

Women repression prevention act to be amended to stop abuse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Women and Children Repression Prevention Act will be amended to stop its abuse and victimisation of innocent people. As the law is very stringent, many people became victims of false cases under it, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, agreeing to observations by many lawmakers. The rate of conviction in cases filed under the Act is only seven per cent, he said during the question-answer session. Citing an example, Moudud said, in one court in Dhaka, the accused in only two out of 177 cases filed under the Act were convicted. The accused in the rest 175 cases were found not guilty. There are 38 special courts in the country, which try cases filed under the Act. Replying to another question, Moudud said the government is planning to develop a 'public prose-

cution service' as recruitment of public prosecutors on political considerations will not help improve justice delivery system. Lack of proper logistics for judges is a 'key weak point' in the judicial system, he said. "In many places judges have to share the same courtroom in two shifts in a day. We're now constructing 21 new court buildings in different districts to solve the problem." To a separate question on delay in trial of cases, the law minister said the government is trying its best to expedite the process and has introduced speedy trial courts for this. "A total of 1500 cases were disposed of in speedy trial courts in last nine months." The number of under-trial civil cases is 73,187 in additional district judges' courts across the country. The number of criminal cases is 85,997. Besides, there are 2,92,746 civil cases pending with assistant judges' courts, he said.

Schoolboy murdered allegedly by peers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A schoolboy was murdered allegedly by his friends in Munshipara-Muktapur village under Charghat thana Tuesday night. The victim was identified as Sumon, 14, son of Delshad Ali of the same village and a student of Charghat High School. Police arrested one of Suman's friends Prabhat, 14, while two others -- one also named Suman, 15, and the other Ukil, 14, remained absconding. Sources said Suman's friends called him out of his house at around 8:00pm Tuesday to watch VCR together. The next morning local people found his body in a pool of blood in a wheat field in the village. The victim's throat had been slit. Sumon was killed following a dispute over share of proceeds from the sale of a VCD that he and his friends had swindled out of a local store, said the sources. Father of the deceased filed a case with Charghat thana.

5 killed, 7 hurt in Kushtia road mishap

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Five people were killed and seven others injured in a road accident on the Kushtia-Jhowdia Highway on Wednesday night. The dead were identified as Alimur, 25, Hira, 18, Karim Ali, 42, Babu, 25, and Asgar Ali, 45. All the five were labourers and hailed from village Mohishkola in Gangni upazila of Meherpur district. Police said the accident occurred at around 11 pm when a bamboo laden truck slipped off the road and fell into a roadside ditch near Badyanathpur in sadar upazila. The ill fated truck was going to a village at Badyanathpur with about 16 labourers on board. On information, police rushed to the spot, recovered the bodies and sent them to Kushtia hospital for autopsy. The injured persons were also admitted to the hospital.

Criminal Hirok & his 2 accomplices surrender to court in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Criminal Mushfiqur Rahman Hirok and two of his accomplices -- Lipu and Rafiqul -- surrendered to the Special Tribunal Court at 10:35 am yesterday. Judge Mirza Mohammad Abdur Rouf sent them to Khulna District Jail at 11 am. Hirok, Lipu and Rafiqul are among six others who have been convicted ten years of RI each in a criminal case recorded with Sonadanga police station on August 22, 1997. The convicts were involved in bomb attack at Banargati bagar on August 22, 1997 in an attempt to kill former deputy mayor of KCC Ikhtiaruddin Bablu. Judgement in the case was pronounced on January 16 this year. Two other convicted persons -- Farid and Rezaul Karim Sharif -- are still absconding. Mushfiqur Rahman Hirok is also a chargesheeted accused in Janakantha journalist Shamsur Rahman murder case.

MCCI

FROM PAGE 1 The MCCI also said the price increase would not help check fuel smuggling, as the petroleum price is still lower in Bangladesh than in India. It asked the government to strictly monitor fuel stations so that they cannot cheat consumers on quality and measurement. "The vigilant units, which are due to be appointed for this purpose, somehow have not convinced consumers because in all likelihood they will be from the ministry and the BPC (Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation)," the MCCI vice-president said. As the price of kerosene has not been increased, "it provides incentives for adulteration of other petroleum products". Such adulteration would damage vehicle engines and pollute the environment, he said. The MCCI delegation raised the problem of low gas pressure hurting industries. It also pointed out that delay in setting up more CNG filling stations has set back the CNG conversion of vehicles. The chamber said the government should make its position clear on gas exports. "In principle, we support that surplus gas should be exported, but the destination of the export being India, there should be a trade-off," the MCCI said.



The newly appointed Kuwaiti ambassador to Dhaka Abdullah Masood Abdullah meets with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

Satkhira police on red alert, 10 nabbed for cop killing

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

All police stations and outposts in Satkhira district have been put on high alert following Wednesday's killing of two police constables with a manhunt for the killers intensified. Ten people were arrested from different parts of the district on Wednesday for their alleged involvement in the incident. Eight of the arrested have been identified as Selim Reza Sabuj, former general secretary of Bangladesh Chhatra League's district unit; Mohammad Raihan, a cadre of Islami Chhatra Shibir; Alamgir Hossain, Abdul Hamid, Kazi Shahagir, Zahurul Haq, Raihan Ahmed and Kazi Roushonuzzaman. Police produced five of them -- Sabuj, Shahagir, Alamgir, Hamid and Zahurul -- before a magistrate's court yesterday. They sought a seven-day remand for Sabuj, Shahagir and Alamgir while the court granted a five-day remand. Police sources said none of the 10 arrested people confessed involvement in the killing of police constables. Constables AK Fazlul Haq and Abdul Mutalib were stabbed to death and constable Ahad Ali was seriously injured by a gang near Itagachha police outpost in Satkhira Sadar thana in the early hours of Wednesday. Ahad Ali's was admitted to the 250-bed Khulna Hospital and his condition was improving, hospital

Muhuri killing

FROM PAGE 1 and examined the effectiveness of a AK-56 rifle, one pistol and two revolvers and loaded those with bullets. On the day of the killing, Montu hired an autorickshaw at 6:30am. Then, he along with Gittu Nasir, Azam, Chhota Saiful and Baittya Alamgir proceeded towards the Jamal Khan residence of Muhuri. Chhota Saiful remained in the autorickshaw and others entered the house. Azam, Baittya Alamgir and Gittu Nasir entered the principal's room while Montu was on guard at the entrance with a Spanish pistol. Gittu Nasir asked the principal's wife Uma Muhuri, "Where is our sir?" The principal appeared at the living room from inside and sat on a sofa. At this stage, Gittu Nasir shot twice on Muhuri's head with his AK-56 rifle, killing him on the spot, the verdict said. After delivery of the judgement, journalists rushed to the Jamal Khan residence of Muhuri but found none of the family members except one distant relative. An on-duty police constable there said Muhuri's family members were not at their residence for the last two days. When contacted over cell phone, the slain principal's son Saikat Muhuri told this correspondent, "The court has done its job well. It identified the culprits and gave them punishment. The truth has been upheld." Saikat, however, refused to say whether he was happy or not with the verdict. The acquitted three teachers said the verdict proved that they were innocent and wrongly implicated in the murder case. Meanwhile, advocate Monjur Ahmad Ansari who appeared for Gittu Nasir said that he would appeal to the higher court against the verdict.

Arsenic

FROM PAGE 1 of arsenic and their impact on human health. There is a need to identify potential economic impacts of arsenic on food chain and quantifying impacts on agricultural productivity. Waste disposal concerns dictate the need for centralising waste treatment from various units in operation, it was recommended. Dr. Ashraf Ali and M. A. Jalil of the Department of Civil Engineering, BUET, were also present at the seminar.



A group of pilgrims who were cheated by a travel agent and could not go to Makkah for the Hajj protest in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday. They want the prime minister's intervention.

World debate

FROM PAGE 12 If (Iraqi) non-cooperation continues, this Council must meet its responsibilities," British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said. Germany, a staunchly pacifist Security Council member, supported French proposals to step up the work of the UN inspectors in Iraq while admitting "concern" yesterday over indications that Iraq still possesses weapons of mass destruction. Government spokesman Bela Andra added: "Together with the majority of the Security Council, the German government demands that the facts as presented (by Powell) be given to the inspectors and checked on the spot. In London, Prime Minister Tony Blair yesterday met Blix and Mohammed ElBaradei, the head of the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), who is to accompany Blix to Baghdad tomorrow. The prospect of the new visit by Blix and ElBaradei and their February 14 report to the Security Council added to a heightened sense of urgency to the debate. "The success of this trip will be of paramount importance," German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer said. "I think we all feel that there is a countdown," Greek Foreign Minister George Papandreou said on behalf of the European Union. "When that arm will tick to zero, I don't know exactly but obviously these reports will be very important." French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin -- who called for more intrusive inspections

following Powell's speech said yesterday: "There is an Iraqi risk and we hope Iraq will provide clear replies about the substance (of its alleged weapons), in particular on chemical and biological weapons." But he said Powell had not provided any hard evidence to back up his claims. "Colin Powell's presentation provided no surprises or concrete proof. The US Secretary of State said himself beforehand that it wouldn't." For its part, Baghdad immediately denounced Powell's presentation as "a typical American show complete with... special effects." Saddam aide General Amr al-Saadi insisted that Blix's UN Monitoring, Inspection and Verification Commission (UNMOVIC) and the IAEA were the "proper channel to process, verify and assess these claims." Al-Saadi added that the speech had contravened UN Resolution 1441, which demands that countries submit all evidence on possible Iraqi weapons to the UN inspection teams. Iraq's neighbours fear unilateral US military action against Baghdad will instigate a civil war, break up the country, foster terrorism and consequently destabilise the oil-rich region. Saudi Arabia, Washington's main US ally in the region, has launched a new diplomatic offensive in a last-ditch bid to mediate on behalf of Baghdad, proposing to grant amnesty to members of the regime of President Saddam Hussein. French Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin -- who called for more intrusive inspections

DU rejoinder

Dhaka University issued a rejoinder regarding a news item published in The Daily Star under the headline 'DU law dept. chairman removed before expiry' on February 4. Allegation of removing Dr. Mizanur Rahman from the post of chairman of the law department before the termination of his term is untrue, the rejoinder said. It said the decision was taken after consultation with the attorney general who opined that Dr. Mizan's term had come to an end on March 8 last year. Our reply: The allegation in the news item was of immediate past chairman of the law department and the news also contained the views of the university authorities in this context.

Bangladesh rice modified

FROM PAGE 12 Organisation, 230 million children are at the risk of clinical or sub-clinical vitamin A deficiency, a condition largely preventable. According to Unicef, nearly two billion people are estimated to be anaemic and 3.7 billion are iron-deficient, the vast majority of them women. In Africa and Asia, the deficiency results in approximately 20 per cent of all maternal deaths. The BRRI director-general, Nurul Islam Bhuiyan, told The Daily Star that breeders at his institute would test its local adaptability. Bangladesh needs to have biosafety regulations in place to check biohazards related to genetically engineered crops. BR29 will be brought home once the National Committee on Biosafety of Bangladesh (NCBB) is formed. Datta, who worked with Prof Potrykus in Zurich, and now leading the IRII biotech endeavour, said the rice variety developed resistance to bacteria and two pests. The IRII also experiments on two other Bangladesh rice varieties, BR11 and BR28. Efforts are on to enrich rice with iron and make it resistant to pests and diseases with the help of molecular biology. "We have also introduced a ferric gene, FRO2, into a rice variety that enhances the uptake of iron by the roots," Datta said. "Our efforts to combine beta-carotene with ferritin and lysine would lead to development of nutritious rice with improved micronutrients, protein and vitamins." According to the World Health

FROM PAGE 12 SF Inspector General KC Sharma told The Times of India that the BDR took back the stranded people at around 2:00am. "We wanted the BDR to accept them in the presence of the media but just to save their face the BDR took them back in the middle of the night," Sharma told Times. "It's impossible," retorted BDR Sector Commander Colonel Enayet Karim. Lt. Col. Ashfaque Islam, commanding officer of 19 battalion BDR, said the BSF took back the stranded people at around 3:30am. Wazed, a teen-aged villager, said he saw the people being shifted to somewhere in Satgachhia village in India by trucks. Villagers are also on vigil to thwart any more push-ins. The simmering border confrontation follows a statement by Advani last month that some 20 million "illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan" would be deported. Within weeks, India started pushing Bangla-speaking Muslims into Bangladesh. Dhaka responded by pushing them back.

Boost

FROM PAGE 12 Mashrafe-bin-Murtaza and Tapash Baisya each picked up a wicket and left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique put the brakes on the Natal innings with a very economical spell of ten overs in which he conceded only 23 runs. Bangladesh lost Hannan Sarkar early, but the innings was stabilised by a stand of 65 runs for the second wicket between Al-Shahriar and Habibul Bashar, who contributed a breezy 20. Then came a partnership of 74 between Al Shahriar and 23-year-old Ehsanul which effectively won the game for the Bangladeshis. Tushar Imran was stumped for 18 with the score on 185 and Ehsanul fell with Bangladesh still two runs short of victory, his 92 coming from just 105 balls with eleven 4s. But Kapali (24 not out) and captain Khaled Mashud (nought) made sure there were no more hiccups and guided the team home with almost four overs to spare. (Scoreboard and other stories on Sports pages)

Roundtable for saving children from risky jobs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society members at a discussion yesterday stressed the need for a pragmatic national policy to spare children from hazardous jobs. They also urged the integration of child labour issues into national development strategies. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the discussion on "Child Labour Policy of Bangladesh: What are we looking for?" at CIRDAP auditorium to provide inputs to the national policy on child labour, drafted by the government. A 1995-96 survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) suggested that child workers within the age range of 5-14 years number about 6.6 million and constitute 19.1 per cent of the total child population in the age group. 1.6 percent of the child labour force belonged to the 5-9 age group and the rest to the 10-14 age group. Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said the number may have risen to 7 to 7.5 million by now and about as much as 83 per cent are engaged in rural economic activities. Lots of children are also involved in the 54 types of hazardous jobs identified by International Labour Organisation (ILO), he added. Child workers in hazardous jobs include those in tobacco factories, motor workshops, lathe factories and welding workshops. Members of parliament, academics, government officials, employers, business leaders and NGO representatives attended yesterday's discussion chaired by Syed Manzur Elahi. State Minister for Labour and Employment Lutfar Rahman Khan was the chief guest while ILO Director Gopal Bhattacharya and CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya also took part in the discussion. Dr Sumaiya Khair, associate professor of Law, Dhaka University, presented the keynote paper. Meanwhile, in an effort to remedy the situation, the govern-

ment has started implementing a USAID-aided project for the rehabilitation of child workers from risky jobs.

BNP men

FROM PAGE 12 from indecision in crucial issues," one BNP policymaker said. "It's unfortunate because it now has more than two-thirds majority in parliament." Some senior BNP ministers and leaders feel that lack of coordination, indecision and interference by a few influential people have robbed the administration of dynamism. Leaders of the BNP's alliance partners have a similar view of the government. They blame lack of dynamism in the administration on 'stagnation' in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) where important issues such as promotion of bureaucrats have remained unresolved for months. A group of a section of officials and political appointees at the PMO has become influential and are making fortune through various unscrupulous deals, insiders say. Worst still, they are accused of inefficiency. "All the wings, particularly the personnel, administrative and press wings, at the PMO are not able to serve either the prime minister or her office," said a disgruntled leader.

Dhaka dismisses

FROM PAGE 1 that the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) had taken back the 213 people between 2:00am and 2:30am on Wednesday in small batches. Chowdhury, however, said those people were no more visible from early yesterday morning. "We don't know where they have gone." A high-level flag meeting between the BDR and the BSF would be held at Coochbehar in West Bengal today (Friday) to discuss the tense border situation, the foreign secretary said. Meanwhile, the foreign ministry is fixing a date for Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan's visit to New Delhi on an invitation from his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha. Sinha invited Khan Wednesday night over telephone for a return visit. In the wake of a tense situation at the border, Chowdhury termed the invitation a "positive development" as "it would give a chance to discuss different issues". Earlier, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tufail Haider met Yashwant Sinha Wednesday evening. Sinha had assured Haider that there would be "no escalation of tension from the Indian side", the foreign secretary said. "There should be restraint on rhetoric from both the sides and India is keen to have best of relations with Bangladesh," Sinha was quoted to have said. Chowdhury said India must stop its push-in bids because "there are laid-down procedure to deal with the issue of illegal immigrants". He asserted, "There should be a permanent solution to this issue." The foreign secretary downplayed Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes' claim that the border situation 'has gone beyond control'. "It is very much under control but there should not be any move for escalation of tension."