

Skop to enforce strike today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop) will enforce countrywide 24-hour strike and 12-hour road and railway blockade today demanding the implementation of the bilateral agreement signed between the government and Skop on January 8, 2004.

Addressing a press conference at its temporary office on Topkhana Road in the city, Skop leaders urged the people to make the strike and blockade programme successful.

Speaking at the conference, the leaders said even though 30 months have already passed, the agreement signed between the government and Skop is yet to be implemented.

Abdullah Sarkar, president of the Sramik Front, said in the wake of demonstrations by the workers, the government signed the bilateral agreement with Skop, which was supposed to be implemented within four months. But the agreement is yet to be honoured, he added.

He said the agreement include

Updated voter list may contain 'fake' names

Fears EC secretary alleging people's non-cooperation with field staff

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The secretary of the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat yesterday expressed concern about the rise of additional voters on the list being prepared through updating the existing one, as people are 'not cooperating' with the field level staff in deleting the fake names from the list.

Additional voters might remain in the voter list if the deletion of names of fake voters or dead persons is not done properly, EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar said, adding, "Fake votes in the election might be cast if the additional voters remain in the list."

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz on several occasions questioned the accuracy of

the existing voter list. In defence of his claim, he quoted a letter of the European Union (EU) sent to the previous CEC, MA Syed and a US State Department report.

The EU letter addressed to the previous CEC had pointed out the existence of as many as 13 million ghost voters, while the US State Department report this year mentioned of 8 per cent fake voters on the existing list prepared in 2000.

The field level staff who are working for updating the voter list in the capital said they are not getting 80 per cent of the people traced to the addresses on the existing list while local people are not interested in providing information for deletion of those names.

"I was informed that the existing voter list shows over 700 voters in

Zahurul Haque Hall of Dhaka University. But only one of them was found in his address," said the EC secretary.

The residential halls of Dhaka University have 9,911 voters in the existing voter list prepared in 2000, sources said. Most of them left the halls by now and new students live there.

CEC MA Aziz on several occasions have said that a good number of voters have been listed in the existing voter list showing Muktangan and Stadium in the capital as addresses, but nobody lives there.

"Those names will be deleted from the list if the assistant officials can certify it," the EC secretary said.

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The 14-party opposition combine's road march at Shyamoli intersection in the capital. The procession started yesterday afternoon from Amin Bazar and ended at Russell Square in Dhanmondi.



A man carries the body of a girl killed in Israeli air strikes on the southern Lebanese village of Qana yesterday that left 52 including many children dead.

US envoy lists factors to shy away investment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Suspension of Tata's investment proposal, taking discriminatory measures against foreign freight forwarders and PDB's move to unilaterally change contracts with power producers will discourage potential foreign investors, observed the US ambassador in Dhaka yesterday.

"Power Development Board (PDB) wants to unilaterally change its agreements with independent power producers and pay for power in taka instead of dollars. New policies should not be used to unilaterally change existing agreements," said Patricia A Butenis.

If the practice continues, investors will go elsewhere or will raise the 'risk premium' they build into their investment, making it more costly for Bangladesh, she noted. "Doing business in this country is tough."

Butenis was speaking as guest of honour at the monthly luncheon meeting of the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Ficci) at Radisson Water Garden Hotel in Dhaka.

Referring to Tata's investment proposal in Bangladesh, she said few investors can afford to wait years for governments to make decisions on their proposals.

Time is money, and opportunities may arise elsewhere that are more attractive, she said adding, to be able to compete the government must make timely decisions and let companies get on with business.

The possibility of Tata's investment spawned renewed interest from many other investors, she said questioning, what message does the failure to make a decision after two years of discussions send to those investors?

"After two years of negotiations, Tata has suspended discussions

on its proposed \$3 billion investment, citing the government's unwillingness to take a decision at the end of its term. Now I understand election politics," the US ambassador quipped.

"Sanctity of contract is the bedrock of business. So, I was surprised to learn that Bangladesh has recently imposed discriminatory bond and surety requirements on foreign freight forwarders as part of its new licensing regulations," she said.

Rules designed to discourage foreign investment to protect a favoured domestic industry do far more harm than good and they create distortions and higher prices for related businesses that depend on those goods and services, she added.

Blaming Transparency International Bangladesh for analysing and reporting trends in

Govt starts talks with agitating teachers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government began talks with Shikkhak Karmachari Oikya Jote (SKOJ), a faction of representatives of striking teachers and employees of non-government secondary and higher secondary level educational institutes yesterday.

Four representatives of the government headed by Education Minister Osman Farruk sat in a dialogue yesterday with leaders of SKOJ led by Shariful Islam at the Prime Minister's Office.

Dialogue with Bangladesh Shikkhak-Karmachari Oikya Parishad led by MA Awal Siddiquee, another platform of eight organisations of teachers and employees, will be held today, education ministry sources said.

Meanwhile, another faction of teachers under the banner of National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE) are determined to blockade roads and waterways in all districts in the country tomorrow

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ARMS, EXPLOSIVES SMUGGLING

Govt fails to buy scanners for ports in 2 yrs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government fails to buy sophisticated scanners and install those machines at ports in two years to stop smuggling of firearms and explosives into the country.

Buoyed by Tk 300 crore Asian Development Bank assistance, the home ministry initiated a move two years back to buy four scanners for Chittagong, Benapole and other ports but officials concerned could not even ascertain specifications for the machines as yet.

Frustrated at the slow progress, the National Committee on Smuggling Prevention yesterday decided to request the finance and shipping ministries to take initiatives to buy the scanners.

"Through random manual checking, it is not possible to know what goods are actually coming in. So, how one can take step to effectively stop tax evasion as well as smuggling of firearms and explosives into the country," a source told reporters after the meeting.

State Minister for Home Affairs

Lutfuzzaman Babar, chairing the meeting, asked law enforcers to strengthen vigilance to stop the firearms smuggling. "There is a tendency to smuggle in firearms and explosives before the election," he told reporters.

The meeting was told that gangs are also smuggling in motor parts, assembling vehicles and using old registration numbers to run those.

The meeting also discussed a new way of smuggling in goods through secret boxes in truck and buses. A committee was also formed to find out ways for quick disposal of cases filed against smugglers.

The meeting also ordered the divisional commissioners and law enforcing agencies to take immediate steps to stop smuggling out of birth control pills and other medicines to Myanmar.

"Since Myanmar cannot produce quality pharmaceutical items due to an international sanction, Bangladeshi medicine are being smuggled out," a meeting source said.

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HEROIN SMUGGLING

BB to probe BD Foods' transactions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) will ask 15 commercial banks to submit vouchers of 90,000 transactions carried out in the last three years by BD Foods Ltd, a company allegedly involved in heroin smuggling to the UK.

The central bank sources said they are going to collect the vouchers, following a request of the Central Investigation Department (CID), to find out any suspicious transaction between any group or person and BD Foods.

A senior BB official said the central bank will issue letters to the commercial banks today request-

ing information about BD Foods' banking between February 2003 and May 2006.

Sources said the central bank so far sent about 3,000 pages of documents to the CID in two phases since the intelligence agency had started the investigation. But, the CID has yet to trace the groups or persons with whom BD Foods had suspicious transactions in the last few years.

"So, the CID has asked for vouchers of all transactions carried out by BD Foods in the last three years," the BB official told The Daily Star. The CID will examine all the vouchers and interrogate any

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Chopped down trees lie on the Airport Road in front of Bangladesh Navy Headquarters. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) felled many large trees to widen the road.

PHOTO: STAR

Robbers loot Tk 10 lakh from Sonali Bank

UNB, Comilla

Burglars broke into Sonali Bank's Comilla Education Board branch and stole over Tk 10 lakh in cash and a rifle at around midnight Saturday.

Bank sources said there was no guard in the bank during the break-in.

Police rounded up four employees of the bank - cash officer Shah Alam, assistant caretaker Golam

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Prayer Timing		
July 31		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-50	6-55
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Iran warns UN over nuke resolution

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday threatened to bin an international proposal over its nuclear programme if the UN Security Council passes a resolution demanding that Tehran freeze sensitive uranium enrichment.

Foreign ministry spokesman Hamid Reza Asefi also said Tehran could "revise" its policies - implicitly warning that future access for United Nations inspectors could end - and said the proposed UN resolution would "worsen the crisis in the region".

"By putting pressure and trying to intimidate Iran, no country will achieve anything. On the contrary, the situation will worsen," Asefi warned.

"If tomorrow they pass a resolution against Iran, the package will not be on the agenda any more," he said of an international proposal

offering incentives to Iran in return for a suspension of uranium enrichment.

The proposal was drawn up by the five permanent UN Security Council members plus Germany.

With Iran seen to be dragging its feet before giving an answer - and saying it will take until August 22 to reply - the Security Council is now poised to pass a resolution giving Tehran until August 31 to stop enriching uranium.

Enrichment work is at the focus of fears the Islamic republic could acquire nuclear weapons, although Iran insists it wants to enrich uranium only to the levels needed to make reactor fuel.

"The Europeans must be aware that we will revise our policies and react accordingly," Asefi said. "Issuing this resolution will worsen the crisis in the region."

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All but 13 satellite channels on air again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Cable operators, who switched off all foreign TV channels Saturday protesting a government order, resumed broadcast yesterday afternoon except 13 channels for which they do not have government permission.

Bangladesh Satellite Cable Network Owners Association (SCNOA) and Dhaka Cable Forum (DCF) yesterday said they would stop broadcasting the 13 popular channels in compliance with the government order.

On receiving a letter from the Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh (Coab), the government issued an order on July 24 prohibiting broadcast of ESPN, Star Sports, TEN Sports, Set Max, Zee Classic, Zee Action, Zee Trendz, Zee Premier, VH1, Zoom, HBO, Star One, Disney.

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