

Labour ministers' meet ends Rich nations urged to remove export quotas

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: Third World countries warned Monday that benefits of the World Trade Organisation could be neutralized by protectionist acts of Western countries in the guise of labour or environmental standards, reports AP.

A five-day conference of labour ministers and officials from 80 developing countries ended with a final declaration calling upon the rich nations to remove quotas and tariff restrictions on exports from the poorer countries.

The protectionism has "the potential for neutralizing comparative advantages of developing countries and the benefits resulting from the Uruguay Round of trade liberalisation," the final declaration said.

The six-page Delhi Declaration was unanimously adopted, but only after starker references to unilateral economic measures to control international trade, contained in the draft, were removed.

The conference urged leaders of Third World nations to raise the issue of protection-

ism at the March World Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen.

Rich countries control 70 per cent of the world trade. Poor countries complain that they account for a minute proportion of their potential in world trade because of trade barriers.

The trade restrictions were causing high unemployment in already poor and overpopulated Third World nations, the document said.

Some rich countries have restricted Third World imports for reasons such as the use of child labour, use of forced labour in prisons to produce goods and environmentally unsafe packaging material.

"This linkage is totally unacceptable," the declaration said.

But the participants vowed to eliminate child labour from their countries. A nine-point programme to eradicate child labour suggested that governments invest in retraining parents so that they could earn more.

Kamal appeals to two top leaders

By Staff Correspondent

Gano Forum president Dr Kamal Hossain said yesterday that he had lost all faith in the leadership of two top leaders.

He appealed to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina to resolve the present political impasse saying "for God's sake, you two leaders sit together just for an hour, and save the nation's nascent democracy."

Dr Kamal was addressing a party rally at Shankar in the city yesterday.

Chaired by Saïdur Rahman Saeed the rally was also addressed by party presidium members Saïduddin Ahmed Manik, Pankaj Bhattacharyya, Zahurul Islam, Mostafa Mohsin Montu and assistant secretary Nripèn Ghosh.

EU calls for end to Chechnya war

BRUSSELS, Jan 23: The European Union called today for an immediate end to the fighting in Chechnya and for the start of talks on a political solution to the conflict in the breakaway Russian region, reports Reuters.

"The European Union continues to follow developments in Chechnya with great concern. It deplores the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law which are still occurring there," EU foreign ministers said in a statement.

Conference

From Page 1 Col 4

the first working session.

Evolution of Bangladesh's stock market and comparative analysis of the stock markets of Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka will also be presented at the session.

Biswas: Resolve crisis

From Page 1 Col 7

former provincial assembly members Reza Uddin Ahmed and Arharul Islam.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, members of her cabinet and most of the ruling party MPs were present at the opening session.

Chiefs of the three services and heads of diplomatic missions were present at the VIP gallery.

President Biswas said that this Parliament was constituted through a free, fair and impartial election and "our sacrifice for democracy is known to the world."

"But time has come to evaluate how far we could achieve that objective of democracy for which we had made great sacrifice," he added.

The President said Parliament is the focal point of all activities in a parliamentary democracy. It is the sacred responsibility of Parliament to make laws for the development of the country and socio-economic welfare of the people, he added.

"We should have tolerance for the sake of democracy and we should take the people into confidence in solving any problem," the President said.

He pointed out that Parliament had passed two bills — People's Representation (Amendment) Bill 1994 and Electoral Rolls (Amendment) Bill 1994 — to strengthen the Election Commission and ensure free and fair elections.

"Democracy is our mission and democratic system is our commitment." President Biswas said amid cheers and thumping of tables by treasury bench members.

The 32-page speech was full of figures showing the performances of this government during the past four years. Sectorwise development activities, economic reforms and foreign policy issues were also elaborated in his speech.

After the President's address, the Speaker adjourned the session till 6:30 pm Wednesday.

Foreign Policy

President Biswas also appreciated the progress achieved in bilateral relation with India with the repatriation of Chakma refugees but said water sharing problem still hanged over.

He said efforts were on to convince India about the urgency of equitable distribution of waters of common rivers, including the Ganges.

The President said peace had been prevailing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts for last two years. Progress was also made regarding the sending back of Myanmar refugees to their homeland. More than one lakh 50 thousand refugees have already been repatriated, he told Parliament.

About SAARC, the President said Bangladesh continued its effort to achieve the progress of the seven-nation regional forum. "We are committed to alleviating poverty in this region according to the Dhaka Declaration of the 7th SAARC summit," he added.

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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 Kakrai, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No. 11, Road No. 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

Professionals begin 72-hr strike today

By Staff Correspondent

The country's professionals begin a 72-hour strike from today to protest what it called repressive measures against the professionals and non-implementation of their 17-point charter of demands.

Called by the Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Council, the strike will be observed across the country.

However, those engaged in emergency services at the hospitals, power supply, gas distribution, attached to the donor organisations, Customs, uniformed services and teachers on examination duty have been exempted from the purview of the strike.

Report on reopening of CU today

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 23: The six-member body formed by the Chittagong University to study the possibility of reopening of the CU is expected to submit its recommendations tomorrow, sources said.

Led by Prof Hayat Hossain, Dean of the Arts Faculty, the probe body held discussions with the leaders of the Chhatra Dal, Chhatra League and Shibir.

Meanwhile Shibir-backed the Sangrami Chhatra Oikya continued its siege programme for the sixth day today demanding reopening of the university by January 25.

Mandela begins India visit today

NEW DELHI, Jan 23: South African President Nelson Mandela arrives here Tuesday for a five-day state visit during which he is to sign three agreements and be the chief guest at India's Republic Day parade, reports AFP.

Mandela, during his stay in New Delhi, is to sign an accord setting up an Indo-South African joint commission, a treaty on Indo-South African relations and a protocol on foreign office consultations, Indian officials said.

He will hold talks with Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao on Wednesday and also address a luncheon for Indian businessmen, they said.

On Thursday, the South African president will be the chief guest at India's annual Republic Day parade.

Ela Ramobin the South African-based grand daughter of Mahatma Gandhi, is accompanying the South African leader on his first visit to India since becoming president.



Fleeing mills workers seek refuge in a pond as a policeman in riot gear pursue them inside the Adamjee Jute Mills area yesterday.

Another worker killed on second day of strike

By Staff Correspondent

The barricade programme seriously disrupted road and rail communications across the country for the second consecutive day yesterday as the striking workers continued traffic blockade to press for their demands including new pay-scales.

Trouble also broke out at Jatrabari crossing and Jurain level-crossing in the capital and in Khulna with the workers put up barricades on the rail lines and roads and the police and BDR personnel removed the barricades yesterday.

However, traffic movement within the city remained unaffected by the agitation.

According to witnesses and police, more than 30 students of the Dhaka University suffered minor injuries as three buses of the university came under attacks by the stick-wielding workers at Jurain and Jatrabari in the city yesterday morning. Besides, a group of angry workers gheraoed the Demra thana for an hour from about 9 am after Demra police arrested six demonstrators from Mirerbagh area of the thana where the agitators clashed with police earlier.

The clash occurred while the workers attempted to put up barricade on the Dhaka-Demra road.

Another industrial worker was killed and over 200 injured as the striking workers of jute, cotton and textile mills clashed with police in different areas, especially at the industrial belts, on the second day of their 72-hour strike and road-rail barricade across the country.

Dual Hossain, 22, a worker of Sohagpur Textile Mills at Narayanganj was shot dead and at least 150 including 20 policemen were injured as several thousand militant workers fought a four-hour pitched battle with the police and BDR personnel in Adamjee industrial zone yesterday morning.

Narayanganj police, however, did not confirm the death and said they only fired rubber bullets and lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the stone-throwing mob.

The trade union leaders claimed that two of their workers were killed by police during yesterday's series of clashes. Besides Dulal, they named one Noor Mohammad alias Siraj of the Adamjee Jute Mills (AJM) as being killed by police beating. But the police denied the claim, saying the 50-year-old Siraj, who has been suffering from old age complications, died of cold Sunday night.

Three killed in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

Three persons, including a police constable, were killed and at least five others injured in separate road accidents at different places in the city and Narayanganj yesterday.

Delwara Begum Dolna, 26, who was accompanying the body of her father to their village home in Comilla, died on the spot when the microbus they were in, rammed against another microbus near the Kanchpur Bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at 11:00 am yesterday.

At least five people, two of them foreign nationals, were injured in the same accident. The identities of the injured could not be ascertained immediately. Body of Dolna was sent to Narayanganj hospital for autopsy.

Drivers of both the microbuses managed to flee. Police seized the badly damaged vehicles.

Meanwhile, Shariful Islam, 35, (Batch No. 9915), a constable of Rajbari Police Line, was killed when a truck knocked him down on the Bawa road near Demra at 2:00 am yesterday. He was on patrol at that time.

In another accident, Abdul Barok 60, a pedestrian was run over by a speeding minibus near the Jatrabari intersection under Demra police station at 9:00 am yesterday.

Bodies of the cop and the pedestrian were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

The Midnight File

23 killed in Pakistan bus mishap

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: At least 23 people were killed and 24 injured when a bus plunged into a ravine near the town of Nikval in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir today, officials said. The bus, which started the journey from Lahore in the province of Punjab, skidded off the road while negotiating a sharp turn near Nikval, about 120 km (75 miles) east of here, the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) said, reports AFP.

Japan's crown prince, princess in UAE

ABU DHABI, Jan 23: Japan's Crown Prince Naruhito and Princess Masako arrived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) today as part of a Middle East tour, the Emirates News Agency (WAM) reported. The royal couple, who were coming from Kuwait, were met at the airport by Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khalifa bin Zaid al-Nahayan. WAM said. They are to spend four days in the UAE, then go on to Jordan, it added, reports Reuters.

Train no more joy ride

From Page 1 Col 4

The buses make the same journey in 4.5 hours costing Tk 230. Here, the passengers are provided with free meals, beverage and entertainment.

BR's time factor is largely due to the historical structure of track network which was set up in the last century.

Dhaka is on a branch line taking off from the direct Chittagong Assam route via Akhaura and Sylhet district. According to A Brief on Railway Reform published by the Ministry of Communications Railway Division a Laksam-Dhaka chord line project, conceived and later dropped, would have reduced the Dhaka-Chittagong distance by 80 kilometres — from 320km to 240km.

Similar conceive and drop policies were also applied to Dhaka Aricha project which would have cut down the distance between Dhaka Rajshahi by 163 km — from 441km to 278 km.

A general bias at the policy level can easily be traced here in 1947, for instance, Bangladesh had a 600 km road network. Now it has 14,000

km and the network is expanding at a considerable pace. Between 1972 and 1993, the rail route has been reduced from 2856km to 2706.1 km. In only five years, between 1985 and 1990, the number of mechanised road vehicles, in the private sector, increased by 73 per cent — from 196,000 to 340,000.

According to the Railway Information Book, in 1970 the total number of coaches was 1,643. Now the number stands at 1,453, out of which 366 are at the stage of scrapping and 400 are partially damaged.

In 1970 BR had 486 locomotives, in 1993 the number came down to 287. Of this figure, 65 per cent comprise inefficient stock. These are either out of order or awaiting repairs.

A senior engineer of the tracks department complained, "the state of BR can be attributed to an informal policy of degeneration to force privatisation into the system."

Many feel that until such privatisation takes place, the railway system can offer little threat to the growing road transport industry.

Taslima's trial adjourned till Feb 9

Trial of controversial writer Taslima Nasreen on charge of hurting the religious sentiments of Muslims has been adjourned yesterday till February 9, reports UNB.

Both complainant and the accused parties were present but the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate A K M Kamaluddin was on leave.

The government did not obtain sanction under Section 188 of the Criminal Procedure Code as per direction of the High Court.

On January 10, a High Court Division bench rejected the prayer for quashment of the charge against Taslima but directed that the trial court should have the sanction of the government under Section 188 of the Cr PC to proceed with the case.

Journalist dead

Former special correspondent of the Daily Ittefaq Zahurul Alam died of a heart attack yesterday evening at his Gulbagh residence in the city. He was 65, reports BSS.

He is survived by his mother, wife, two sons and one daughter.

Zahir, who joined the profession of journalism in the sixties, also served in different dailies — the Azad, Sangbad and Paigam.

The body of the deceased was sent to his village home Sampara under Raipur thana of Narsingdi district for burial at his family graveyard.

Leaders of the National Press Club, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) expressed their deep shock and profound grief at the death of Zahurul Alam.

Indian girl held from Sangsad Bhaban bailed

A court yesterday set free on bail a teenage Indian girl who was arrested from the Sangsad Bhaban on November 17, reports UNB.

Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Shahiduddin Ahmed granted the bail after Mina Mallick alias Nabila, 17, accused under Foreigners Act produced a photocopy of her passport.

Prosecution case in brief is that on November 17, the accused was detained when securitymen found a dagger in her possession while she was entering the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

Nabila failed to produce her passport after her arrest.

125 executed in China

BEIJING, Jan 23: China has executed at least 125 people in the past two weeks as part of a crackdown on crime ahead of the lunar new year festival, reports Reuters.

The China News Service reported today that 12 people were put to death in the southern city of Zhuhai on Friday for murder, rape and robbery.

The agency added that a further 18 people, including a serial killer dubbed the "Guangdong ripper" by the Hong Kong Press had also been executed in southern Guangdong province.

JS boycott case Opposition leaders pray for larger bench

Applications filed by opposition leaders for constituting a larger bench for hearing of the writ petition against the Speaker and opposition leaders in the Jatiya Sangsad boycott case will come up for hearing on January 25 before a High Court division bench comprising Justice A M Mahmudur Rahman and Justice M Hamidul Huq, reports BSS.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, Jatiya Party leader Moudud Ahmed and Jamaat leader Moulana Motiur Rahman Nizami, who are the respondents in the writ petition, have filed three separate applications before the bench praying the above writ petition be referred to the Chief Justice to constitute a special bench for hearing.

In their applications they stated that as the questions raised in the said writ petition involves matter of great public importance as well as a number of constitutional and legal issues, the same ought to be referred to be a larger bench.

Militants vow to fight Benazir's crackdown plans

ISLAMABAD, Jan 23: Militant Muslims vowed Monday to fight Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's plans to curb their influence and take away their weapons, reports AP.

Benazir met with provincial leaders and government ministers on Sunday to map out a strategy to try to end the sectarian violence that has killed or wounded hundreds of people in recent years.

Much of her strategy appeared to be directed at controlling thousands of religious schools, often considered the centres of military training and fundamentalist teachings.

Many of these schools, known as madrassahs, are believed to be funded by fundamentalists in the Middle East, particularly from Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Benazir promised to check the funding of the schools, outlaw military training camps run by religious groups and weed out foreign students who the government believes are troublemakers, a government release said.

The government is dreaming if it thinks it will be able to control the workings of the madrassahs, said Zia-ur-Rehman Farooqui, an official of the militant Sunni group called the Soldiers of the Friends of the Prophet.

"We will not comply if the government tries to take away our weapons, it would be suicide," he said.

Farooqui's group regularly clashes with militant Shites, most of whom belong to the Organisation for the Implementation of Shite laws.

Korean hurt in blast, dies

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 23: An employee of a Korean company, who was critically injured in a chemical explosion on Sunday night, succumbed to his injuries at Shahjadpur Health Complex early today, reports UNB.

Jang-u-Choi, 46, an operator of the Samwhan Company, met the accident at Talgachhi in Shahjadpur thana at 10 pm on the day while mixing petrol with bitumen for carpeting work on the Bogra-Nagarbari road.

Two other local employees, Shamsul Huq, 35, and Bablu, 28, working with Choi on the road, also suffered injuries in the explosion. They were rushed to the same complex and later shifted to the Bogra Mohammad Ali Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

Lanka takes steps to scrap executive presidency

COLOMBO, Jan 23: Sri Lanka's government today announced draft proposals to scrap the country's executive presidency and revert to a parliamentary democracy under a new constitution in six months, reports AFP.

Justice and Constitutional Affairs Minister G L Peiris said the government hoped to transfer executive power to parliament through a cabinet of ministers by scrapping the 1978 constitution.

"We hope to adopt the new constitution with the consensus of all the other parties in parliament. So far we have had no opposition to these proposals," Peiris told reporters here.

Under the present constitution, modelled partly on the US, French and British systems, the president is the head of state and government, commander-in-chief of armed forces and is considered above the law.

Israel steps up fight against Islamic radicals

JERUSALEM, Jan 23: Israel stepped up the fight against Islamic radicals today as troops and police spread a security blanket over the country after Muslim suicide bombers killed 19 people.

"We have decided to intensify the hunt for terrorists," government spokesman Uri Dromi told AFP. "we'll demand the Palestinian authority cooperate."

"We'll give them a list of names. We will demand that these people be extradited to Israel or sentenced in Gaza. Our attitude is very serious."

The Islamic Jihad said two "martyrs" from the self-rule Gaza Strip carried out the suicide attack on Sunday which also left 65 wounded at Bet Lid junction, 25 kilometres (15 miles) north of Tel Aviv.



Police intercepting an Awami League procession near the Television Bhaban in the city yesterday.

Hasina AL, JP processions

From Page 1 Col 4

signed if the Prime Minister had made the announcement regarding her resignation only two days before," Hasina said.

The AL leader said Opposition members resigned from Parliament as they were not allowed to say anything against the corruption of the ministers.

Sheikh Hasina also said a huge sum is being spent for maintaining eight offices of the Prime Minister and for the publicity of Prime Minister and other ministers through TV news.

She also questioned the utility of such publicity saying "We watched on TV the PM distributing blankets among the distressed, but newspaper reports revealed that people were dying due to cold spell in the northern region."

The rally was also addressed by party general secretary Zillur Rahman, president members — Amir Hossain Anu, Abdur Razzak, organising secretary Mohammad Nasim and City unit general secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

The rally was followed by a procession which marched towards the TV Bhaban at Rampura.

From Page 1 Col 3

Jatiya Party brought out a procession, led by Khaledur Rahman Titu and Col (ret'd) Abdul Malek from Badda area in the afternoon. A group of youths attacked the processionists in west Badda area. JP leaders said. Supporters of the ruling party made the attack in which 15 JP activists were injured, they alleged.

Another JP procession was intercepted by police near the Broadcasting House.

The Jamaat held a rally at Malibagh intersection which was addressed by party leaders Abbas Ali Khan, Mohammad Qamruzzaman, ATM Azharul Islam and Jasimuddin Sarkar.

They demanded dissolution of Parliament, holding of general elections under a neutral caretaker government and autonomy of radio and television.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Hasina, in a statement last night, condemned the 'police action' on AL leaders and workers. The government was resorting to repression to foil the Opposition movement for a caretaker administration, she said.

Hasina alleged that city AL leader Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Jubo Jubo leader Alam and many others were injured in the 'police action'.