



Adviser to the Caretaker Government Dr Akbar Ali Khan speaks at a conference styled 'What works for the poorest?: Knowledge, politics and practices' at Brac Centre Inn in the city yesterday. Sitting from left are Imran Matin of Brac University, David Hulme of University of Manchester, Canadian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Barbara Richardson, Brac Chairperson Fazle Hasan Abed and Ravi Kanbur of Cornell University.

Ailing Castro misses parade

REUTERS, Havana

Tanks rolled through the streets and jets roared overhead on Saturday in Havana's first military parade in a decade, but ailing leader Fidel Castro did not attend in what many saw as a sign his long rule of Cuba may be over.

Some 300,000 flag-waving Cubans marched past a reviewing stand in Havana's Revolution Square in salute to the commandant they had hoped would make his first public appearance since surgery four months ago.

Castro's absence at the event marking his 80th birthday and the 50th anniversary of the start of the revolution that put him in power accelerated speculation that he may be fading into history after 47 years in control.

"It means he will not return to power, that's for sure. Otherwise he would have made it," said a European diplomat who attended the parade but asked not to be identified.

The biggest military parade in Cuba since 1986 capped five days of celebrations that felt more like a farewell than a birthday party and included conferences on Castro's place in history. The events were attended by left-wing politicians and intellectuals from dozens of countries.

Castro had emergency intestinal surgery in late July that forced him to temporarily turn over power to his brother Raul Castro. He has appeared feeble in the few photos and videos released by the government.

Raul Castro, Cuba's acting president and defence minister, led the parade, but said nothing about his brother's condition or absence in a speech.

He quoted from a past Fidel speech, praised the Cuban people for their "maturity" the past four months and at the end shouted "Viva Fidel."

Distrust of Muslims runs deep in US

REUTERS, Washington

When radio host Jerry Klein suggested that all Muslims in the United States should be identified with a crescent-shaped tattoo or a distinctive arm band, the phone lines jammed instantly.

The first caller to the station in Washington said that Klein must be "off his rocker." The second congratulated him and added: "Not only do you tattoo them in the middle of their forehead but you ship them out of this country ... they are here to kill us."

Another said that tattoos, armbands and other identifying markers such as crescent marks on driver's licenses, passports and birth certificates did not go far enough. "What good is identifying them?" he asked. "You have to set up encampments like during World War Two with the Japanese and Germans."

At the end of the one-hour show, rich with arguments on why visual identification of "the threat in our midst" would alleviate the public's fears, Klein revealed that he had staged a hoax. It drew out reactions that are not uncommon in post-9/11 America.

"I can't believe any of you are sick enough to have agreed for one second with anything I said," he told his audience on the AM station 630 WMAZ (http://www.wmaz.com/), which covers Washington, Northern Virginia and Maryland.

"For me to suggest to tattoo marks on people's bodies, have them wear armbands, put a crescent moon on their driver's license on their passport or birth certificate is disgusting. It's beyond disgusting."

"Because basically what you just did was show me how the German people allowed what happened to the Jews to happen ... We need to separate them, we need to tattoo their arms, we need to make them wear the yellow Star of David, we need to put them in concentration camps, we basically just need to kill them all because they are danger-

ous."

The show aired on November 26, the Sunday after the Thanksgiving holiday, and Klein said in an interview afterwards he had been surprised by the response.

"The switchboard went from empty to totally jammed within minutes," said Klein. "There were plenty of callers angry with me, but there were plenty who agreed."

POLLS SHOW WIDESPREAD ANTI-MUSLIM SENTIMENT

Roughly a quarter of those polled said they would not want to live next door to a Muslim and a third thought that Muslims in the United States sympathized with al-Qaeda, the extremist group behind the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington.

A poll carried out by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), an advocacy group, found that for one in three Americans, the word Islam triggers negative connotations such as "war," "hatred" and "terrorist." The war in Iraq has contributed to such perceptions.

Klein's show followed a week of heated discussions on talk radio, including his own, and online forums over an incident on November 22 involving six Muslim clerics. They were handcuffed and taken off a US Airways flight after passengers reported "suspicious behavior" that included praying in the departure gate area.

The clerics, on their way to a meeting of the North American Imams Federation, were detained in a holding cell, questioned by police and FBI agents, and released. Muslim community leaders saw the incident as yet more evidence of anti-Muslim prejudice.

IGNORANCE SEEN AS KEY PROBLEM

Several American Muslims interviewed on the subject of prejudice over the past few weeks said ignorance was at the core of the problem.

"The level of knowledge is very, very low," said Mohamed Esa, a US Muslim of Arab descent who teaches a course on Islam at McDaniel College in Maryland. "There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world and some people think they are all terrorists."

Call for int'l aid to Palestinians

AFP, Gaza City

France's socialist presidential candidate Segolene Royal called for a resumption of international aid to the Palestinians during a visit to the Gaza Strip yesterday.

"It is necessary to resume international aid to Palestinians," Royal said, according to participants in a roundtable discussion she held with Palestinian students in Gaza City.

Palestinians need access to functioning public services, added Royal, who is vying with French Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy in presidential elections scheduled for April 22.

Following the victory of the Islamist movement Hamas, which refuses to renounce violence or recognise Israel, international assistance to Palestinians was partially frozen in March.

Despite the freeze, European Commission spokeswoman Emma Udwin says the EU has given 651 million euros (817 million dollars) to the Palestinians since the start of 2006, up from an annual average of 500 million euros.

World AIDS Day observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Durjoy Nari Sangha observed the World AIDS Day through country-wide workshops, awareness rallies and processions and cultural programmes.

Durjoy President Shahnaz Begum said the sex workers in Bangladesh contributed a lot in curbing AIDS, "since they frankly spoke on the crisis and gave utmost effort to 'stop AIDS'", while Hajera Begum, project director of Realising the Rights of Sex Workers' Children explained how they carried out the awareness programmes through campaigning at the grassroots.

Earlier on August 2006 Durjoy received prestigious 'International Red Ribbon' award for AIDS awareness at Toronto in Canada.



Advocate Khandaker Mahub Uddin speaks at a press conference organised by Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum in the city yesterday protesting attack on the Supreme Court.

Birds flu outbreak in S Korea

AFP, Seoul

South Korea has culled some 771,000 chickens since it reported two new bird flu outbreaks in its southwest late last month, a local government said yesterday.

The mass culling began after the flu hit a poultry farm at Iksan, 230 kilometers (140 miles) southwest of Seoul, on November 22 before spreading to a second farm nearby two days later.

The Iksan city government said in a statement the number of poultry slaughtered totalled some 771,000 as of Sunday, after a military-backed quarantine in the areas around the disease-hit farms.

Prime Minister Han Myeong-Sook visited Iksan yesterday and expressed satisfaction at the mass culling and other quarantine measure taken by local governments against the avian flu, Yonhap news agency said.

Health officials had culled and buried 158,000 chickens within a 500-meter (546-yard) radius of the outbreaks, and on Thursday extended the culling to all farms in a three-kilometer radius.

In the 500-meter quarantine zone, more than 440 pigs and dogs were also killed amid complaints from animal rights activists.

On Friday, military troops were deployed to run checkpoints near the affected farms on the outskirts of Iksan, the first time the military has been called to help in the crisis.

The latest bird flu outbreak in Iksan marks the first emergence of the potentially deadly H5N1 virus in South Korea in three years.

South Korea was the first country to report avian flu when the latest outbreaks, the largest and most severe on record, began in Asia in mid-2003.



Durjoy Nari Sangha stages a drama at Suhrawardi Udyan in the city yesterday to create awareness about AIDS among sex workers.

'Raise awareness about AIDS among vulnerable groups'

The speakers at a seminar said risk factors that cause HIV to spread are present in Bangladesh.

They said raising awareness among the youths and the vulnerable groups together with providing the means to combat HIV, can reduce the risk of AIDS in the country.

The seminar was held on 'AIDS challenges and new generation in the 21st Century' was organised by Trust for Social Development (TSD) in association with Rotary International Bangladesh on December 1 at Women Voluntary Associations (WVA) auditorium.

The seminar was supported by

UNFPA in observance of World AIDS Day.

About 200 young men women, mainly students, took part in the participatory seminar.

They said information about HIV/AIDS is inadequate to understand the diseases in a meaningful way. Importantly, They stressed the need for youth-friendly atmosphere for access to counselling and treatment that reduces the risk of contracting the viruses.

Regarding "blood safety" in HIV/AIDS prevention, they pledged support for voluntary blood donation.

The speakers said media can play a very vital role in raising

awareness about the disease.

Trust for Social Development chief Executive Luthfur R Choudhury, Rotary District HIV/AIDS Initiative Committee Chairman Rtn. Ahmed Farooque spoke at the seminar.

Dr Hashrat Ara Begum of Marie Stopes Clinic, Dr Zahidur Rahman of UNAIDS, Rtn. Ahmed Farooque, Afroza Sarwar, Chief of Operations of TSD, Lubna Zahan, Lecturer of Northern University moderated the technical sessions.

Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, editor of The Bangladesh Observer, distributed certificates among the participants at the concluding session.



Dr Hashrat Ara Begum speaks at a seminar on 'AIDS challenges and new generation in the 21st century' at WVA auditorium in the city yesterday. UNFPA and Trust for Social Development (TSD) organised the seminar to mark the World AIDS Day.