



Nagarik Sanghati stages a demonstration at Shahbagh in the city yesterday demanding security of Ahmadiyyas across the country.

## Children still deprived of legal rights

Speakers tell roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday called for establishing a child-friendly society through a change in attitude towards them, proper implementation of the Children Act, 1974, establishment of juvenile courts on an urgent basis and development of necessary infrastructure.

Although there is a proper legal procedure for children accused of crimes, many cases involving them are tried in criminal courts and even they are not sent to children development centres, they said.

They suggested that the judges, probation officers and law enforcers should be given proper training on juvenile justice system and the media should play a pro-active role in raising mass awareness about the issue.

The roundtable on 'In search of justice for children' was jointly organised by The Daily Star, Department of Social Services and Save the Children, UK at the National Press Club in the city. The programme is supported by Manusher Jonno Foundation (MJF).

Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury of Dhaka University said the children do not commit crimes, they make mistakes, but they still have to undergo punishment, which is a sad thing for society.

"It is society that is responsible for the repression of children, leading the children to make mistakes," he said, adding that the rule of law cannot ensure justice for children - sensitiveness of conscience is needed to this end.

UM Habibun Nessa, head of programme (protection) of Save the Children, UK, said though the Children Act was formulated a long time ago, it drew attention of the legal experts very recently, but by the time many children were tried in criminal courts and sent to jails, instead of correction centres.

She said children who commit crimes or are subject to exploitation should receive justice, but the present legal system and infrastructure is not sufficient for it.

"Thousands of children are



Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury speaks at a roundtable on 'In search of justice for children' at the National Press Club in the city yesterday. The roundtable was jointly organised by The Daily Star, Department of Social Services and Save the Children, UK.

subject to exploitation, as they are employed in hazardous child labour," Habibun Nessa said, adding that 95 percent of children who were removed from the garments industry have again ended up in the invisible exploitative child labour.

Advocate Alena Khan, executive director of Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights, said the law enforcers, in many cases, send the children directly to jails bypassing the court.

The police also do not mention the ages of accused children in the First Information Report (FIR), she said, suggesting that the district or police administration should conduct investigations to determine the age of accused children.

According to a report of Save the Children, UK, a total of 582 children have been languishing in different jails in the country as of last month.

Alena Khan also alleged that the officials of Social Services Department do not visit the children in the detention centres.

Fahima Nasrin, deputy attorney

general, said the age of the accused children mentioned in the FIR is not verified, which often lead to legal complications.

Wahida Banu, director (Programme) of Aparajeyo Bangladesh, said the people, even those who are educated, are not aware of the laws and treaties protecting the children. So, justice for the children cannot be ensured, she added.

She suggested strong intervention in the correction centres where abuse and drug addiction are commonplace. "The authorities seriously look into how drugs are supplied there."

Criticising the non-implementation of laws, Shaheen Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno Foundation, said there is a monitoring tool in the home ministry, but it is not functioning properly.

On the role of police dealing with children's cases, she said a child-friendly society is needed to create child-friendly police.

Mehtab Khanam, a professor of

psychology at Dhaka University, said, "There are many problems facing children in the conflicting social system, but we do not care about them."

"We should change our attitude toward the children to correct their personality disorders," she noted.

On the age of accused children, Deputy Inspector General of Police Phony Bhushon Chowdhury said it is not possible to verify their ages instantly. There should be some kind of mechanism for it, he added.

Stressing the training of the police and probation officers to sensitise them to child issues, he said there should be at least one cell in every police station so that accused children can be kept there before they are sent to court.

Acknowledging that the Children Act is not being implemented properly, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka Jalal Ahmed said the number of children in jails, however, has fallen now and more probation officers have been appointed.

"We do not want to send chil-

dren to jail, but some are still sent to jail, as a large number of accused are produced before the court everyday."

He observed that at least two police officers should be employed in each police station, who will be given special training to deal with children's cases.

Advocates Shahdeen Malik and Nizamul Huq Nasim of Bangladesh Supreme Court, Salahuddin Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Retired Police Officers' Welfare Association, Sanwar Ali, deputy secretary of Social Welfare Ministry, AM Abdul Jabbar, former secretary of Social Welfare Ministry, Rehana Sultana of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, Farida Yasmin of Bangladesh Legal Aid & Services Trust, Sarder Asaduzzaman of Danida, also spoke at the roundtable. The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam moderated it.

## Body to probe irregularities soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna Citizens' Forum (KCF) showed black flags to State Minister for Power Anwarul Kabir Talukder when he visited Goalpara Power Station and the office of West Zone Power Distribution Company Limited (WZPDCL) yesterday.

Braving torrential rains, forum activists and members of all non-governmental organisations staged demonstration carrying black flags and chanting slogans for solving the severe power outage prevailing in the southwestern region of the country.

The demonstrators led by KCF Chairperson Shaikh Abdul Kayyum made an attempt to prevent the state minister from entering the office of WZPDCL at Boyra, but failed due to prompt action by law enforcers.

"I don't mind as your reaction is quite justified. You are deprived of your rights to get electricity without loadshedding," the state minister told the demonstrators.

Later addressing the local journalists, officials of WZPDCL and CBA leaders Anwarul Kabir blamed the administrative loopholes for power outages.

He however hoped that the power crisis now prevailing all over the country would be resolved in next three to four months.

Earlier during the visit of the power station at Khalishpur, the state minister expressed his dissatisfaction over the poor maintenance of costly machines.

He directed the PDB chairman to transfer two officials of Goalpara Power Station to PDB head office in Dhaka on charges of negligence to duty.

The two officials are Bishwa Nath Halder and Nirapada Sarker who are managers of units one and two respectively of the power station.

The state minister accused the managers of unit one and two of misappropriating over Tk 100 crore in the name of repairing and overhauling works.

He also reprimanded the chief engineer for not doing his duties properly.

The state minister said a high powered committee would be formed soon to probe into corruption of a section of Goalpara Power Station officials who are largely responsible for deplorable condition of 110 megawatt and 60 megawatt plants.

The probe committee will begin work very soon, he added.

## Come to the aid of children with disability: Hasina

UNB, Savar

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday called on the affluent section of the society to come to the aid of the children with disability.

She also urged the guardians of handicapped children to take good care of their children putting aside their all agonies.

Hasina, also Awami League president, was addressing a function marking the birthday of her granddaughters - Amin and Aleez - at the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) at Savar in the morning.

"Handicapped children need to be rehabilitated with love and affection, and the affluent people should come forward to ensure their welfare," she

said.

Hasina's younger sister Sheikh Rehana, daughter Saima Wazed Putul, her husband Khandaker Musharraf Hasan Mitu, AL leader Dr Khandaker Hasan Mahmud, Pankaj Devnath, SM Kamal Hossain, Dhaka district AL President Benjir Ahmed and General Secretary Mahbubur Rahman were present.

On the occasion, the CRP auditorium was decorated with flowers. Students of 'Special Needs' of CRP's William and Merry Tailor School welcomed the AL president with flowers.

The children with disability danced and sang songs on the occasion while Hasina and her granddaughters offered cakes to them.



Non-government school and college teachers stage a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday demanding 100 per cent salary.

## No scope for spending money from block allocation before Nov

Says Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said there is no scope of spending money from block allocation before November-December this year against the projects approved in the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecneec) meeting last week.

"It takes a long process to release money against any project. How does the money, allocated from block allocation could be spent during the present regime as there are a lot of processes that still remain incomplete?" Saifur said.

He refuted some recent media reports about government's ill motives to plunder public money in the name of block allocation, saying that the four-party alliance government would not remain in power when the projects start.

The finance minister was briefing newsmen after an Ecneec meeting in the city yesterday that approved eight projects of Tk 1,589 crore. The minister is not optimistic of beginning the imple-

mentation of the projects during the caretaker government's tenure that would take office in late October.

On July 12, the first Ecneec meeting of the current fiscal approved the Second Rural Infrastructures Development Project of Tk 1,737.75 crore.

"This was not to loot public money, but a continuous effort of the government for development," he said adding that the process began in September 2004.

The project is funded by donors whose representatives conducted feasibility studies over the whole year of 2005 before approving it this March, he added.

"The ministry concerned sent the project to the Planning Commission in April and Ecneec approved it after scrutiny," said the finance minister.

"We have yet to sign any agreement with the donors," he said adding that the agreement might be done next year.

The finance minister said development is a continuous process. "We

cannot keep on suspending all development activities and programmes due to elections. Even, when the electioneering will reach its peak, the then government will also continue implementation of development projects, conducting the polls side by side," he said.

## BPRA founding anniversary on July 22

The 27th founding anniversary of Bangladesh zPublic Relations Association (BPRA) will be held on July 22, says a press release.

A discussion will be held at Meherba Plaza at Tophkana Road in the city to mark the occasion.

Mustafa-E-Jamil, president of the association, will preside over the function.

## Projects worth Tk 1589cr okayed

UNB, Dhaka

The Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecneec) yesterday approved eight projects with an outlay of Tk 1589 crore, including Tk 408 crore in project aid.

"The five projects will be implemented with the government's own funds while World Bank, Canada, Denmark, Italy and South Korea will provide project aid for three other projects," Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman told reporters after the meeting.

ATk 667 crore Housing (Poverty alleviation and rehabilitation) Project (Revised) under the Prime Minister Office was approved in yesterday's meeting chaired by the finance minister. The meeting also approved Faridpur-Gopalganj-Rajbari Coordinated Area Development Project (Revised)

costing Tk 65 crore, Construction of Thana Buildings of Police Department in Type Plan (Second phase - 48 thanas) involving Tk 50 crore and Modernisation of Signaling and Interlocking System at 10 Stations in Akhaura-Sylhet section of Bangladesh Railway's Eastern Zone at a cost of Tk 103 crore.

Other projects are Modernisation and Replacement of Signaling and Interlocking System of 14 stations of BR's Western Zone (Second revised) involving Tk 185 crore (Tk 69 crore project aid), Judicial Capacity Building Project (Revised) costing Tk 516 crore (Tk 234 crore project aid), Chittagong Wasa Madunaghat Water Supply Project (Second revised) worth Tk 269 crore (Tk 105 crore project aid) and Operational Capability Strengthening Project (Revised) involving Tk 142 crore.

## Automation system for SSF

BSS, Dhaka

The activities of Special Security Force (SSF) were brought under complete automation system yesterday to enhance its proficiency.

Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui formally inaugurated the automation system for the SSF at the Prime Minister's Office.

The technology will help the SSF to ensure the security of VIPs and foreign dignitaries through a fool-proof security system.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Siddiqui said the automation system will help the SSF become more professional, efficient and forward-looking.

He said security plays an important role in ensuring development in any country.

Dr Siddiqui also underlined the need for human resource development and computer literacy for the officers of SSF.

Director General of SSF Major General Syed Mehdi Ahmed Rumi also spoke on the occasion.

## Swiss govt donates 150 pieces of art and crafts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government of Switzerland donated 150 pieces of art and crafts to the National Museum in the city yesterday.

The museum authorities has set up a 'Switzerland Corner' on the international floor of the museum to display those objects.

The exhibits represent the traditional arts and crafts that flourished in various regions in Switzerland over the centuries.

The works include ceramics and pewter products, masks, utensils, musical instruments, toys and fabrics. The exhibition has some objects of daily use, some of which are still in use in Switzerland.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman inaugurated the 'Switzerland Corner' as

the chief guest. Swiss Ambassador Dora Rapold was also present.

"This move by Switzerland will help strengthen the relationship with Bangladesh. The people would also get to know the Swiss culture through the exhibition," Selima Rahman said.

Swiss Ambassador Dora Rapold said these objects of arts and crafts have travelled to more than 20 countries and now they have found their final abode at Bangladesh National Museum.

The Swiss government has presented the objects to Bangladesh as a mark of long-standing friendly relations between the two countries, she added.

Prof Mahmudul Haque, director of Bangladesh National Museum, was also present.



A collection of arts and crafts from Switzerland was donated to Bangladesh National Museum in the city yesterday to mark 35 years of friendship between Bangladesh and Switzerland.