

WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE MEETING ENDS Call for joint efforts for better health services

UNB, Dhaka The 59th session of Regional Committee for Southeast Asia of the World Health Organisation (WHO) concluded yesterday with a call for stronger commitment and joint endeavours of the member states for better health service delivery in the region. High profile delegates, including health ministers from Bhutan, Korea, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor Leste and host Bangladesh, joined the weeklong meeting that adopted 10 important resolutions. The meeting, held at Hotel Sheraton, was followed by a press conference on its output. Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Country Representative of WHO Dr Duangvadee Sunkhobol, Regional Director Dr Samillee Pliabangchang, Deputy Regional Director Dr Pooman Khetraraj Singh and Health Secretary AKM Zafar Ullah were present at the briefing. Dr Khandaker Mosharrar read out the resolutions. The resolutions include promoting patient's safety at healthcare institutions, alcohol consumption control policy options in the Southeast Asia, strengthening public health workforce in SEAR countries and regional strategic plan for human resource development, regional initiatives for eradication/elimination of tropical diseases, regional strategy for health promotion, follow-up of sixth global conference on health promotion, public health, innovation essential, health research and intellectual property rights, international trade and health, health information and system development. On promoting patient's safety, the committee noted with concern the high human financial toll of adverse events in both developed and developing countries. It recognised that most harms to patients are caused due to failures in the design, organisation, and operation of systems and hence a large proportion of adverse events are preventable. The committee urged the member states to assess the scope and nature of adverse events in healthcare institutions and asked the WHO to provide technical leadership and coordinate the development of a strategic framework for strengthening patient's safety. About alcohol consumption and controlling policy, the committee recognised that adult per capita alcohol consumption in the region almost doubled in the last decade and this cast a negative impact on the health of the population. On strengthening public health, the committee was mindful of the fact that effective and efficient management of existing human resources for health is one of the most precious and important resources of the health system which would lead to effective programme delivery. It asked the WHO to develop a package of interventions and tools to provide technical support to the member states to strengthen training capacity to support the existing regional partnerships and networks. On tropical diseases, it said diseases like leprosy, kala'azar, and lymphatic filariasis are significant public health concerns in the region. The WHO was also asked to increase technical support to the member states, facilitate public private partnerships for research for new, safer and more effective diagnostics and drugs, and mobilise additional funding to support the national efforts. The regional committee decided that the technical discussions in 2007 would be held on nutrition and food safety. It also decided that its 60th session would be held in Bhutan in conjunction with meeting of Ministers of Health.

Death threat to educationists condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different socio-political and cultural organisations yesterday condemned the death threat to Prof Hasan Azizul Haque of Rajshahi University and Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. Expressing concern over the threat, Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jaill in a statement said the Jamaat-Shibir patronised by the government has been trying to make the country a sanctuary of the Islamist militants. And to materialise their blue print, they want to kill the non-communal, democratic intellectuals, politicians and litterateurs, he added. He demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of culprits and measures to ensure safety to the teachers. Leaders of Forum for Secular Bangladesh in a statement said before coming to power, Jamaat-Islami threatened noted poets, litterateurs, artists and intellectuals and incited the fundamentalist militants to kill them. It urged all to be united against the evil forces and to uproot them from the country. President of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) Manzurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said it seems the government has been using the law enforcers to encourage and protect the killers as the law enforcement agencies have been showing quite indifferent attitudes even after the death threat to the professors. The leaders said the militants have been issuing death threats to the professors time and again. As no steps were taken against them, they dared to pronounce death threat to Hasan Azizul Haque from a rally. Bangladesh Udichi Shipi Goshti, Samajantrik Chhatra Front, Bangabandhu Lekhak Parishad, Rajshahi University (RU) Bangabandhu Parishad, Anti-Imperial Teachers' Forum, Rajshahi Workers Party and Gono Sanghati Andolon also condemned the threat to the eminent professors. Former RU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdul Khalek and Prof Saidur Rahman Khan also expressed deep concern over the death threat. Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) activists of RU threatened Prof Hasan Azizul Haque with death for his speech on education and secularism at a seminar on Monday. The Shibir leaders issued the death threat in a rally where they branded the eminent litterateur 'an atheist and enemy of Islam', declared him persona non grata on the campus and burnt his effigy.



Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon forms a human chain at Shahbagh in the city yesterday demanding proper study before building the fourth Buriganga bridge.

Proper study before 4th bridge on Buriganga demanded

BSS, Dhaka Speakers at a rally here yesterday urged the government for not building a bridge over the river Buriganga without conducting proper feasibility study. They said the Buriganga river is almost close to death because of excessive pollution, illegal encroachment and rampant commercial use by the unscrupulous people. Another bridge over this river without proper study will further aggravate the situation. Buriganga Bachao Andolon, a component of the environmentalists' forum Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan (BAPA), organised the rally in front of National Museum in the city. Vice president of BAPA Syed A N M Wahed presided over the rally while general secretary Mohidul Haque Khan, Mihir Biswas, Taksim A Khan, Zakir Hossain and Iqbal Habib, among others, addressed the rally. They said the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) had hurriedly started earth-filling works on the southern side of Kamrangirchar without any study, aiming at constructing the fourth bridge on the river. The earthwork to stop the river's second course of water flow will suspend transportation from Kamalbag to Rayerbazar, BAPA leaders said. They are also afraid that the surrounding areas as well as the whole city would fall prey to a severe water-logging with further deterioration in the overall environment. The speakers called for taking immediate steps in the light of recommendations made by the government taskforce earlier to improve the river's navigability, maintain its flows and evict the illegal encroachers.

Train derails near Sylhet

UNB, Sylhet

One of the compartments of a commuter train derailed on Chittagong-Sylhet route yesterday disrupting train services on the route for about six hours. Railway sources said the bogey of Sylhet-bound Jalalabad Express from Chittagong veered off the track in between Majgaon and Moglabazar stations at around 10:00am. The disruption of train communication between the district and other parts of the country caused untold sufferings to passengers, particularly children and elderly people. Sylhet-bound Parabat Express and Kushiyara Express were stranded at Majgaon station for six hours. The Parabat Express reached Sylhet at 5:30pm after a relief train salvaged the bogey while the Chittagong-bound Paharika Express left Sylhet at 4:10pm instead of 10:15am. Dhaka-bound Parabat Express could not depart Sylhet as of filing this report at about 7:00pm.

2 children drown in Kaliakoir

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two children drowned in a pond at Kaliakoir on Thursday. They were identified as Pranto Islam Antor, 6, son of Abdus Sobhan, and Sabrina, 7, daughter of Dulal Meah of Srfaltoli village. The two were cousins and playing near the pond at about 10:00am, locals said. At one stage of playing, Antor went to the pond to pick up water lily and drowned. Sabrina also drowned when she wanted to help Antor. Later the villagers recovered their bodies from the pond.

IUMS team in city

BSS, Dhaka

A two-member delegation of the International Union of Muslim Scouts (IUMS) headed by Dr Zahair Ghunaim, secretary general, arrived here on Thursday. International Commissioner Mohammad Zainul Abedin along with Executive Secretary Nazrul Islam gave a warm reception at the ZIA, said a press release yesterday. They visited the National Headquarters (NHQ) of Bangladesh Scouts in the afternoon and called on the Chief National Commissioner M Fazlur Rahman. After a brief dialogue they attended an official dinner arranged at a restaurant here. The dinner was attended by National Commissioners, members of the Advisory Council and the Chief National Commissioner of Bangladesh Scouts.

Alleged criminal arrested

UNB, Keraniganj

An alleged criminal was arrested along with a revolver from Ispahani residential project area in Keraniganj yesterday. The arrested was identified as Babul, 35, one of the associates of Shaheed, an alleged notorious terrorist of old Dhaka. Acting on a tip-off, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel raided the area known as den of terrorists, and held Babul along with the revolver and two bullets at about 4:00pm. Some 10 to 12 of Babul's associates however managed to escape during the raid.



Bangladesh Sarkari Unnayan Prokolpo Karmakarta-Karchari Kalyan Parishad stages a demonstration at Mukhtangan in the city yesterday to press their five-point demand.

ROAD ACCIDENTS' Take stern action against persons responsible

DU CORRESPONDENT

Incompetent drivers, faulty vehicles and unfit roads are mainly responsible for fatal road accidents across the country, said the speakers at a press conference yesterday. They also identified illegal driving license, unawareness of drivers about common traffic rules and indifference of the authorities concerned to implementing the rules as other important causes of road accidents. The press conference was organised by Automobiles Mechanics Association of Bangladesh at Crime Reporters' Association office in the city. Association leaders observed that the owners of the vehicles are mostly responsible for road accidents as they allow the drivers with illegal license to drive their vehicles and do not arrange training and motivational programmes for them. They also urged the government to take stern actions against the responsible persons to prevent road accidents and save life and valuables. Association President Khalid Hossain Buddha, Hafizur Rahman and Md Chunnun Ostad were present at the press conference.

Security guard dies in rooftop fall in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A security guard died after falling from the roof of an under construction building at Tolarbagh in the city yesterday. The victim, identified as Abdul Kuddus, 50, was working as a security guard of a five-story under construction building at Tolarbagh, said his wife Shahida Begum. At about 9:00am, he went upstairs to see whether the labourers were watering the roof. Accidentally he fell down from the rooftop and died on the spot. The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue.

WEATHER TODAY logo with sun and cloud icons.

Moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at many places over Khulna, Barisal, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and at a few places over Dhaka and Rajshahi divisions in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today. Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said in a forecast. Yesterday's highest temperature of 34.1 degree Celsius was recorded at Jessore and the lowest of 25.2 degrees at Sylhet and Rangamati. The sun sets in the capital at 6:22pm today and rises at 5:38am tomorrow. The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with 4 columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.

Appeal for help

STAFF CORRESPONDENT



A daughter has appealed for financial assistance to save the life of her mother who has been suffering from cancer for last four years. K a m r u n Nahar, a college lecturer, is now under treatment at a hospital in Mumbai, India as her breast cancer has spread to lung, says a press release. She was given very expensive chemotherapy and oral medicine for her treatment. To continue the treatment, Nahar needs Tk 2,00,000 immediately but her family is now totally exhausted financially bearing the cost of her treatment for such a long time. Finding no other way, her only daughter has appealed to generous people and organisations for help to save the life of her mother. Contributions can be sent to Kamrun Nahar, A/C No 12100055162, Mercantile Bank Ltd, Dhanmondi Branch, Dhaka - 1209.

MADRASA DEGREES Refrain from taking decision on political considerations

Non-govt teachers urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Teachers of non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas yesterday urged the government to refrain from taking any fundamental decision on education, particularly on Fazil and Kamil degrees and Qawami madrasa on political considerations. Leaders of the National Front of Teachers and Employees (NFTE), a platform of 11-teachers and employees organisations of non-government high schools, colleges and madrasas, said new debate will emerge if the government announces Fazil and Kamil degrees as equivalent to graduation (pass) and master degrees under the National University. The cabinet committee on upgrading the madrasa education has already finalised the recommendation to recognise Fazil and Kamil degrees as equivalent to graduation (pass) and master degrees of general education under the National University. The committee will formally sign the recommendation report tomorrow. Meantime, Prime Minister Khaleed Zia has announced the Dawra degree of Qawami madrasa as equivalent to master's degree of general education on August 21. "Madrasa education is totally different from the general education system. It can be upgraded by establishing different Islamic University, not merging with the general education," said NFTE chief co-ordinator Prof Quazi Faruque in a press release. He also said the quality of Qawami Madrasa education will not improve if the existing syllabi and curricula remain. "Mere recognition will not change the quality of Qawami Madrasa students," he added. The signatories of the press release include NFTE Conveners Azizul Islam, Prof Shahjahan, Prof MA Rashid and Prof MA Sattar.

DHAKA TODAY logo and list of events: Poetry reading, Certificate distribution ceremony, General meeting, Photo exhibition.

Astronomers strip Pluto of its status as a planet

REUTERS, Prague

Pluto was stripped of its status as a planet on Thursday when astronomers from around the world redefined it as a "dwarf planet," leaving just eight major planets in the solar system. With one vote, toys and models of the solar system became instantly obsolete, forcing teachers and publishers to scramble to update textbooks and lessons used in classrooms for decades. "Pluto is dead," Mike Brown of the California Institute of Technology bluntly told reporters on a teleconference. Discovered in 1930 by the American Clyde Tombaugh, the icy rock of Pluto has traditionally been considered the ninth planet, farthest from the sun in the solar system. However, the definition of a planet, approved after a heated debate among 2,500 scientists from the International Astronomical Union (IAU) meeting in Prague, drew a clear distinction between Pluto and the other eight planets. The need to define what is a planet was driven by technological advances enabling astronomers to look further into space and measure more precisely the size of celestial bodies. "This is all about the advancement of science changing our thinking as we get more information," said Richard Binzel, professor of Planetary Sciences at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a member of the planet definition committee. "The significance is that new discoveries and new science have told us that there is something different about Pluto from the other eight planets and as science learns more information, we get new results and new considerations." Brown added impetus to the decades-old debate on the definition of a planet when he discovered UB313 in 2003. Xena, as it is nicknamed, is larger than Pluto, instantly creating a buzz over whether a new planet had been discovered. The scientists agreed that, to be called a planet, a celestial body must be in orbit around a star while not itself being a star. It must be large enough in mass for its own gravity to pull it into a nearly spherical shape and have cleared the neighbourhood around its orbit. Pluto was disqualified because its oblong orbit overlaps Neptune's. Xena also does not make the grade of being a planet, and will also be known as a dwarf planet. "It's an issue mainly for the public, not really for scientists. Some people may be upset, but we've long regarded it (Pluto) as a minor planet," said Richard H. Miller of the University of Chicago. Alan Stern of the Southwest Research Institute in Boulder, Colorado, overseer of science investigations on NASA's New Horizons mission to Pluto, called the reclassification rash and illogical. "I think people are going to consider Pluto a planet regardless," he said. Officials at the American Museum of Natural History in New York had been at the vanguard of the movement to demote Pluto and were feeling vindicated on Thursday. "We had enormous numbers of telephone calls and I would say things that verged on hate mail from second-graders -- very angry children who said, 'What have you done?' This is the cutest, most Disney-esque of the planets. How could you possibly demote it?" said Michael Shara, the museum's astrophysics curator. While the museum staff was celebrating, Shara said Pluto's new status was more a victory for the astronomical community because it now had a "greatly increased understanding of what a planet is." The agreed-upon definition -- the first time the IAU has tried to define scientifically what a planet is -- comes in sharp contrast to the draft sent around to delegates at the General Assembly last week. That document, which kept Pluto as a planet and would have added three others, touched off a revolt that grew daily. Some delegates appeared downright hostile to the notion. Tombaugh's widow Patricia said the discoverer, like any good scientist, would have accepted the demotion as inevitable. "Clyde would have said, 'Science is a progressive thing and if you're going to be a scientist and put your neck out, you're apt to have it bitten upon,'" the 94-year-old said from her home in Las Cruces, New Mexico. She added that a small amount of her husband's ashes were now on a spacecraft bound for Pluto. The new definition creates a second category called "dwarf planets," as well as a third category for all other objects, except satellites, known as small solar system bodies. From now on -- or at least for the time being -- joked one delegate -- traditional planets will be restricted to eight: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune.