

State deptt lauds

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Though the government claims that acts of violence against members of religious minority groups are politically motivated and cannot be solely attributed to religion, human rights, human right activists claim that there has been a continued increase in religiously-motivated violence, it said.

"Although the government is secular, religion exerts a powerful influence on politics, and the government is sensitive to the Muslim consciousness of the majority of its citizens."

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom but the number of Hindu, Christian, and Buddhist minorities who experienced discrimination by the Muslim majority has increased, the report observed.

The report also commented that the "animosity between the parties" often leads to politically motivated violence and heightens societal tensions between Muslims and Hindus.

It said the US government discusses religious freedom issues with the Bangladesh in the context of its overall dialogue and policy of promoting human rights.

"Reports of harassment by BNP supporters of Hindus, who traditionally vote for the AL, preceded

and followed the October 2001 election. Reported incidents included killings, rape, looting, and torture. The BNP acknowledged reports of atrocities committed between Muslims and Hindus; however, the BNP claimed that they were exaggerated," it said.

Since the October 2001 elections, religious minorities reportedly have continued to be targeted for attacks, it said adding that many such reports have not been verified independently. "The government sometimes has failed to investigate the crimes and prosecute the perpetrators, who are often local gang leaders."

The report also added that the US Embassy in Dhaka also had assisted some Christian-affiliated relief organisations in guiding paperwork for schools and other projects through government channels on an informal basis.

In the report, India and Bangladesh fell into the category of "State Neglect of the Problem of Discrimination Against, or Persecution of, Minority or Nonapproved Religions" while Pakistan in "State Hostility toward Minority or Nonapproved Religions."

The full text is available at <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2003/24468.htm>

MONEY LAUNDERING

Taskforce finds banks not cooperative

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The central taskforce against money laundering yesterday expressed its dissatisfaction at the reluctance of different commercial banks in providing information on 'hundi' and other illegal monetary transactions.

At a meeting of the taskforce, presided over by Bangladesh Bank (BB) Deputy Governor M. M. Hossain, central bank officials warned the related banks of dire consequence if BB investigations detect any illegal transactions.

The banks are bound to share information on illegal transaction with the taskforce, and for the last few months no instance of illegal transaction was reported to it.

But the police department provided some information to the taskforce on money laundering during yesterday's meeting. The meeting was told that hundi transfer is on the rise through courier services.

B Chy invited to open Kader Siddiqui's party programme

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Krishak Sramik Janata League President Kader Siddiqui has invited former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury to inaugurate the party's 4th founding anniversary programme on December 24 in the city.

Siddiqui described Badruddoza as a pioneer of alternative stream when he along with his party leaders met the latter at Bari dhara KC Memorial Saturday.

Badruddoza assured Syddiqui of his presence on the occasion as an audience.

Poacher or saviour?

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While showing this correspondent their private zoo, Shitesh Ranjan's son, Samar Dev, said that his father recently caught a pair of Kaliz (Mothura) and a pair of fishing cats in the jungle.

"I also can identify many species of animals and birds, but you won't find so many animals in the jungle nowadays," said Samar, a university student also helps run the family's sarms business.

A well-known bird watcher, Inam-ul-Huq, claimed that Shitesh Babu kept rare birds in conditions so poor that they often died, and said he once saw once Shitesh Ranjan shooting fowl in the Lauchhara forest.

Shitesh Ranjan told the Daily Star that he had been collecting animals for years. He bought them from trappers, exchanged them for chickens with tribal people, or was given them as donations. He said the zoo was started by his father and he had permission from forest department to possess birds and deer.

He said he had set a lot of animals free in the forest in recent days, and blamed the animals' declining numbers on the forest department's failure to control tree-felling in the national park.

DFP ads go

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dailies are published from elsewhere in the country, meeting sources said.

Expressing surprise at the astonishing numbers, the committee asked who are the people publishing such a large number of newspapers and where the newspapers are.

"We wanted to know specifically who publish the newspapers," asked Mosharaf Hossain, a member of newly formed sub-committee.

"Overall performance of the DFP is below the mark and it has failed to meet public demands because of corruption and negligence of the officials," Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury, chairman of the committee, told The Daily Star emerging from the meeting.

The allegations of corruption against the director general of the DFP were also discussed at the meeting. "The allegations against the DG of the DFP should be disposed of," Monjurul Ahsan Munshi, a member of the committee, told the meet while raising the issue.

The information secretary informed the parliamentary committee that departmental action against the DG is underway and once the prime ministerial gives the go-ahead a committee will be formed to investigate the corruption charges. So, the issue need not be discussed at the meeting, he observed.

Another member of the committee, Muhammad Mosharaf Hossain said, "The DFP has failed to function effectively as it is dogged by irregularities. It spends a lot of money in making films and documentaries, but the people don't get them."

The committee also asked the information ministry to fill up its vacant posts to make the organisation dynamic.

RU function

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Jamaat-e-Islami, far outnumbered other guests in the audience, observed participants. The volunteers at the function were also ICS activists or supporters, they added.

Right from the beginning, the chief guest of the session, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, had been repeatedly greeted with typical ICS slogans like 'Narake tarbi - Allahu Akbar' and 'RU campus is meant for ICS.'

Later, some female leaders of Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student front of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), took a united stance at a corner of the dias to counter the ICS slogans.

Different student organisations, who had decided to stage demonstrations during the prime minister's visit, could not do so being obstructed by the security and law-enforcing forces.

Almost all members of the Progressive Teachers Group and many of the pro-BNP teachers of

the university did not attend the function. Among the 900 teachers, not more than 150 were present, sources said.

None but one former vice-chancellor (VC) attended the function while there are at least nine former RU VCs alive among a total of 16.

"I would not have joined the function if I were informed that many of my dear ones were boycotting it," former lawmaker Sardar Amjad Hossain, who was a RU student, told The Daily Star.

Expressing exasperation over the excessive incongruity in the function, he said the RU authorities should have organised the function with participation of all corners.

Mustafizur Rahman Khan, a former social welfare secretary of RU central students' union and now a 61-year-old journalist, said the function turned into a political one following the dominant presence of partisans both on the dias and among the audience.

PM to give medals

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minister's visit to present awards to outstanding students. The JCD plans to bring out processions and hold a rally on the campus to welcome her today.

The DU in observance of 'Sushikkha Barsha-2003' is awarding gold medals to students who stood first class first in first-year honours examinations in 2001. The prime minister will address the programme as chief guest at the Teachers-Students Centre (TSC) auditorium.

Education Minister Osman Farruk and State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon will be special guests. DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz will preside over the function.

Meanwhile, different students' organisations including the main opposition Awami League's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Progotishil Chhatra Jote (PCI), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-backed BCL plan to demonstrate carrying black flag on the campus today against the visit.

Bush wants

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Arafat's "removal" in September, with one minister even suggesting that he could be assassinated, but Washington warned Israel not to attempt to expel him.

Bush was non-committal about Sharon's speech, saying that he would wait to see what happened on the ground.

"Speeches are good things, but they are words. I am waiting for action," he was quoted as saying.

"Now is the time to do all in the Middle East, and I am determined and committed to doing that. You can be sure that I have done a lot until now, but I am going to keep on doing. I am going to continue to be active and committed to my vision."

Meanwhile, the Israeli army arrested a senior political figure in the hardline Palestinian Islamic group Hamas in the West Bank town of Nablus on Sunday, Hamas and Palestinian security sources said.

Adnan Asfour, 40, on Israel's wanted list for two years, was arrested at his father's home in the Al-Masara district.

Congress leaders

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Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which had steadily lost ground to the Congress since the last national election in 1999.

New parliamentary polls must be held by October.

While the regional elections were fought primarily on local issues, they were seen as a personal defeat for Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi who was assassinated by Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels in 1991.

Road transport

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week, Huda ordered the BRTC to submit a report to his ministry within 15 days explaining why it was incurring a net loss despite having operational profit.

BRTC Chairman Taimur Alam Khondaker told the meeting the corporation earned the highest amount of operational profit in the current fiscal year.

The meeting on BRTC's performances was told that private transport operators often violate BRTC rules and evade payment of government revenue. They also change designs of vehicles to increase the number of seats.

Sources said the BRTC earned Tk 7.56 crore operational profit in the first five months of this fiscal year. It earned Tk 28.27 crore and spent Tk 20.71 crore during this period.

The corporation provided Debt Liability Services (DLS) of Tk 5 crore in the last two fiscal years, which was not possible earlier. The number of buses increased to 768 from 529 earlier, the sources mentioned.

Taimur however said later the ministry asked him to submit a report within 15 days but it is for fixing a development target.

Nazmul Huda asked BRTC officials to arrange video shows at different road crossings about traffic rules for creating awareness. Potential

donors could be contacted for funding this, meeting sources quoted him as saying.

The meetings felt that BRTC offices in 21 districts should be activated for monitoring wrongdoings and violation of traffic rules by private vehicles.

Mobile courts should operate at the entrances to the capital to penalise such vehicles, the meet stressed.

The BRTC was asked to reduce the frequency of direct bus service between Dhaka and Agartala if adequate number of passengers were not available. The service is incurring losses for want of passengers, sources said.

PM opens

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students' hall.

Khaleda urged RU administration to improve educational atmosphere on the campus. Urging teachers to refrain from factionalism and partisanship, she asked the administration to take realistic steps to remove session jam.

"Let study and research be the only goal for students and teachers," she added.

The RU, established in 1953 with only 161 students, now boasts 24,000 students under 24 departments.

Fake real estate DMD nabbed for embezzlement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sarwar Hossain, deputy managing director (DMD) of Gembind Union Logistic Services Ltd. (Gulsel), was arrested yesterday on charge of embezzling earnest money against tender.

Cantonment Police Station filed a case against Sarwar, former squadron leader of the Air Force, the same day. He was produced before court immediately after the arrest.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) said Gulsel has been deceiving companies for long by embezzling earnest money received against tenders it floated for supply of materials for real estate business. Managing Director of Gulsel HM Kaiser has gone into hiding.

Gulsel has allegedly embezzled a huge amount of earnest money deposited by scores of companies including Diamond Cement Ltd., Inspirations Ltd. and Farhana Associates.

PM sits

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Moudud Ahmed, Information Minister Tariquul Islam and Agriculture Minister MK Anwar -- to find a solution to the outstanding issues.

However, the meeting could take no concrete decision.

Meeting sources said they discussed ways to strengthen parliament, revive the women's reserved seats as well as frame necessary laws to this end and bring some more amendments to the constitution.

They also discussed some proposals on bringing amendments of the constitution, the meeting sources said. However, the policymakers were tight-lipped about them.

Meeting sources said some important proposals for constitutional amendments and framing laws would be placed when the Jatiya Sangsad goes into its 11th session sometime in the middle of next month.

Iraqi pipelines

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pipelines further north, between Beji and Mosul, about 250 miles north of Baghdad.

Al-Jazeera quoted officials as saying those fires were caused by saboteurs.

The Oil Ministry introduced rationing on Thursday to overcome shortages that have created mile-long lines of cars at gas stations and waits up to 12 hours.

20,000 bulldozed

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In a statement, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) protested the eviction and accused the government of not serving a proper legal notice before the eviction began.

Signed by ASK Executive Director Sultana Kamal, the statement accused the on-duty magistrate of running the drive without precisely knowing the acreage of land the HBRI owns in the area as he, the ASK said, could not inform the rights group about it.

"The High Court suggested the government should not evict slum dwellers without rehabilitation," the statement says.

In another statement, Coalition for the Urban Poor (CUP) also protested the eviction and asked the government not to drive the slum dwellers out of their shanties without proper rehabilitation.

The CUP blamed the government for violating the 1999 court verdict that discourages eviction of slum dwellers without restoring them to a decent life.

Some political leaders and civil society members in a joint statement also demanded the government stops evicting shanty people.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Gono Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Professor Mozaffar Ahmed, Justice KM Sobhan and Samyabadi Dal President Dilip Barua are among the signatories to the statement.

Police reforms

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Bank, as a development partner, would continue to assist the government in its implementation.

"The Work Bank is ready to assist in the police reform scheme," the state minister said, adding it was an initial meeting in that regard.

The country director and the state minister deliberated on various components of the proposed reform, including training of the police personnel, separation of prosecution and investigation, general policing and crime control, and providing the police force with modern equipment and logistics.

Earlier, on December 13, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) submitted a \$13.5 million three-year police reform proposal, adding a flip to the government efforts. If the three-year scheme is properly implemented, the UNDP has also promised to extend this support to police reform for another six years.

The government is also tapping other donors for financial and technical support for the reform project.

Azadi editor

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Chittagong, died at 9:05am at the age of 82.

He was suffering from old age complications and his eldest son died November 20 last.

Khaled left behind his wife, three sons, two daughters, relatives and many friends and well-wishers at home and abroad.

Thousands of mourners including ministers, politicians, officials, journalists, writers and members of different socio-cultural organisations rushed to his house at OR Nizam Road in front of Chittagong Press Club for a last glimpse of him.

His first namaj-e-janaza was held at city's Jamiyatul Falah Mosque after Asr prayers and the second at his village Sultanpur in Raozan after Magrib. He was buried at this family graveyard.

Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin, State Minister for Forest and Environment Jaful Islam Chowdhury, Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, AL Presidium Member Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, city AL President MA Mannan and City Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, among others, attended the janaza.

Tributes on behalf of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and AL President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina were paid to him before the first janaza.

Born in a noble family on July 6, 1922, Khaled passed Matriculation from Raozan RRAC Institution in

TIB rejects

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on the basis of day to day bulletins published by the parliament secretary, said Mozaffer.

"The report showed some facts about quorum crises, disposal of notices, process of passage of the bills, deliberations of lawmakers, etc," he added.

Israel mulls Iran attack

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Israel meanwhile is reportedly pondering an attack on Iran. Israel is considering an operation to destroy the nuclear capabilities of Iran, Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, was quoted as saying yesterday.

Since the collapse of Saddam Hussein's rule in Iraq, Israel has come to regard the Islamic regime in Tehran as its number one enemy, despite Iran's acceptance of a tough new international inspections regime for its nuclear facilities last week.

Meir Dagan, head of Israel's Mossad overseas intelligence service, told MPs last month that Iran's nuclear programme posed the biggest threat to the existence of the Jewish state since its creation in 1948.

Welcoming the Libyan decision, Egypt President Mubarak said, "Israel must also eliminate its weapons of mass destruction."

Egypt has for many years been urging Israel to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and make the Middle East a region free of WMD.

Iran, which recently agreed to allow snap inspections of its own nuclear facilities, expressed satisfaction with Libya's decision.

"Iran welcomes any step taken by any country to dismantle weapons of mass destruction," said foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi.

"But it is the time for the world to push for Israel's disarmament, as the main threat to the region," he added.

Similar sentiments were expressed by the Gulf states of Qatar and Bahrain.

Earlier, Arab League Chief Amr Mussa urged the world Saturday to put pressure on Israel to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

Libya's "important" decision comes as part of serious Arab efforts to

Biman bomb scare turns out a hoax

UNB, Dhaka

A Biman flight that was halted Saturday night following a bomb hoax at Zia International Airport left for Karachi early yesterday after nearly an 8-hour ordeal for the passengers.

"It was nothing but a bomb hoax. The flight took off at 4:42am with all its passengers," a Biman Bangladesh Airlines official said.

Nothing was found inside the plane after an intensive search and no-one was arrested, he said.

On receiving a telephone call that a bomb was planted in the plane, the airport authorities disembarked all the 177 passengers from the BG-31 flight just 20 minutes before its scheduled takeoff at 8:30pm Saturday.

The call raised a scare as security personnel overloaded passengers and started checking them.

State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin rushed to the airport on hearing the news.

In the last six months, three such incidents occurred. In June and July, two Dhaka-Kolkata flights were halted on bomb scare.

On November 15, unidentified callers phoned the ZIA as soon as a Riyadh-bound flight took off and gave a bomb threat. The bomb hoax led to the forced landing of the plane at Mumbai, but nothing was found in the aircraft following a search.

1940, HSC and BA from Chittagong College in 1942 and 1946 and MA in history from Calcutta University in 1947.

He took up journalism in 1958 and joined the Azadi as managing editor on September 5, 1960.

He became editor of the daily within two years and till death served the same with utmost integrity and commitment.

Khaled had also been a successful political figure in between his 44-year journalistic career.

In the general elections of 1970, he contested from the AL from Raozan constituency and defeated then influential Muslim League leader Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, father of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury.

He was a close aide of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and member of the 31-member committee that framed the country's constitution in 1972. He has also been the governor of Chittagong in 1975.

APPOINTMENT ISSUE

CU teachers' ultimatum to government

CU CORRESPONDENT

The Chittagong University Teachers Association (CUTA) has given a 15-day ultimatum to the prime minister for withdrawal of a circular on mandatory approval of Prime Minister's Office for all appointments in the university.

The CUTA leaders threatened a vigorous movement including indefinite work abstention to press home their demand. They also gave another three days to the CU vice chancellor to formally reject the circular or face an anti-VC campaign on expiry of the ultimatum.

make the Middle East a WMD-free zone," Mussa told reporters.

"It is important, during this period, that the international community put pressure on Israel to sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty," Mussa said.

The United States has classified it as an atomic power since 1968. Experts say Israel has at least 200 nuclear warheads.

"It is not logical to make an exception for Israel while other countries are called on to eliminate WMDs," said Mussa.

BNP men's attack

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The superintendent of police in Munshiganj told The Daily Star that steps were taken to avoid violence and said the clash left one injured.

AL PRESS CONFERENCE

The central AL leaders organised a press conference at Siphahira in the district and accused BNP lawmaker Abdul Hye of patronising the group blamed for the violence.

Some AL presidium members briefed the press on the incident and said Hye was among the 101 men of the ruling alliance, whom the AL branded as godfathers.

Talking to The Daily Star by telephone last night, Sabar, also political secretary to the leader of the opposition, described Munshiganj as the hotspot of hoodliganism.

Sabar said the AL got permission from the district administration to use the venue for the council well ahead of JCD's rally.

Deputy Commissioner Syed Mustafizur Rahman also said the AL had announced its programme on December 13, but the administration had no option but to impose Section 144 later to avoid disorder.

Hye told a gathering in front of the BNP office in Munshiganj that the movement would continue until police arrest the attackers of CUP leader Biplob.

AL's Munshiganj district unit President Mohamud Mohiuddin said the roadblock to bar AL leaders from reaching Balur Math proved the JCD convened its rally to foil the AL council.

Patients suffer as interns go on strike at Barisal hospital