

World Bank ultimatum works well on WASA

Reforms, realisation of arrears speed up

Star Report

Dhaka WASA has fulfilled some of the major conditions given by World Bank (WB), which threatened last month to stop funding the Fourth Dhaka Water Supply Project if the conditions were not fulfilled within February 20 next year.

Realisation of overdue bills, administrative reforms and appointment of three deputy managing directors were among the major conditions put by the WB.

The WB ultimatum followed a visit of a WB team to Bangladesh in August this year. The team was not happy when it left Dhaka as WASA then had failed to realise more than Tk 27 crore in arrears from government organisations and autonomous bodies. Besides, the other major WB conditions were also not fulfilled at that time. WASA, however, has so far

realised about Tk 25 crore in arrears, of which Tk 22.52 crore belong to government organisations, sources said. The government still owes Tk 93.90 lakh.

Referring to another WB condition, a WASA official said it has already appointed two deputy managing directors while another would join on January 1 next year.

The WASA board is reported to have agreed to draft the WASA managing director in the decision-making process. A letter from Local Government Division informed the WB on Wednesday about WASA's progress in fulfilling the conditions.

Sayedabad water treatment plant is the major component of the Fourth Dhaka Water Supply Project, which is likely to be completed by December 2001, well ahead of the deadline of July

2001. Sources said about 50 per cent of the project has already been completed.

The Tk 750 crore project is co-financed by World Bank and the French, Japanese and Bangladesh governments. As per the agreement, the WB would provide Tk 336.45 crore, the French government 137.83 crore, Japanese government Tk 5.45 crore and Bangladesh government the rest.

WB has already spent more than half of its promised fund for the project.

With the completion of the project, Dhaka WASA would be able to produce an additional 22.5 crore litre water regularly. At present, WASA is producing 120 crore litre water per day while the maximum demand is now about 145 crore.



A bus fell into a ditch at the Airport Road near Khilkhet yesterday. About 100 passengers were travelling in the bus during the incident. However, no deaths were reported. -Star photo

8 more killed in Assam

GUWAHATI, India, Dec 21: Indian soldiers shot dead four tribal guerrillas and four settlers were killed in a separate attack in the northeastern Indian state of Assam today, a police spokesman here said, reports AFP.

He said four rebels belonging to the outlawed National Democratic Front of Bodoland were gunned down by troops in a tiger sanctuary in western Assam, some 230 kilometres (142 miles) from the state capital of Guwahati.

The militants were hiding in the Manas Tiger Reserve when army soldiers challenged them and in the ensuing encounter four rebels were shot dead, the police spokesman said.

The group is fighting for an independent tribal homeland in oil-rich Assam.

In another incident on Thursday, heavily-armed militants

rounded up eight Muslim settlers in Assam's northern Lakhimpur district and fired at them from close range.

"Four of them died while three were wounded," the official said, adding that one of the intended victims ran away before the firing squad attacked the group.

The identity of the militant group was not immediately known but police charged Assam's dominant insurgent group, the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) to be behind the attack.

ULFA militants are the main suspects behind a killing spree against non-Assamese people in which more than 120 people have died in the last few weeks.

More than 10,000 people have lost their lives in an insurgency over the last 10 years in the remote northeast state.

Eid holiday

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ple have already started to leave the capital as government and other offices as well as educational institutions closed yesterday.

The holidays however do not apply to banks as most commercial banks will remain open on Saturday, December 23 while some will carry out transactions for limited hours on December 24, 25 and 29.

Some important Nationalised Commercial Banks will operate on December 23 from 10am to 1pm, on December 24 from 1pm to 3:30pm and on December 29 from 2:30pm to 5pm.

Some private banks will operate full-time on December 23 while others will remain open for limited hours.

Truant minister

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If needed, the members will meet Hasina, Feroz said.

Yesterday's meeting was attended by, among other members, Syed Raquibul Haq, A K Fazul Haq, Kamrun Nahar Putul, Mozammel Hossain, Dr. Mohammad Ali and Shamsuzzoha Khan.

Under the Fourth Fisheries Project, the government plans to set up of 8000 'fisheries village' in the country and train some two lakh fishermen.

The meeting also asked the authorities concerned to submit a report on the alleged irregularities in implementation of the project. In line with the decisions of the previous meeting, it also suggested punitive action against managers of five Haors for their alleged corruption.

State Minister for Fisheries and Livestock Abdul Qudus and Secretary of the ministry, Margub Morshed, also attended the meeting.

AIDS project

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some workers in a cold room to torture them, he alleged.

Abdur Rahim of Serajabad in Munshiganj district said that a number of workers fell sick due to extra work and torture. The matter was later disclosed to an inspection team from Wall Mart, a world famous buyer of garments, during its visit to the factory, he said.

The Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and the Welfare Association of Repatriated Bangladesh Employees (WARE) jointly organised the press conference.

BLAST advisor Shadhin Malik said that they contacted the company officials in Bahrain over telephone, but they said the allegations were "false and fabricated".

They however agreed to discuss the matter after Eid, he said at the press conference.

He said such allegations were made by Bangladeshi expatriate workers earlier also but the offenders were not punished. The Bangladesh government also did nothing for the welfare of expatriate workers although they remit a huge amount of foreign currency every year.

Traffic tangle

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yesterday. However, it is hoped that the situation would start improving with thousands leaving the capital for their village homes on the weekend today, followed by other holidays including that for the Eid.

MCCI president

From Page 12

Chowdhury (Retd) Chief Executive and Managing Director of Agricultural Marketing Co. Ltd, Syed Fazul Haque Managing Director of Glaxo Wellcome Bangladesh Ltd, AKM Rafiqul Islam, FCA Managing Director of Pragati Insurance Limited, K Z Islam Managing Director of Nirman International Ltd, Masih U Karim Managing Director of Berger Paints Bangladesh Ltd, Habibullah Khan Managing Director of Meenhar Sea Foods Ltd and Shahab Sattar Chairman of Shahab Razor Blades Industries Ltd.

C K Hyder continues to remain as Secretary-General and Chief Executive Officer of the chamber.

Bottlenecks to Indo-Bangla trade expansion to be removed

CALCUTTA, Dec 21: Bangladesh and India agreed to work together for removing bottlenecks to expansion of trade between the two countries, reports UNB.

The agreement was reached at a meeting between Bangladesh Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil and India's Union Minister of State for Trade Omar Abdullah, both here to attend a trade infrastructure summit, organised by the Bangladesh India Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BICCI).

The Bangladesh Minister pointed to the tariff and other non-tariff barriers restricting entry of Bangladesh's goods into Indian market and sought the Indian minister's personal initiative in this regard.

He also reminded the Indian minister of their previous commitment to give market access to 25-category Bangladeshi items.

The Indian minister stressed the importance of the meeting of joint experts group for boosting bilateral trade. He said the two sides should work together to implement the decisions taken on several occasions to facilitate trade.

"Indian government is very

much sincere in resolving the issues which are still not addressed," Omar Abdullah said.

West Bengal Trade and Industries Minister Bansagopal Chowdhury, BICCI co-chairman Abdul Awal Mintoo and another co-chairman, GP Goenka, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Mostafa Faruk Mohammad and Indian High Commissioner to Dhaka Monilal Tripathi also addressed the summit meet.

Jalil requested India to improve physical infrastructure to facilitate more trade on land routes and reminded India of its commitment to allow market access to 25 categories of Bangladeshi goods.

The Bangladesh Commerce Minister identified infrastructure weakness as a major bottleneck to expansion of bilateral trade through land customs, the most feasible routes since the two countries have a long border, stretching over 4,000 kilometres. "Unfortunately, communications network of most of these land routes is very shabby," the minister said. He urged Indian government to improve road links with Petrapole checkpoint in

India. Referring to the huge trade deficit between the two countries, which is roughly 1 billion US dollar, Jalil said such a scenario is a matter of great concern for any country.

Materialising the previous commitment of giving non-reciprocal market access to 25-category Bangladeshi items and withdrawing all tariff, non-tariff and para-tariff barriers on export from Bangladesh could help reduce the trade gap, Jalil said.

There is no alternative to joint ventures, because both the countries are signatories to the SAPTA agreement, he said. Besides state-level developments, private sectors of the both countries should also take up pragmatic steps.

Apart from government and private sector experts, some 100 leading businesspeople, industrialists, entrepreneurs and investors are taking part in the business summit that will have three technical sessions on river and air transportation, non-physical infrastructure and road and railway links.

LTTE declares ceasefire

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demand for de-escalation of fighting before peace negotiations could resume.

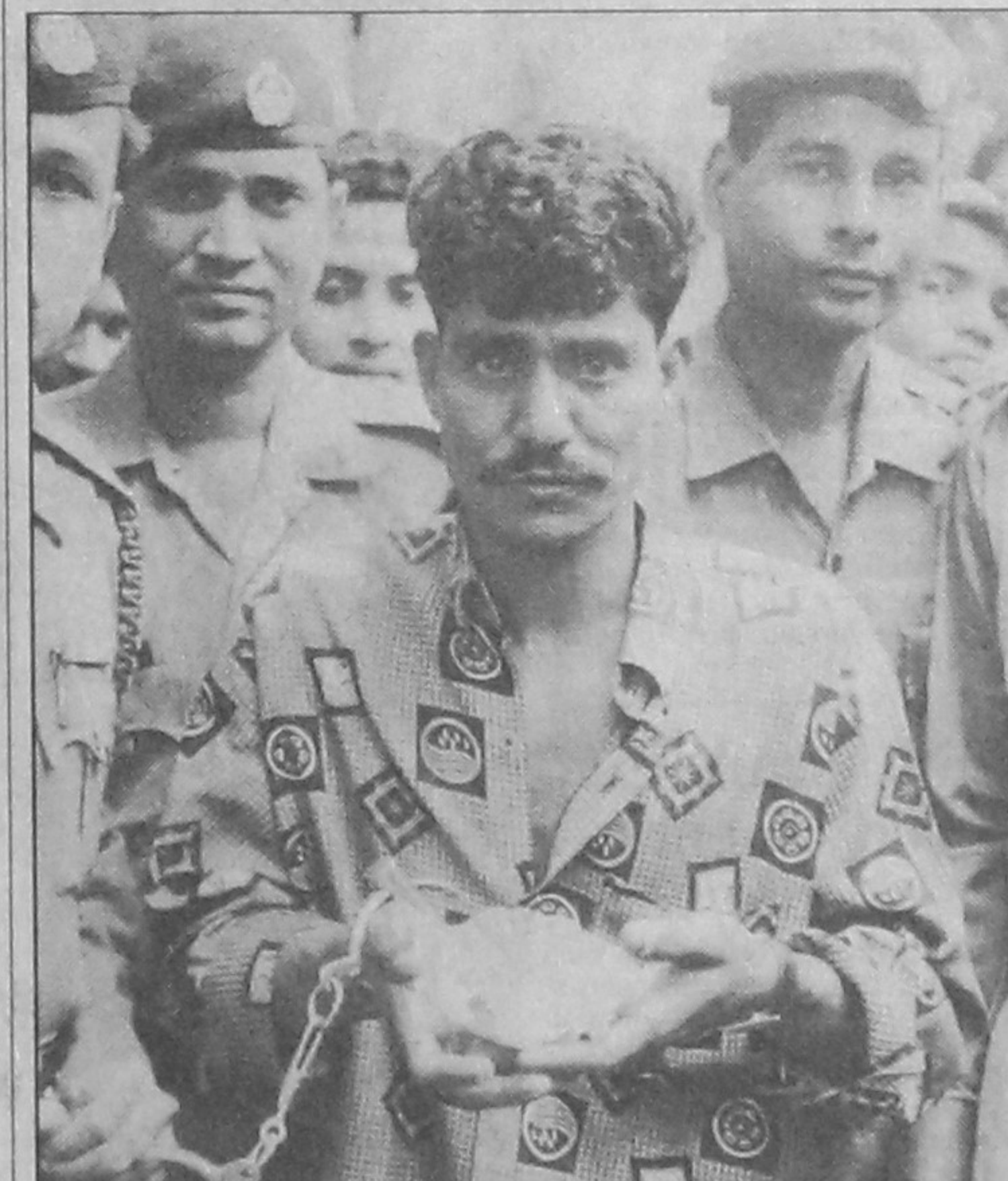
The Tigers have been fighting since 1983 for an independent homeland for minority Tamils in the northern and eastern parts of the small island-nation off the southern tip of India. The war has claimed more than 63,000 lives and devastated the country's economy.

The LTTE said in its statement that it was prepared to extend the 'period of peace' if the Sri Lankan government responded 'positively by ceasing armed hostilities against our forces and takes steps to implement the Norwegian proposal of mutual confidence-building measures.'

Norway, which has been mediating between the two sides, has drafted a schedule to de-escalate the conflict as a first step in the

peace process, according to local media reports.

Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim, who has made at least four visits to Sri Lanka this year, has drawn up a schedule to be implemented on a staggered basis within a specific time. The Sunday Leader, an independent English-language newspaper, reported earlier this month.



Police caught a person red-handed from the stadium area in the city yesterday while he was selling heroin. His wife, also engaged in this trade, managed to escape. -Star photo

'Lalon's shrine belongs to Bauls'

KUSHTIA, Dec 21: Hundreds of Bauls and followers of Lalon Shah at home and abroad have expressed concerns over the construction of a new structure on the compound of Lalon's mazar, saying it would violate the sanctity of the holy place, reports BSS.

"Let Lalon's mazar remain a place of Bauls to congregate, to sing among themselves, to try to commune with the spirit of the great Fakir. I fear the presence of any further building apart from the existing rooms of the Lalon Academy will lead to a major distortion of the focus of the holy site," said Lalon researcher French anthropologist Rosanne Trotter.

Her concerns were echoed by many including leading intellectuals of the country who recently participated in a nationwide campaign under the banner of 'Lalon Shrine Protection Committee.'

A delegation of the committee led by Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury visited the mazar of Lalon Shah on Monday, but faced an insidious opposition by some locals allegedly led by the officials of the Lalon Academy.

The academy, which became a platform of some political elements rather than followers of Lalon Shah or academics, has been desperately advocating for the construction of a new complex on the mazar compound.

The Protection Committee demands that the proposed complex should be built outside the existing compound. The construction of the four-storey complex at a cost of Tk 3.64 crore under a project within ten feet of the shrine was postponed recently following a meeting between the members of the Protection Committee and State Minister for Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader.

A vested quarter in the area

are misguiding the locals by using the propaganda that the mazar complex would be relocated in Dhaka, some local people said.

A counter gathering was also organised by the Lalon Academy on the day the intellectuals visited the compound. Some of the local leaders said they would not tolerate any interference with the construction by outsiders.

Meanwhile, one of the convenors of the Protection Committee, Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, said they were not opposing the new construction of a new structure, but launched the movement to protect the sanctity of the mazar compound. He suggested that the complex could be built on the 26 acres of land reclaimed from the Kalliganga River under a government project. The land is only 100 yards off the compound.

Indian daily lauds expulsion of Pak diplomat

A prestigious Indian daily yesterday commended Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her recent decision to expel a Pakistani diplomat for hurting the national sentiment of the people of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

"Sheikh Hasina is right in saying that the expulsion was necessitated by the Pakistani diplomat hurting Bangladesh's feeling by speaking against its independence and sovereignty," said an editorial of The Statesman published simultaneously from Calcutta and Delhi.

"Pakistan would have done the same to any foreign diplomat," the paper said supporting Bangladesh government's action. The leader titled 'Marching Orders' said, 'Never before have Bangladesh-Pakistan ties hit such a low as they have following the expulsion of Irfan ur-Rehman Raja, Pakistani deputy high commissioner in Dhaka.'

Raja by his comments at a seminar here late last month hurt the national sentiment giving rise to public condemnation and demand to the government to expel him.

Bangladesh, which protested the utterances of Raja, showed utmost tolerance in dealing with him. The diplomat was finally expelled after Pakistan failed to withdraw him even two weeks after it promised to do so.

The paper said: "Although bilateral relations have been under considerable strain since last September when General Pervez Musharraf slighted Sheikh Hasina by cancelling an appointment with her for deprecating military takeovers, never have they reached a stage when a senior diplomat of the other country has to be declared person a non grata."

The daily said it was expected that relations between the two countries would improve after Islamabad announced to recall Raja. But that was not to be, it said.

Commenting on the statement of Raja, the paper in its editorial said it was 'meant to articulate the view that some constituents of the BNP-led four-party opposition combine have always held regarding the liberation war leading to the break-up of Pakistan.'

It further said Raja was 'testing the waters for those who hope to sweep back to power in next year's polls by undermining the principles on which Bangladesh was founded.'

The paper concluded by saying that the 'fundamentalist outflows are desperate since another poll victory for Awami League-led liberation forces would sound their death-knell.'

Gene therapy in mice opens up new front against AIDS

PARIS, Dec 21: French doctors said today they had devised a gene therapy in mice that dealt a blow to the AIDS virus by fooling it into latching on to a passing protein rather than a cell, causing it to wither and die for lack of nutrition, reports AFP.

The research by doctors at Edouard-Herriot Hospital in Lyons, one of France's top institutions in medical innovation, is published Friday in the US magazine AIDS.

Researcher Kamel Sanhadi told AFP that the work had been carried out on mice that had been genetically modified to be without immune defences, to enable the rodents to receive human cells yet not reject them.

Two genes were then inserted into the mice, causing them to produce a substance called glycoprotein.

This circulated in the blood, mimicking CD4 receptors, the part of a cell surface to which the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is attracted.

"When the AIDS virus meets a human cell, it latches on to its CD4 receptors and then infiltrates the cell," Sanhadi said.

"We sought to imitate this process by placing receptors in the vicinity of the virus, but in a soluble form."

The mice were infected with HIV a week after the gene transfer, but the virus was fooled by the false CD4s and did not penetrate cells, which meant that it was deprived of an energy source to survive and reproduce, Sanhadi said.

After three weeks, "virus levels in the blood were quite undetectable, even using the most powerful techniques, such as gene amplification," he said.

He added, however, that it was too early to say whether the virus may be holding up in a reservoir of the body, such as the lymph glands, the brain or spinal cord.

The next step will be test the therapy on primates, with the

Fish trader succumbs to stab injuries

By Staff Correspondent

A young man, who was stabbed by a gang of miscreants on Friday, succumbed to his injuries at Dhaka Medical College Hospital on Wednesday night, hospital sources said.

The deceased was identified as Shentu, 30, a fish trader at Karwan Bazar and son of Khorshed Alam of 47 South Khorshbar in Tejgaon.

A gang of miscreants stabbed Shentu near Jongli mazar in Tejgaon which he was going to Gulshan. He was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and later shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital as his condition was deteriorated. Shentu died at the Orthopaedic Hospital at about 9:30 pm on Wednesday, hospital sources quoting the witnesses said.

Sources said a few days ago Selim and Shoban of Pichhi Hannan group went to the Shentu and demanded toll from him. As he refused to comply, the gang threatened him to kill.

Later, Shentu filed a case with Tejgaon police station accusing the gang members. Police suspected that the gang stabbed him to take revenge.

SAARC People's Forum

From Page 12 persons. "It is an anti-immigration policy targeted against developing countries".

It condemned consolidation of power exercised by multinational corporations (MNCs) through institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The conference organised by RESISTANCE and SANFEC, two networks of peoples' movement in South Asia, was participated by voluntary organisations and grassroots level workers from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The Maldives and Bhutan were not represented.

More than 150 social and human rights activists, journalists, lawyers, environmentalists, agriculturists and NGO representatives attended the conference.

The declaration called for a moratorium on production, import, distribution and sale of genetically modified (GM) plants and food products, which were threatening food security in the region.

On this issue, governments came under fire from the participants. Biotechnology is not aimed at eradicating hunger but at increasing profit of companies engaged in GM research and marketing, they noted.

The participants questioned why governments in the region are supporting this technology which has serious negative impact on human health and environment.

Development of technologies which destroys plants' immunity system are aimed at taking con-

trol of the food supply chain and making the poor farmers dependent on private companies, the conference pointed out.

WTO's intellectual property rights (TRIPS) agreement restricts farmers' right to save, trade and reuse seeds. "This is unacceptable and we must bring an end to this," said Farhad Mazhar of RESISTANCE NETWORK from Bangladesh.

The conference noted that international instruments, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention against Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA), were either not totally ratified by some countries or were not implemented.

The SPF urged governments of SAARC countries to bring their national policies in line with these international conventions.

The participants demanded that the pending SAARC Convention to combat human trafficking be signed without delay, incorporating the changes suggested by women's groups and human rights organisations.

It proposed setting up of a media centre to strengthen the campaign of the Forum.

The conference also demanded that the 11th SAARC Summit be held immediately. "We reiterate that the excuses given for not holding the 11th SAARC Summit is against the SAARC Charter and therefore such excuses are not congenial for the spirit of cooperation and are against the interests of the people of the region", the declaration said.

No sooner had he...

From Page 1 The Pabna seat fell vacant following the death of BNP lawmaker Rafiqul Islam Bakul on

November 10 while Awami League MP Syed Kamal Bakht's death on December 15 led to the vacating of the Sathkira seat.

As per law, the Election Commission is bound to hold by-election to a vacant seat within 90 days from the day it falls vacant unless there is a natural disaster that may extend the time-limit by another 90 days.

Now, the Commission has to complete by-election to the Pabna seat by February 8 and that of Sathkira by March 15. And, in the absence of a natural disaster the Commission will have to hold the two by-elections although one

may question the rationale behind such extravaganzas.

The seventh Jatiya Sangsad that has eclipsed all previous records of parliamentary by-elections in the country has also provided short-lived tenure to four other MPs, who all were elected less than a year ago. The four are Food Minister Amir Hossain Amu, Dr Alaaddin Ahmed, Raihanul Haq and Chayan Islam, all belonging to the ruling Awami League.

In its 53-month life, the outgoing parliament has already witnessed 29 by-elections to its vacant seats. By-election to yet another seat in Bhola has been pending since early days of the present parliament owing to legal complications.

Gold import limit

From Page 1 more import in a bid to curb smuggling and promote local jewellery industry.

The baggage rules in the last budget allowed a person to import up to 10 kilograms of gold with a duty of Tk 200 per tola.

The decision, according to one NBR official, has backfired and smuggling into and out of the country has increased.

During the July-November period, 1.85 lakh tola of gold (1 kg equals 86 tola) through legal channel.

In November alone, 90 per cent of the total quantity was imported legally, he said.

huge import made little impact on development of the jewellery sector and was actually smuggled out of the country.

On the other hand, another official complained, gold continued to come in through illegal channel despite the liberal policy.

Persons involved in hundi businesses are engaged in smuggling, he added.

The official said that most of the illegal gold came through the green channel at the Zia International Airport, adding that the new rule held the promise to halt the trend.

All the customs houses have been notified of the new order, he said.