

SAFMA regional confce Dhaka Declaration calls for peace within, among S Asian nations

BSS, Dhaka

The South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) yesterday adopted a 14-point 'Dhaka Declaration' which stressed on upholding participatory democracy, freedom of expression and the right to dissent.

The declaration called for striving for peace within and between nations of South Asia and securing the diversion of resources from wasteful acquisition of arms to public interest projects.

More than 160 SAFMA journalists participated in the two-day regional conference which concluded yesterday. SAFMA called for efforts to discourage preaching of hatred, distortion of national characters, xenophobia, cultural chauvinism, racism, caste-based discrimination and exploitation of the poor and marginalised.

It urged all to fight violence and terrorism that undermines both democracy and freedom of media.

The declaration appealed for all to resist authoritarianism and religious extremism in any form. It urged South Asians to reject the demonisation of the 'others' as an instrument of perpetuating conflicts.

The SAFMA document stressed the need to foster professionalism and transparency in the media and to develop intra- and interstate solidarity among media persons in order to resist intimidation and violence by anti-democratic forces.

Apart from enlarging the right to freedom of information for the media, the SAFMA declaration appealed for all to raise a bulwark against intra-media forces and tendencies that support or

strengthen the vested interests' assaults on democracy and media freedom.

The SAFMA declaration observed that India, widely hailed as a secular democracy, has been threatened by forces of communalism and religious bigotry. An established tradition of press freedom is being threatened by a growing criminalisation of politics and abuse of judicial practice. These factors weaken India's pluralistic civil society and by that token, sap the foundations of democracy itself, it said.

Referring to Pakistan, it said the state's return to democratic path was doubly squeezed by the forces of authoritarianism and religious extremism. The SAFMA perceived that such a situation would result in extremely grievous consequences to people's right to representative government and their basic freedom.

It said efforts are needed to strengthen the gains of people's struggle for self-determination and democracy in Bangladesh, and the major political forces need to arrive at a closer understanding and cooperation to ensure basic right of the people, especially the disadvantaged.

The SAFMA declaration said prospects for consolidation of democratic institutions, pluralism and respect for human rights still remain unclear in Sri Lanka. But the suspension of hostilities and the process of negotiations have set the country on the road to peace, it said.

About Nepal, it said the disruption of the democratic system is threatening to erase people's right secured through the democratic revolution of 1990.

Gang attacks house of N'ganj AL secy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

An armed gang on Sunday night attacked the residence of Khokon Saha, secretary of Narayanganj town Awami League.

The gang opened fire on the house and tried to break open the main gate. Khokon Saha however escaped the attack.

Saha said that a group of listed criminals from Missionpara and Dawnchamber areas went to his Goalpara residence at about 10:30pm and ordered him to come out of the house. The miscreants also fired three rounds of bullets and issued death threats.

The officer-in-charge of Narayanganj thana said a police team went to the spot but the attackers had already fled the scene.

Saha said he would lodge a case.

Police recover decapitated body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the beheaded body of a young man from the Asgar Ali Lake at South Rasulpur in Shyampur yesterday.

The victim was aged about 25 and his identity is still unknown.

Police said he might have been killed seven days ago and the killers threw the body into the lake.

Police sent the body to the Mitford Hospital for an autopsy.

A case was filed with Shyampur Police Station.

Nor'wester

FROM PAGE 1

Medical College Hospital (RMCH), local clinics and different health centres, police said.

The 30-minute storm that razed houses and uprooted trees also caused substantial damage to standing boro, jute and maize crops.

Power supply and telephone connection were also disrupted all over the district.

Local met office said the storm swept over the district with a velocity of around 100km per hour.

Our Correspondent from Gaibandha adds: Two persons were killed and 31 others injured when a high velocity nor'wester battered Gaibandha district Sunday night.

Most affected upazilas are Gaibandha sadar, Sadullapur, Palashbari and Gobindaganj where about 1200 dwelling houses were razed to the ground and many fruit bearing trees and electric poles uprooted.

One Bimal Sarker, 42, of village Gopalpur under Sadullapur Upazila and a child of one Abdul Matin of village Kishoreganj under Palashbari Upazila died when houses collapsed. Besides, 31 others sustained injuries. Power supply remained snapped for 18 hours.

Judicial officials

FROM PAGE 1

recruitment of assistant judges, saying cases are piling up in the district courts in the absence of judges. The litigants are suffering due to unusual delay in disposal of cases.

He contended that recruitment of judges in subordinate courts was thwarted more than three and a half years ago by the judgement in Mazdar Hossain case regarding separation of the judiciary.

The verdict had made it mandatory for the government to recruit subordinate judges by constituting a Judicial Service Commission, which is yet to be there.

However, Barrister Amriul Islam contended that there was no scope to give permission to this end as the highest court had given a roadmap for separation of the judiciary. The judgment still stands and the court cannot violate its own decision.

Passports

FROM PAGE 1

tem. The signature will be imposed on the biometrics passport by computer scanning, which could be read only by machine.

Instead of a photo, there will be a ghost image of the holder in the passport, visible only by an ultra violet light.

"Any sort of counterfeit will be impossible if such a machine-readable passport is introduced," a high-up at the Department of Immigration and Passport (DIP) said.

Similar US directives might be enforced for the remaining countries in the world in future, sources hinted.

When asked, officials at the DIP said they received no directive in this regard till yesterday.

The cost of passport could go up once the biometrics passport is introduced in the country, one official at DIP told The Daily Star.

The country has a demand for one million passports a year.



Women queue to cast votes in the election to the Tarabo Municipality in Narayanganj yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

PM: Write for regional peace

FROM PAGE 1

Apart from a large number of participants from host Bangladesh, nearly 90 eminent journalists from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal are taking part in the meet.

Pointing at the resources of fertile soil, productive manpower, generous reserves of natural, mineral and water resources, and a vast market within the region, Khaleda Zia said the region need not depend on others if the little problems and disputes among the regional countries are resolved.

"We must reduce the fear and tension with regard to security," she said adding that the mental block that still stands like a wall in the field of cooperation should be demolished.

"Side by side with building a positive public opinion, the media has to exert influence in policy formulations," Khaleda Zia said.

She urged the media to play a bigger role in removing the roadblocks for the interest of the people, ravaged by poverty and afflicted by various problems.

The prime minister said freedom of press existed vividly in Bangladesh and thanked the organisers for rightly selecting Dhaka as the venue for the SAFMA meet.

She assured the foreign media to carry out their professional duties in Bangladesh without restriction, but regretted that a number of persons representing two international weeklies and a foreign TV channel came here concealing their identities.

Detailing the incidents, she said some of them have expressed regret for such an act and went back home. "Unfortunately, later on they filed reports containing false and distorted information about Bangladesh."

"Bangladesh is no longer the source of bad news only. It would be a distorted picture of Bangladesh, if it is painted as the valley of droughts, floods, cyclones, famines, calamities and unnatural deaths or a haven for extremists," Khaleda Zia reminded.

"Bangladesh is now a land of good tidings too," she said mentioning the developments like steady progress in removing difficult problems of poverty, illiteracy, underdevelopment and diseases.

She also spoke of the development of communications infrastructure, growth in traditional resources of fish, trees and cattle, and the empowerment of women ensured by her government.

"Wipe out the picture of suffering, afflicted and distressed Bangladesh, and supplant it with the picture of an active, enterprising Bangladesh full of potentials," the prime minister told the gathering of leading editors, columnists and reporters of the region.

Speaking about the freedom of media and of journalism in Bangladesh, she mentioned that great struggles and many sacrifices had to be made to attain that freedom.

She reminded her audience that

even after independence of the country, the freedom of newspapers was once shackled, and the freedom was also destroyed during the autocratic rule.

Referring to the sad episodes of the history of journalism in Bangladesh, Khaleda Zia said she and her party had been associated with all the movements of the journalists to ensure press freedom.

In the welcoming address, Reazuddin Ahmed said that a tension-free South Asia has the potential to emerge as the most powerful political and economic block in the world.

Enayetullah Khan in his keynote paper mentioned the persisting irritants and conflicts like CHT insurgency, Ganges Water Sharing, armed cauldron in Northeast India, Kashmir and the crisis in peace process in Sri Lanka.

"The media feeds in this regard are highly partisan on both sides of contention and often enter the third country domain in South Asia," he observed.

Khan urged the gathering of the leading journalists from South Asian countries to commit themselves to the security of the countries and peoples of the region as well as the region itself by building the bulwark of unarmed peace and cooperation.

The prime minister inaugurated the website of SAFMA at the function and was presented with a crest of the organisation by Reazuddin Ahmed.

Law and order

FROM PAGE 1

the proposal were controversial, sources noted.

The committee, which met yesterday after more than eight months, also reviewed the steps taken after its previous meetings.

The meeting, chaired by Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, convener of the committee and local government, rural development and cooperatives minister, stressed curbing crimes, especially growing number of murders.

The committee last met on September 22 last year and so held 28 meetings since its formation on October 10, 2001.

It could not meet for several months because of the anti-crime drive by the joint forces and some other reasons, a senior official mentioned.

Yesterday's meeting was attended by, among others, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury. The cabinet secretary and the inspector general of police were also present.

Khosru arrested

FROM PAGE 1

hardware trader from Dhaka to Chittagong Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court that recorded their confessional statements.

The trio were also taken to the clinic to identify Khosru, but they did not do so for reasons best known to them.

Another two witnesses from Sitakunda were also taken to the court where they gave confessions.

Police sources said Sitakunda police were trying to influence Double Mooring police to arrest the journalist.

As the Double Mooring police were reluctant to take any measure against Khosru before the disposal of the abduction case filed with them, Sitakunda police acted on their own.

Meanwhile, Sitakunda Press Club leaders in a meeting here yesterday termed the case against Khosru as 'false and baseless'.

The held a meeting with club General Secretary Jahangir Alam in the chair to air their indignation over what they termed a drama to divert the abduction incident into a different direction.

They alleged that the plaintiff Mahbulul Alam is one of the 21 men charged/accused in the case of mugging at Bibrhat in which a gang tormented a woman and looted goods worth about Tk

4,00,000 before evicting her from home.

The meeting was addressed by Acting President of the club M Hedayat, Saiful Islam Shilpi, Didarul Hossain Tutul, Masir Jahangir Alam, Khairul Islam, Ziaul Haq Zillu and Mostafa Mintu.

Manju bailed in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Former energy and mineral resources minister Anwar Hossain Manju has been granted bail in a graft case.

Judge Mohammad Motiur Rahman of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday granted him bail upon a bond of Tk 50,000 with two guarantors.

Manju along with his lawyers surrendered before the court at 2:30 pm and sought bail.

In the bail petition, Manju's lawyers said the High Court had earlier granted him bail till submission of the charge sheet in the case and that he did not misuse the privilege. On May 12, the investigation officer (IO) of the case submitted the charge sheet.

Explore domestic market

FROM PAGE 1

Rahman delivered the welcome speech.

Taking part in the discussion, Asgar Hossain Bhuiyan, former vice president of Bangladesh Jute Association, said no industry would be viable without having proper feasibility study done beforehand. He also stressed the need to have agro-based industries for proper utilisation of domestic resources.

Dr Karunamaya Goswami said no development was possible without the development of human resources. Underscoring the environmental aspect for the growth of industrialisation, he said there should be a serious study on whether the knitting-dyeing industry should continue to have the support even when it continues to pollute Shitalakhya river or sweet water with its waste.

Narayanganj town planner Al Amin said the infrastructure of the sunset industries should be utilised for new industries and incentive should be provided for them.

Summing up the session Dr QK Ahmed, chairman of the CPD taskforce, said a pro-people industrial policy is a must and they would obviously recommend it to the government.

Chief guest Dr Selina Hayet Ivey said Narayanganj Municipality would extend all cooperation to the small and medium industries.

BKMEA vice-president Md

Hatem, Crown Cement Ltd proprietor Khabiruddin Mollah, Bangladesh Yarn Merchant Association President Jahangir Alam, NASIB Chairman Mirza Nurul Goni Sumon, CPB leader Dulal Shah, politician Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Workers Party leader Safiuddin Ahmed, advocate Merina Begum, Dr Shahnaz and Anjuman Ara Aksir also took part in the dialogue.

He said a forex reserves position of \$2.5 billion would create a comfortable cushion to go for the free float. Yesterday, the reserves stood at \$1,886 billion.

The BB has taken preparations to monitor the currency market once the exchange rate is made free so that no-one can manipulate the market.

IMF adviser

FROM PAGE 12

case of Bangladesh as the official and kerb market dollar rates are now very close.

He said a forex reserves position of \$2.5 billion would create a comfortable cushion to go for the free float. Yesterday, the reserves stood at \$1,886 billion.

OIC FMs to discuss Iraq, terrorism at Tehran conference

AFP, Jeddah

Foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) will meet in Tehran later this week to discuss a host of issues including Iraq and terrorism, an OIC source said yesterday.

All 57 member states except Iraq are expected to take part in the plenary conference from May 28-31 to "review and consult about the situation in Iraq," following the US-led war to topple Saddam Hussein's regime, the source told AFP.

No invitation was sent to Baghdad because there is no legitimate authority running Iraq's affairs, he added.

OIC, based in the Saudi Red Sea port city of Jeddah, has repeatedly called on the US-led forces that toppled Saddam's regime to leave Iraq as soon as possible.

The conference agenda, prepared by senior officials during a meeting held in Jeddah last month,

also includes the Israeli-Palestinian issue, notably the status of Jerusalem.

Terrorism and dialogue between civilisations will be tackled in light of an OIC anti-terrorism document issued before the September 11, 2001 and the latest deadly suicide bombings in Riyadh and Casablanca.

The chief diplomats of Islamic states will also discuss the situation in Afghanistan, in addition to difficulties facing Muslim minorities around the world, especially in troubled spots like Kashmir and Chechnya.

Philippine Foreign Secretary Blas Ople has been invited to attend the meeting as a "guest" of the conference.

Bangladesh, the world's third largest Muslim-majority country, Thursday put forward senior politician Salauddin Quader Chowdhury for the post of OIC secretary general, occupied since 2001 by Abdulwahed Belkeziz.

AL: 39 JS bodies

FROM PAGE 1

next month.

"But we asked our legislators to submit notices and questions to the parliament secretariat in the run-up to the session," the former speaker said.

Speaking on the AL's boycott of the last session, he said: "We never said that we would not return to parliament."

Hamid said the opposition's participation and stay in the House depended on the government's attitude towards them.

He said the opposition deputies wanted to speak up in the House and point out the misdeeds and wrongdoing of the government.

"If they don't allow us to speak, we'll not sit idle," he said, adding: "We'll walk out of the House."

Alleging the chair's bias in running the Jatiya Sangsad, he said as a speaker he did not try to rob the voices of opposition lawmakers.

Hamid said he had allowed 57 minutes to former opposition leader Khaleda Zia on a point of order.

AL deputies boycotted the last session on the opening day protesting against the switching off of the microphone of the opposition chief. They alleged that the session was confined to only four days in a scheme to make the House ineffective.

AL leaders, however, hinted that party lawmakers were willing to join the budget session as they get time allocation on the budget speech.

Hamid also briefed newsmen

on 'persecution' of his party-men at Kachua in Chandpur by the ruling party and the administration.

In a 'false killing case' the ruling party-men framed 1,500 people, largely AL workers, he said.

Hamid said he visited the area on Saturday.

Dr Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir, former lawmaker and Kachua thana AL President Mezbahuddin Ahmed and Acting General Secretary Shahid Ullah were present.

Mondal murder

FROM PAGE 12

submitted the final report on June 6, 2001 as the allegations were not proved against any of the accused.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka ordered further investigation into the matter by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) upon a naraji petition filed by the complainant on June 19, 2001.

The CID submitted a chargesheet against Shahid and another 17 on November 4 last year. Shahid, Alamgir, Kala Sharif, Abdul Malek and Akhter Hossain are now in custody, while others have been absconding.

Special public prosecutors (PP) Nazrul Islam and Abdul Latif Talukder appeared for the state, while Advocate Mahbub Ahmed, Saidur Rahman Manik and Emdadul Haq Lal for the accused.

Rangamati forests

FROM PAGE 1

in such a situation?" he asked.

Local people, however, say loggers take the cover of 'jote permit' to ferry the logs to facilities out of the district, also with the help of forest officials.

'Jote permits' are given to private planters by the government under which they grow trees on leased out lands and cut those when they are matured.

Loggers usually wield the permit to carry the logs out even from places where no 'jote land' ever existed.

This year 1,00,000 cubic feet of logs are expected to be extracted from the Rangamati forest region under the permit, a forest official said.

The forestlands are disappearing at a time when the government has no greening plan for the region.

"We submitted a 5,000 acres afforestation plan, but it was not approved," Salahuddin said.

Meanwhile, political leaders, environmentalists and the civil society have expressed serious concern over destruction of the forest.

"The authorities concerned should take immediate steps to

save the forests," said Moni Swapan Dewan, deputy minister for the CHT Affairs.

"Otherwise, the whole nation will have to pay very dearly."

Rupayan Dewan, a frontline leader of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity, said it was high time to save the forests and halt the march of environmental degradation.

Judiciary

FROM PAGE 1

service and the magistrates exercising judicial function," maintained the court.

"There is no tangible basis," observed the court about the government apprehension that the criminal justice system may collapse in case the magistrates exercising judicial function opted for other service.

"Even if we take the worst situation that no working magistrates opt for judicial service under the modified rules, the government has the power to depute required number of magistrates for a specified period or until the posts are filled up by new recruitment," observed the court.

Tobacco products

FROM PAGE 12

per cent additional tax on tobacco products showed five per cent decline in tobacco consumption or, in other words, tobacco smokers also declined by five per cent," Syed Mahbulul Alam, project officer of the organisation, said in his keynote paper.

He pointed out that revenue collection from the fresh tax also increased by about five per cent, which is quite a significant amount of money.

Citing survey reports of World Health Organisation (WHO) and World Bank, Alam argued that if only 10 per cent extra tax is imposed globally, 42 million people would give up smoking in developing countries and lives of about nine million people would be saved in developed nations.

England experienced a slump in consumption by 16 per cent from 1997 to 1999 following slapping of

additional taxes on tobacco and tobacco products. "Just in two years it dropped down by 16pc. Because those who gave up smoking are now aware and understand better about the bad effects of tobacco," Alam added.

The global consumption of tobacco is declining, read the keynote paper. In 1995, some 2.93 billion sticks of cigarettes were sold and in 1998 it dropped down to 2.58 billion.

"A survey in 1997 showed that 23 per cent of school children aged between 14 and 16 in Bangladesh regularly smoke cigarette. And the smoking habit among our new generation is increasing at an alarming rate," Alam said.

Debra Isoyrmson, regional director of Path Canada, project coordinator Sohrab Uddin and project official Amit Ranjan Deb also spoke, among others.

Satyajit retrospective
Dhaka University Film Society screens 20 films of famous Indian filmmaker Satyajit Ray on the occasion of his birth and death anniversary. On the 4th day, four films titled 'Apar Sangsar', 'Joy Baba Felunath', 'Aranyer Din Ratri' and 'Kapurush Mahapurush' will be screened. Venue: TSC auditorium, Dhaka University. Time: 10.00am, 12.30pm, 3.30pm and 6.00pm.

Film show
Academy Film Society will screen a British film titled 'Death and the Maiden'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6.30pm.

Get-together
Bangladesh Rabindra Sangeet Shilpi Sangstha organises a get-together in observance of its 15th founding anniversary. Venue: Natmondi, Dhaka University. Time: 5.00pm.

Launching ceremony
The High Commissioner of India organises a reception on the occasion of the launching of a book titled 'Contemporary Art of Bangladesh'. Venue: Hotel Sheraton. Time: 7.00pm.

Prize giving ceremony
The prize giving ceremony of the essay competition on 'Russia's Northern Capital St. Petersburg: 300 years of glorious history'. Venue: Russian Cultural Centre, Dhanmondi. Time: 5.30pm.

ICAB anniversary
The inaugural ceremony of the 30th founding anniversary of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) will be held with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as chief guest. Venue: Bangladesh China Friendship Centre, Sher-e-Banglanagar. Time: 11.00am.</