

Forget bitter memories for regional peace: Hasina

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that the old, bitter memories of the past must be forgotten to pave the way for regional peace.

She was addressing the inaugural session of the three-day meet on 'Prospects of Peace, Development and Harmony in South Asia' at the Central Public Library auditorium yesterday afternoon.

Organised by the Asian Regional Centre of the World Peace Council (WPC), Bangladesh, the seminar was attended by delegates from Japan, Nepal, India, Pakistan, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Palestine, Iraq, DPR Korea and host Bangladesh. Poet Begum Sufia Kamal was in the chair.

In her speech, Sheikh Hasina called for mutual cooperation to attain regional peace.

"We must be honest and sincere to keep pace with the revolutionary progress in the Asia-Pacific region," Hasina said while referring to national economic development.

She observed that mutual hatred and suspicions were hindering the process of peace in this region.

Most of the speakers, however, said the absence of war does not mean that there is peace in the world. To achieve real peace, poverty, communalism, exploitation, social and sex discrimination and nuclear arms race must be eliminated.

"Do not let your (respective) governments to increase the military budget," urged Tahira



Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina addressing a seminar on 'Prospect of Peace, Development and Harmony in South Asia' at the Public Library auditorium in the city yesterday.

— Star photo

The Gorai ... a river in its death throes

By Masud Hasan Khan back from Kushtia

Anyone who has never seen a river dying may visit the Gorai in Kushtia district and take a stroll on its dried-out bed.

Choked up by sand dunes at the point where it takes off from the Padma, the 175-kilometer-long Gorai is now having its last, dying hiccups because of acute shortage of water at its source.

The Padma itself has been heavily silted up near the Gorai off-take due to water diversion by the Farakka Barrage in the Indian state of West Bengal.

The lives of millions of people living in seven southwestern districts of the country would be drastically changed if the Gorai is cut off from its origin, warned water experts and environmentalists.

The Gorai is the major fresh water source for all the small rivers, waterbodies and marshlands of those districts, they pointed out.

Originating from the Padma in Kushtia district, the Gorai meanders through Faridpur, Rajbari, Jhenidah, Magura, Narail and Khulna districts before emptying into the Bay of Bengal at Halifax Cut.

The river is known by different names in different districts on its sea-bound course.

"The Gorai is doomed ... its death is only a matter of time," commented Sheikh Abdul Momin, a Water Development Board (WDB) engineer based in Kushtia.

I will definitely not venture so far. But surely, a major breakthrough has been achieved in the communication between our two countries. As I had said in the beginning, relations with Japan, be it political or economic, have to be seen as a process. How we carry forward that process, will determine the real outcome of this trip.

Tomorrow: Investment scenario and prospects for Bangladesh.

Moudud for JS polls under caretaker govt

Jatiya Party Parliamentary Party leader Barrister Moudud Ahmed has put up a strong plea for holding all elections to Parliament under interim caretaker government for next 20 years or so.

Talking to UNB yesterday he said the demand for election under a caretaker government, which is based on national consensus, is reinforced by widespread popular belief that it is not possible to have free and fair elections in this country under political government.

Referring to painful experiences of pourashabha elections at Savar and Feni, and to the alleged blatant rigging in by-elections in Mirpur and Magura-2 constituencies, the former Vice-President under the Ershad administration observed the flagrant violations of all norms of democratic conduct during these polls confirmed people's faith that political parties are unable to hold free and fair elections in this country. "Nor is it possible for the Election Commission to act independently and effectively under a political government."

In response to a question, Moudud Ahmed noted with confidence that the demand for elections under caretaker government was more a political than a constitutional issue. "Therefore, it should be looked into from a broader perspective and in the greater interest of the nation. It should not be viewed from a partisan point of view."

Referring to the constitu-

tional position in 1990, Moudud Ahmed said that at that time also there was no provision as such in the Constitution for an interim government. But the JP government amended the Constitution on the popular demand for an interim government and subsequently Parliament legitimised it with retrospective effect by passing the 11th amendment to the Constitution.

Prokrichi to observe strike Tuesday

By Staff Correspondent

Some 70 thousand professionals of the country will observe a day-long strike on Tuesday to press for realisation of their 17-point charter of demands.

They will also hold a rally at the Engineers Institution in Dhaka and bring out a procession on the day.

A fresh action programme will be announced at the rally, the leaders of the Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Council, a platform of doctors, engineers, agriculturists and general cadre officials, told a press conference in the capital Saturday.

They called upon the government to implement its earlier announcement on restructuring the present bureaucracy of the country. "Therefore, it should be looked into from a broader perspective and in the greater interest of the nation. It should not be viewed from a partisan point of view."

Referring to the constitu-

Zahir murder

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A case was lodged with the Dharmoddi police accusing an Awami League leader and member of Parliament Akhteruzzaman Chowdhury alias Babu of masterminding the murder.

Zahir's wife believed that the murder was due to a business feud among the directors of the UCBL and the Janata Insurance Company Limited where Zahir was the chief legal adviser. Akhteruzzaman was once Zahir's business partner and a former UCBL director.

According to the source, State Minister for Planning Dr. Abdul Moyeen Khan may be elevated to the rank of a full minister.

6 killed in Ctg

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Twenty other people were injured and two of them were admitted to the Chittagong Medical Hospital with serious injuries.

Besides, four persons died after being struck by a lightning yesterday afternoon in a remote village of Patiya, 30 miles from here, police said.

Meanwhile, fire brigade personnel started an operation in the Lalkhan Bazar slum area to recover the missing bodies.

Major of the Chittagong City Corporation A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury, and other officials visited the affected area this morning where hundreds of people gathered after the news of the tragic landslide spread in the city.

The Met Office recorded 58 mm of rainfall in 24 hours till 6 this afternoon while the speed of gusty wind was 78 km per hour. Most of the low-lying areas of the port city and its suburbs were submerged by flood water caused by incessant rainfall last night.

Unofficial reports reaching from Bandarban said the tornado at about 7 am lasted for a couple of minutes.

Thousands of people got stranded at the Bahaddarhat, Bakalia and Sholakbarhat area because of the rain and consequent water logging.

TAIPEI, Taiwan, Apr 2: A fire on a sightseeing boat in eastern China killed all 32 people on board, including 24 Taiwanese tourists, official news reports said Saturday. AP

The manager of a Taiwanese tourist agency said he believed Friday's fire was set by gangsters who had robbed the passengers.

They alleged that the present bureaucracy had "grabbed the political power."

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrak, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhannamandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR DHAKA.

Two banking accords with Russia signed

Two banking agreements between Bangladesh and the Russian Federation have been signed paving the way for utilisation of a 25 million US dollar deferred payment facility provided by Dhaka for boosting export, reports UNB.

An official announcement here yesterday said a breakthrough had been achieved in establishing the first-ever banking relations between Dhaka and Moscow through the accords signed Friday at a reception to leading Russian bankers at the Bangladesh embassy in the Russian capital.

The signing of the two credit agreements between Sonali Bank and Sberbank and Toko Bank, two prime banks of the Russian Federation, establishing correspondence relationship and agency arrangement for LC facilities for Russian importers of Bangladeshi goods capped a month-long vigorous negotiation conducted by the embassy.

It was concluded during a three-day visit of the Sonali Bank Managing Director.

Absence of credit agreements, correspondence relationship/agency arrangements/LC facilities so far were the biggest impediments to utilisation of the deferred payment credit facility provided by the Bangladesh government to the Russian importers.

The visit was possible due to prompt coordination and decision by the ministries involved, which is appreciable, the announcement said.

People to be involved in dev plans: Moyeen

By Staff Correspondent

The government is to formulate its next development plan through 'participatory perspective planning exercise' reflecting the needs and demands of the people at the grassroots level.

According to Irrigation Ministry officials, salinity in the coastal districts has moved 200 kilometres inland.

The sea-bound waters of the Gorai earlier flushed out the brackish waters of the Bay of Bengal, preventing seepage towards the mainland.

Besides inland capture fisheries, forest resources and navigation in the coastal district have also been affected.

The only solution to the problem lies in augmenting the flow of the Gorai with at least 10,000 cusecs of water, WDB engineers pointed out.

The present flow of the Gorai is less than 150 cusecs during the dry season (March through June).

A Flood Action Plan (FAP-4) study on the south-west of Bangladesh also pointed out the urgent need for augmenting the Gorai's flow.

However, a WDB attempt to augment the flow by dredging a channel from the Padma has been aborted after an expenditure of Taka one crore.

In order to identify the needs of the people at the grassroots level, the government will hold a series of meetings in all the districts with the representatives of the local people, NGOs, farmers, labourers, teachers and other professionals.

The first such meeting begins on April 5 at Thakurgaon, to be inaugurated by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The needs of the local people will be analysed and then

JU classes resume today

The classes of the Jahan-

girnagar University (JU) resume today after a 50-day long unscheduled closure.

Positivism

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Begum Zia said in the past a rather negative image of Bangladesh had been projected among the Japanese by negative publicity, and that her visit had contributed to improving Japan's idea about Bangladesh, she added.

After the correct picture of Bangladesh was given to them the Prime Minister said, the Japanese frankly admitted that they did not know all this.

Emperor Akhito, she said, showed keen interest in Bangladesh's economy and even enquired about its 'golden fibre' — jute.

Replies to a question, she said Prime Minister Morihiko Hosokawa was very much in favour of private sector Japanese investment in Bangladesh.

Japan, she said, even favours import of rice from Bangladesh.

The visit, Begum Zia said, created a new and positive interest in Bangladesh.

Major cabinet reshuffle

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Arguing in favour of his contention, the BNP leader, requesting anonymity, said, "The JP had no contribution to the restoration of democracy. Rather, it was the JP which had jeopardised the democratic institutions during the last decade."

The BNP leader hoped the AL would realise this.

Meanwhile, AL leader and chief whip of the Opposition in Parliament Mohammad Nasim told this correspondent last night that his party's immediate political objective was to realise the demand for holding the next parliamentary polls under a neutral care-taker government.

Replies to a question, Nasim said his party was yet to formulate an outline of the care-taker government. He, however, felt that presently was more important to compel the BNP to concede to the Opposition demand for a caretaker government.

The April 7 siege of the Secretariat aims at mounting pressure on the government to accept our demand for a caretaker government", Nasim said. Once the demand is accepted the Opposition would start formulating the outline of the care-taker government, he added.

Begum Zia said that at the investment seminars held in both Tokyo and Osaka the Japanese private sector had shown interest in Bangladesh.

The Japanese government, will support the social sector, she added.

Begum Zia said that at the investment seminars held in both Tokyo and Osaka the Japanese private sector had shown interest in Bangladesh.

Turning to Bangladesh, she said that although the other parties were also speaking of a similar economic system, she cannot quite understand why some of them continued to take a negative attitude.

How can the country go ahead Begum Zia posed, if at every step impediments are created even after restoration of democracy.

Houses razed to the ground included primary schools, madrasahs, union parishad, Krishi Bank.

In reply to another question, the Opposition chief whip told The Daily Star that attending the next session of parliament would depend on what he said, the 'behaviour' of the ruling party.

"We never said that we had boycotted the Parliament session for good," Nasim told the Star.

Foreign Secretary M. R. Osmany was present during the briefing.

The Midnight File

Goa Chief Minister dismissed

NEW DELHI, Apr 2: The Governor of India's western state of Goa dismissed its Chief Minister today and reinstated his predecessor, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said. It said the Governor Bhanu Prakash Singh replaced Wilfred De Souza of the Congress Party with his party rival, former chief minister Ravi Naik. Naik stepped down in May last year after a court disqualified him as a member of the state legislative assembly. PTI did not say why Naik was disqualified but India's Supreme Court restored his membership in February, reports Reuter.

8 killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR, Apr 2: At least eight people were killed in India's troubled northern state of Jammu and Kashmir today, three in a battle between Muslim separatists and troops, officials said. They said at least three separatists were killed and several houses gutted after soldiers of the Indian army launched a major mopping operation against Muslim rebels in the mountains north of Handwara town, close to the border with Pakistan, reports Reuter.

Foundation of country's biggest hospital laid

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday laid the foundation stone of a 1000-bed modern hospital at Uttara Model Town, about 20 kilometres north of the city centre, reports BSS.

The hospital has been named "Mia Amanullah Hospital" after the donor who has committed to contribute the entire cost of the hospital and also to maintain the institution in the initial stages. Mia Amanullah is one of the top established industrialists and bankers of the country.

The Bangladesh Medical Studies and Research Institute (BMSRI), a non-profit society, will run the hospital through its private limited company — Uttara Adhunik Hospital (UAH) (Private) Limited — on a non-profit but self-sustainable basis.

Total cost of the hospital has been estimated at Tk 1000 million. Situated on five bighas of land, the 16-story hospital building will have a floor area of half a million square feet.

Speaking on the occasion, President Biswas called upon the sponsors of the hospital to make provisions so that the poor people of the country could have access to the treatment facilities of this largest hospital in the country, which would be equipped with most modern equipment and state-of-the-art technology in medicine and surgery.

He said establishment of this hospital with philanthropic contribution would inspire many others to come forward for public welfare activities and service to humanity.

The foundation-laying ceremony was also addressed by Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, donor of the hospital Al-Hajj Mia Amanullah, co-chairman of BMSRI and Managing Director of UAH M. Mahbub-uz-Zaman. Project Director of BMSRI Prof Abu Ahmed Chowdhury and Chairman, Executive Council, BMSRI and UAH Prof M. Yusuf Ali.