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The World On Time



The Daily Star organised a discussion meeting on "State of Women's Movement in SAARC Countries" at a city hotel yesterday. — Star photo

Women's representation

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Nepalese parliament said that all the clauses of CEDAW were ratified by Nepalese parliament but without implementation.

Rokhsana Mashadi, a Pakistani freelance journalist said that although all political parties had women's wings, women were reluctant to join them because of the cynicism about political parties that those are corrupt institutions.

"Women in high positions in Pakistan come from elite families who consider women's issues as peripheral. Years of martial law has had a backlash on women," she added.

She also said that the penal code often victimised the woman victim, particularly in rape cases where the rape victim is jailed, if she failed to produce evidence.

Jezima Ismail, a Sri Lankan educationist, said that women's movement as such do not exist now and the CEDAW was ratified only recently.

Ramini Muhumegama, a Sri Lankan lawyer, said that there existed several discriminatory laws including laws of citizenship in her country. "We have a national women committee, but it has no statutory rights," she added.

Both the Sri Lankans opposed the idea of quota reservation as it marginalises and "shunts women in one corner."

Rouf Hakim, a male parliament member of Sri Lanka who was present in the discussion said, "Women movement in Sri Lanka do not want reservations and quotas. They want to rise on their own merits."

Sigma Huda said that citizenship law in Bangladesh is totally biased against women. "Women MPs on reserved seats have allegiance to parties, not the constituencies. I favoured that women MPs should be directly elected. We are working to establish a uniform family code in Bangladesh based on equality of men and women."

Salma Khan, an executive member of CEDAW committee, said that some Muslim countries like Iraq and Tunisia have enacted progressive laws on the basis of Islam. "Quota should not be seen as a favour. Rather, it should be seen as a lawful means to ensure parity," she added.

Naila Khan, an activist of Samillito Nari Samaj, said that women's issues are marginalised in the Parliament and there is lack of political will when it comes to women's issues.

Shirin Huq, a member of Naripokkho, said the voices of the vast multitude of women will not be heard unless adequate representation of women in local bodies is ensured.

Humaira Islam, executive director of the Shakti Foundation, suggested for evolving strategy for ensuring much more participation of grassroots level women in decision making.

Shahen Anam, a writer on women's issues, said though domestic violence is endemic in all strata of society, least is talked about it.

Rokeya Rahman, President of Women Employers Association, said banks, particularly in urban areas, are reluctant to give loans to women as they consider women entrepreneurs as high risk clients though the village women have proved themselves as credit worthy.

Rasheda Chowdhury, Director of ADAB, stressed the need for coordination between the city-based elitist women movement and the silent emergence of the women movement in the grassroots level.

Helen Rahman, an NGO leader, said that the high turnout of women voters in the recent elections prove that a quiet revolution is taking place.

Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star, said if a women vote bank can be established, the political parties will be compelled to take women's issues more seriously.

Emphasising a greater role for the print and electronic media, the Daily Star Editor said that the Television, in particular, is causing serious damage to the women's concerns by portraying women in stereo-type images.

Syria masses troops near border with Turkey

BEIRUT, June 15: Syria has massed troops near the border with Turkey following reports that Ankara was behind four blasts that rocked the country in recent weeks, Al-Hayat daily reported today, says AFP.

"Syria moved around 40,000 soldiers to border areas with Turkey," said the London-based Saudi daily, which is published in Beirut and other Arab capitals in a dispatch from Damascus.

Travellers arriving in Damascus from the Turkish-Syrian border spoke of tension there as well as gunfire from the Turkish side which "seems to be on a permanent state of alert," Al-Hayat said.

The travellers also reported Syrian troop reinforcements "for the first time" in areas near the border, it added.

The US State Department said earlier this month that several non-accidental blasts took place in Syria in May. Damascus dismissed the reports, which it said had been traced to Turkish journalists amid cool ties between the two countries over an Israeli-Turkish military accord.

Al-Hayat said one of four blasts — none of which caused casualties — was a booby-trapped car which exploded in the Bassatin region just outside Damascus near the home of Abdullah Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

"It occurred on May 6. It was a powerful blast which was heard across Damascus," the newspaper said, quoting a source close to the outlawed PKK which is waging a violent campaign against Ankara for an independent Kurdish homeland in southeastern Turkey.

"Syrian security forces who rushed to the scene found another booby-trapped car that had failed to explode," the source said.

A second, smaller bomb exploded a few days later in the central Damascus square of Marjeh in an empty construction plot.

Last week the British daily financial times, quoting senior Arab political sources, said Assad, who has a summer home in Latakia, was the target of a bomb attack in Damascus.

Diplomatic sources told Al-Hayat that Syrian security forces arrested 80 members of the small ethnic Turkmen community, mainly in Latakia, following the blasts.

Storm kills 87 in India

HYDERABAD, India, June 15: India's south-eastern coast braced for the full force of a powerful tropical cyclone today after torrential rains whipped up by the storm killed at least 87 people, reports Reuters.

The cyclone, swirling in the Bay of Bengal, was heading towards the state of Andhra Pradesh where at least 30 people have died in heavy rains with winds of up to 100 km (60 miles) an hour.

Meteorological experts said the storm was expected to strike the south-eastern coast between Machilipatnam and Visakhapatnam towns by this evening.

Strong waves, at least a metre higher than normal, were likely to inundate the low-lying areas of the southern part of Andhra Pradesh which home to nearly 25 million people, mostly poor farmers and fishermen.

The area, across the sub-continent from Bombay, is prone to cyclones.

Some 10,000 people died in 1977 when tidal waves swept 12 km (7.5 miles) inland. In 1990, nearly 1,000 were killed when a cyclone with winds of up to 250 km (150 miles) struck the coast.

Among the 31 people killed in Andhra Pradesh so far, 20 were from Madanapally district. They were missing on Friday night but the Press Trust of India (PTI) said they had been washed away. Seven more people in the state died when lightning struck them.

Menon alleges violence in his constituency

Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon alleged widespread violence marred voting in his constituency and demanded investigation by withholding its result, reports UNB.

He made the allegation at a post-election press conference yesterday at his party central office.

Menon who contested the June 12 parliamentary election from Barisal-2 constituency, however, accepted the overall results of the election and greeted Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for her party's victory.

"We think the single-majority party has the right to form government," he said.

He alleged that the Jatiya Party activists captured different centres in Babuganj thana and drove out the polling agents of other parties.

Menon said the presiding officer of Dargabari centre in Barakota union, which was captured by JP activists, postponed voting at 3:15pm after he had filed complaint.

But the JP workers gheraoed the centre confining him and the on-duty election officials and forced them to count votes and announce result of the centre, he alleged.



A discussion on "Problems of SAARC Prospects of Journalism in South Asia" was organised by The Daily Star at a local hotel yesterday. — Star photo

Increased flow of information

From page 1

istani Journalist, said cooperation in South Asia can be seen in the light of European cooperation where regional integration was borne in the minds of the people.

He said the experience of a number of wars had helped unite the continent which is absent in South Asia.

"If we want to move beyond rivalries, we have to rely on specific ideas that promote people-to-people closeness leading to cooperation," he said.

Dileep Padgaonkar, an Indian journalist, said there is no faith in Indian people that SAARC will settle disputes between the countries, and also little interest in the minds of Indian people about SAARC members.

He said prospect of SAARC does not concern anyone in the establishment.

He suggested that regional news could be sent on the internet which could create interest among people of the member states.

He also suggested two-way transmission of pictures about the SAARC countries and exchange of journalists among the countries.

Kazi Shahed Ahmed, Editor of Aker Kago, said India can not ignore its neighbours like Bangladesh because of the enormous trade opportunities.

Bazur Rahman, acting editor of Sangbad, said journalists should make it sure whether they are acting as agents of change or agents of vested interest for acrimony.

He said the media and the mediemen must free themselves from the "politics of hatred" and if this can be done, it will mean a major progress for the region.

Reazuddin Ahmed, Chief Editor of Financial Express, said efforts to promote journalism in SAARC countries did not take off for various reasons.

He said as democracy is taking roots in all member states, there will be free flow of information.

He said in the context of regionalised trade pattern, there is an imperative to form blocks like SAARC.

Kanak Mani Dixit, editor of Himal magazine of Nepal, said that the press in the SAARC

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PHILIPS

7 envoys meet Chief Adviser

A delegation of seven envoys called on Chief Adviser Muhammad Habibur Rahman at his office here yesterday, reports UNB.

The chief adviser presented to each of them a first-day cover released by Bangladesh Post Office on the occasion of June 12 parliamentary election.

US Ambassador David N. Merrill, British High Commissioner Peter J. Fowler, Australian High Commissioner Kenneth W. Aspinall, European Union Ambassador Michael Druey, Italian Ambassador Raffaele Miniero, Swedish Ambassador Bjorn I. Sternby and Dutch Ambassador Robert A. Vornis were in the delegation.

Secretary to the Chief Adviser, Abdullah Haroon Pasha, and Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan were present in the meeting.

Gazali Shafie

Meanwhile, leader of the Commonwealth Election Observer Group Tan Sri Dr. Mohammad Gazali Shafie paid a courtesy call on Chief Adviser Muhammad Habibur Rahman at his office yesterday and discussed the polls.

The June 12 parliamentary election and the forthcoming repolling in some centres came up for discussion. Dr. Gazali Shafie praised the election machinery of Bangladesh.

The Chief Adviser presented Dr. Gazali Shafie with a first-day cover released by the Bangladesh Post Office on the occasion of Parliamentary elections.

Ctg-Kaptai road link disrupted for 2 hours

CHITTAGONG, June 15: Road communications between the port city and Kaptai was disrupted for two hours today as the road was blocked following abduction of two BNP activists, reports UNB.

Witnesses said BNP supporters put up barricades at about 1 pm after two party workers were kidnapped allegedly by Chhatra League activists at Burir Char in Hathazari thana.

They, however, removed the barricade at about 3 pm after BNP workers Lokman and Bhutto were released by the kidnappers. The two BNP men alleged that they were beaten up by BCL activists.

Supporters of the BNP brought out a procession at Burir Char protesting the kidnapping. Tension was prevailing in the area. Police were posted to avert any possible clash.

Meanwhile, supporters of the BNP and the Awami League chased each other at Fatehabad in Hathazari thana at about 12:30 pm. The chase and counter-chase followed ransack of a confectionery owned by a local Awami League leader allegedly by BNP supporters.

The Midnight File

Russians fire warning shots to stop 20 Japanese ships

MOSCOW, June 15: A Russian border guards ship fired dozens of warning shots today to keep 20 Japanese ships from entering Russian territorial waters near the disputed Kuril Islands, the Interfax news agency said, reports AP.

SADF governing board meets in Dhaka tomorrow

The governing board of the newly founded South Asian Development Fund (SADF) begins its first meeting in Dhaka tomorrow to set programs for the functioning of the fund.

The 2-day meeting is due to discuss matters relating to capital formation of the fund and establishment of its secretariat.

The meeting will also identify the areas of operation of the fund, said a press release of the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB) yesterday.

The tri-sectoral SADF was formally launched at the 8th SAARC summit meeting in New Delhi in May last year with an objective to identify development projects in SAARC member countries and help arranging necessary fund for their implementation.

In addition, it will also extend support to projects on human resource development and infrastructural development.

Three sectors of the SADF are: (1) Identification of Projects and Development (WIDP); (2) Institutional and Human Resource Development Projects (WHIRDP); and (3) Social and Infrastructural Development Projects (WISDP).

Chief executives of the development financial institutions and senior foreign ministry officials of the SAARC countries will attend the SADF meeting.

The ICB managing director has been nominated the first chairman of the SADF governing board. The fund secretariat will be housed at the ICB office.

Mosque demolition Indian minister vows to punish Hindu militants

NEW DELHI, June 15: An Indian minister today vowed to punish Hindu militants who destroyed a 16th-century mosque in the town of Ayodhya four years ago and triggered an orgy of Hindu-Muslim violence, reports AFP.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Mohammed Taslimuddin told a public meeting here that those responsible for the Babri Mosque's razing "will not be allowed to go scot free."

"No stone will be left unturned to punish the culprits," said Taslimuddin, a Muslim.

The Ayodhya mosque was razed by thousands of Hindu zealots on December 6, 1992 after a prolonged campaign by headline Hindus, who claimed it was built by Moghul emperor Babar after destroying a Hindu temple at the site.

The 1992 razing sparked off bloody Hindu-Muslim riots across India, leaving an estimated 2,000 people dead.

Those who destroyed the Ayodhya mosque have gone unpunished, and minister Taslimuddin's pledge to prosecute them came three days after new Minister HD Deve Gowda won a crucial parliamentary vote of confidence.

Muslims are the largest minority in Hindu-majority India, constituting about 12 per cent of its 900 million population.

Jamaat blarney conspiracies for defeat

The Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday blamed conspiracies for the party's defeat in the June 12 election, saying they do not consider this as a debacle, nor rejection by the people, reports UNB.

"Jamaat's defeat was not because of people's rejection. It was due to partisan role of the administration, NGO machinations, and massive rigging, capture of polling centres, use of black money and terrorism," said Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami, the Jamaat's secretary general.

He was addressing a post-election press conference at the party central office in the city yesterday. Other central leaders and some defeated party candidates were present.

The Jamaat, which bagged 18 seats in the 1991 election and played a crucial role in the formation of BNP government, won only three seats this time out of the 273 constituencies for which unofficial results have been announced.

Nizami, who lost his Pabna-1 seat, said: "We expected another impartial election like 1991, but never comprehended how serious and naked can be the bureaucratic conspiracy."

The aim of deploying army proved a failure as their role was subject to request for assistance by the civil administration, he said, alleging that the administration played the role of a silent spectator when polling centres were captured by musclemen.

The Jamaat leader conceded that the presence of voters this time was higher than that of 1991. "But it does not mean that the real voter presence was equal to the turnout shown officially... 90 per cent turnout shown in some places totally absurd," he said.

He further alleged that this time the entire machinery of polling had become involved politically that seriously undermined the impartiality of the election.

Airbus

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aircraft has 25 seats in business class and 196 in economy class. Biman will use the Airbus on regional routes from its Dhaka base, mainly to the Gulf and Southeast Asia.

The Airbus A310 will burn 40 per cent less fuel per trip, officials said.

Introduction of the new aircraft is the first step in fleet modernisation programme of the national airlines.

Indian EC

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three days after Prime Minister H D Deve Gowda, 63, won a vote of confidence in parliament for his minority United Front government with the help of former premier PV Narasimha Rao's Congress (I) Party.

The Hindu Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been predicting that the ruling coalition would not last long because it consists of disparate parties.

Deve Gowda took power on June 1 after the April-May ball left a splintered parliament. The BJP formed a minority government in New Delhi but it resigned after just 13 days after failing to win a parliamentary majority.

The next Indian general elections are due in 2001.

JP

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about the statement. She also said nothing was discussed about it at the meeting.

Anwar Hossain Manju, when contacted later and told about Roushan's denial, said the statement was given by the Acting Party Chairman and the Secretary General and it was not discussed at last night's meeting. He said it was not a press conference but a post election get together.

Khaleda

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said in a statement on the eve of the day.

The day is known as a 'black day' in the domain of newspaper publication for the last two decades after the ordinance of muzzling the press ceased to exist with the abrogation of the one-party BKSAL system.

Begum Zia said the BNP believes in showing respect to freedom of expression, press freedom and all other democratic rights. The press enjoyed full freedom during the BNP regime, she added.

She urged the people to be conscious so the 'black day' cannot repeat itself in the history of the country.

AL to consult parties

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About the formation of government, Hasina said she was still waiting for a presidential invitation which, she hoped, would be communicated to her after the President got official results of the polls from the Election Commission.

Earlier, soon after the AL president flanked by senior party leaders entered the VIP Lounge of the Press Club, journal warmly received her. She reciprocated the warm feelings of the newsmen and expressed her hope that they would continue to play a vital role in building a prosperous nation in future as they did in the past.

She congratulated journalists for their pivotal and courageous role during the peoples' movement over the last two years.

"I have come here to convey my gratitude to you and have chats over a cup of tea," said a beaming Hasina.

"We will welcome any kind of criticism, however, harsh and bitter it may be, if not compromised on professional objectivity and impartiality," said Hasina adding, "Please do not write false or motivated news."

A smiling Hasina quoted Tagore, "Truth is hard, I love to accept it, because it does not deceive..."

Political adviser to the AL chief, Shah AMS Kibria, AL president members Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan, Abdul Momin and Tofael Ahmed, party General Secretary Zillur Rahman, city AL president and Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif and some other party leaders were also present.

Hasina invited questions and suggestions from the journalists present.

Replying to a question she said, "I am for establishing rule of law in the country. The illegal arms recovery drive will continue. A sub-committee of Awami League is being formed to work out ways and means to root out terrorism."

She further said that there would be provision for maximum punishment for repression on women.

Hasina urged the people to remain alert against all sorts of provocation and maintain peace. "My party does not believe in politics of revenge and conspiracy," she said.

Asked about the reported release of former army chief ASM Nasim Hasina said, "No accurate news on this matter is available to me till now."

Replying to another question regarding relations with neighbouring countries, the AL president said that her party wanted friendly relations with all.

Later, Hasina went round different sections of the Press Club and had light refreshments with newsmen.

Nari Samaj urges govt to help rescue Kalpanath Chakma

By Staff Correspondent

The Samillito Nari Samaj has expressed deep outrage at the kidnapping of Kalpanath Chakma, a student and central committee member of the Hill Women Federation.

Kalpanath Chakma was kidnapped in Rangamati in the early hours of June 12 by plain-clothes people suspected to be member of security forces.

Her kidnapping has been confirmed by various women organisations and reported in several newspapers, said a statement of Nari Samaj.

Nari Samaj has demanded immediate release of Kalpanath Chakma and punishment of the kidnappers. It has urged the caretaker government to take immediate action in the matter.

Chinese dissident released

BEIJING, June 15: Police released today a veteran Chinese dissident who had been detained in a security sweep before the anniversary of the 1989 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators, reports AP.

Police in the southeastern city of Nanhai threatened to beat Wang Xizhe and would not allow him to read books or newspapers during his 15-day detention, his wife, Su Jiang, said.

Wang was ostensibly detained for violating his parole by leaving Guangzhou, where he lives, to go to Nanhai, she said. The couple has made the 15-kilometer (10-mile) trip many times to see relatives without any problem.

"I believe it has something to do with June 4," she said.

Early that day in 1989, soldiers shot their way into Beijing to smash demonstrations that had brought a million people into central Beijing's Tiananmen Square. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of people were killed.

Ever since, Chinese authorities have detained or placed under heavy surveillance activists and their families to prevent them from marking the anniversary. Wang was taken into custody for 15 days last year but many others rounded up then have not been released.