

# 11-pt suggestion to boost regional cooperation

## Third meeting of BCIM Forum concludes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The third meeting of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Regional Economic Forum has laid emphasis on bolstering economic cooperation among the countries.

The forum on its concluding day yesterday adopted an eleven-point statement to foster cooperation in the BCIM region.

The fourth meeting of the BCIM forum will be held in Yangon, Myanmar, in 2003.

The vast natural resources of the region should be utilised for collective benefits, the forum suggested.

It further emphasised improved transport connectivity for efficient movement of goods and people to promote tourism and better understanding among people.

The forum recommended that the cooperating institutions and organisations endeavour to generate broad-based support for the BCIM idea.

In continuation of the Track II initiative, the forum called upon business leaders in the region to establish a focal point to identify constraints and opportunities of trade and investments and formulate action programmes before the end of 2002.

They should list specific trade and investment facilitation measures, which may then be presented to their respective governments for necessary action, the forum suggested.

It urged various chambers of commerce in the region to hold and participate in exhibitions, which could be a practical means of creating awareness about trade and investment opportunities.

It favoured periodic meetings to provide opportunities for dialogues, exploration of new opportunities and modalities to strengthen regional cooperation. The meetings will be held in rotation.

The forum advocated research studies to identify specific areas for joint ventures conducive to cooperation.

The Track II institutions will require an appropriate funding for the necessary studies and surveys as well as continuation of the current series of dialogues, the forum recognised.

The delegates appreciated the participation of high-level representatives of Bangladesh.

The visiting participants expressed their gratitude to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and all other host institutions and individuals in Dhaka for their gener-

ous hospitality and meticulousness in making the meeting a success.

As decided by the forum, Bangladesh's focal point will be the CPD for contact, communication and liaison; Myanmar's focal point will be its commerce ministry; and Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and Institutions of Science and Technology of Yunnan government will be the focal point of China. However, India refrained from mentioning its focal point and will inform the forum about it later.

The Chinese delegation has expressed willingness to hold a car rally from Kunming of China to Kolkata of India to create a positive response to the BCIM forum.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the CPD read out the "Dhaka Statement", while Dr. Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the CPD, chaired the session.

Dr. Rehman in his presidential speech expressed his optimism that the BCIM forum would help the countries in the region have an economic growth through multilateral trade and investment.

He underscored mutual cooperation among the participating countries to push ahead with the forum to obtain optimum benefits.



Artistes of Tarunya Natyagoshthi perform at the Pathanattya Utsab 2002, the street drama festival organised on the occasion of the upcoming golden jubilee of the 1952 Language Movement.

# Khaleda: Campuses

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The delegation included VCs of Dhaka University Prof Anwarullah Chowdhury, Rajshahi University Prof Faisal Islam Faruqi, BAU Prof Mustafizur Rahman, BUET Prof Nur Uddin Ahmed, Chittagong University AJS Nur Uddin Chowdhury, JU Prof Jashim Uddin Ahmed, Islamic University Prof Mustafizur Rahman, Khulna University MA Kader Bhuiyan, BB Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Krishi University A Halim Khan, National University Abdul Momin Chowdhury, Acting VC of BOU Dr Ri Sharif and Acting VC of Shahjalal University Prof AAziz.

Assuring all-out cooperation of her government in restoring discipline in the country's education sector, Khaleda sought assistance from the vice-chancellors for implementing the programmes of her government.

She said despite resource constraints, her government was pledge-bound to ensure proper education for building a better future of the country.

The prime minister told the heads of the country's universities that she does not want to read any news of students being involved in extortion, kidnapping or any other illegal activities. She asserted that the present government would not tolerate any such acts.

She mentioned government programmes for promoting education, including stipend for students at primary level and free education for girls up to higher secondary level.

The vice-chancellors, during the meeting, pointed a grim picture of

the situation prevailing in the universities. They informed the Prime Minister of "irregularities, anarchy and indiscipline" embedded in the institutions during the five years of Awami League rule.

They urged the Prime Minister to form of a high-level inquiry committee to investigate the irregularities.

The VCs said recruitment was mostly made "on political considerations" without judging qualification and experience. This, they said, led to financial difficulties and "a severe anarchic situation" in the educational institutions.

## AL: Oppsition

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The recommendations of the sub-committee, Zillur added.

As many as 540 leaders of different tiers of the party including some central committee leaders were earlier served with show-cause notices in regard to the party's debacle in the October 1 parliamentary election.

Sources said so far half of those served with show cause notices have responded and the rest will give their reply soon.

The meeting, chaired by party President Sheikh Hasina, also discussed party's programmes drawn up on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Language Movement and for proposed human rights convention.

The AL will hold a rally at Muktangan in the city on February 15 to observe the day as "Democracy Killing Day".

# Pilgrims groan

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during the air travel from Dhaka. Two teams are to work round-the-clock at Bangladesh Hajj Camps in Makkah and Madina.

According to reports received at the religious affairs ministry, none of the doctors is at Jeddah Airport while most of the others are absent from Makkah and Madina camps.

Officials in Dhaka said two pilgrims suddenly fell sick a few days back but there was not a single doctor for his treatment. The doctors concerned could not be contacted even till yesterday.

The pilgrims and Hajj officials then had to call in doctors from nearby Pakistani and Indian camps

for treatment of the Bangladeshi pilgrims.

The health ministry has been informed of the situation but necessary steps in this regard are yet to be taken.

A senior official of the religious affairs ministry, who wanted not to be named, said that in the past their ministry would send doctors and they were accountable to it. "But this time, the doctors sent from Bangladesh are not accountable to any one."

He went on, "Every day, lot of complaints are being received here. Although we have nothing to do, we are being blamed for such a situation," he added.

## Abduction case: 17 jailed in Sherpur

UNB, Sherpur

A court here yesterday sentenced 17 people to five years rigorous imprisonment in an abduction case.

The convicts are Suruj Ali, Shaftul Islam, Momin, Boyel, A Karim, Aka, Khokan, Kadir, Joyal, Hialu, Ashraf Ali, Rahim, Babul, Jamshed, A Salam, Hanif and Khorshed of Nakla upazila.

The court also fined them Tk 1,500 each, in default to suffer one year more RI.

According to prosecution, the convicts ransacked the house of Ashraf Ali of Jalpur village of the upazila at about 1:30 am on Jan 4, 1995 and kidnapped his son Abdul Aziz, 8, at gunpoint. They later sent a letter to him demanding a ransom of Tk 5 lakh.

After examining the records and witnesses, the court handed down the verdict.

## As Morshed Khan

**FROM PAGE 1**  
Khan was speaking at a seminar on SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) yesterday. The foreign minister did not name Hasina but said "the leader of the opposition was causing considerable damage to the image of Bangladesh".

He said during her recent tours abroad and in her public comments, Hasina has been saying to the world with considerable enthusiasm, "Look, we are Taliban. Bangladesh is a Taliban country."

"No Bangladeshi citizen could expect of the leader of the opposition to carry out such a tirade against Bangladesh,"

"I do not think any members of her party are at all to blame for this. It is she alone. She is working as a one-man demolition squad against Bangladesh," the foreign minister said.

## Rickshaws

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some city points yesterday, including Danik Bangla and Science Laboratory crossings.

Sources said the rickshaw-pullers also damaged a number of motor vehicles after attending a rally at the Osmany Udyan in the afternoon.

Police, however, could not confirm any incident of damage of motor vehicles last night.

The rally was organised to hammer on the eight-point demands, including withdrawal of a ban on movement of rickshaws on a number of city roads and an end to police harassment.

The rally observed that authorities should take steps to ban movement of unlicensed rickshaws on the city roads. But they asked the authorities not to ban movement of rickshaws on any more city roads.

No prior announcement was made regarding the rickshaw strike, though and the office-goers bracketed in the low- and middle-income group had to bear the brunt. A large number of people had to walk to their destinations.

A number of rickshaw-pullers said following an instant decision by a section of rickshaw-pullers as well as rickshaw owners yesterday morning, most of the rickshaws did not hit the city streets yesterday.

Some others however said fearing a drive to seize illegal rickshaws, most of the rickshaws stayed off the roads.

# HIV-AIDS spreads along Asia's drug routes

REUTERS, Sydney

Increasing drug use in Asia is accelerating the spread of HIV-AIDS along drug trafficking routes from the so-called Golden Triangle to nations like Indonesia and governments are doing too little to combat it, a report says.

The report on 22 Asian countries, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, said Asian governments were working against the sexual transmission of HIV but they were not doing enough to prevent the virus spreading among injecting drug users.

"Without such action, Asia will continue to be home to what threatens to be amongst the worst regional AIDS epidemics on Earth," said the report by The Centre For Harm Reduction, one of Asia's foremost health and medical research bodies.

Seven million people in Asia live with AIDS or HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), which causes the disease.

The report said Asia had few HIV-AIDS prevention programmes for drug users, such as needle exchanges, and that many drug users shared needles cleaned simply by cold water, not the recommended boiling water or bleach.

"Drug use has become one of the major accelerants of the HIV epidemic in the Asian region," said the report available at the centre's Web

site (<http://www.chr.asn.au>). The centre first issued an Asian HIV-AIDS report in 1997.

"Populations of drug users develop rapidly along trafficking routes, creating new drug markets and HIV threat in host countries," it said.

## Indonesia at risk

The report said Indonesia was one of the most at risk with HIV infection due to drug injections rising to 19 per cent of the total number of people infected from less than one per cent before 2000.

It said by September 2001, there were 2,313 cases of HIV in Indonesia, of which 449 were injecting drug users, adding there were some two million drug users, half of which injected.

The report found injecting drug users made up 70 per cent of HIV infections in China in 2001 compared with 66 per cent in 1997.

It said specific HIV subtypes now appearing in previously HIV-free areas of China could be linked to specific drug trafficking routes to the "Golden Triangle", the so-called heroin producing region of Myanmar, Laos and Thailand.

China puts its number of confirmed HIV-AIDS cases at 28,133, but health officials say the real figures could be above 600,000. The United Nations says China could have 10 million HIV-AIDS sufferers by 2010 unless it acts

decisively.

The Australian report found 75 per cent of those infected with HIV in Iran were injecting drug users, 65 per cent in Vietnam and 54 per cent in Thailand.

It said the Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Hong Kong, Macau, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh also faced potential HIV epidemics among injecting drug users.

The report noted an increasing number of Asian women injecting drugs, particularly in the sex industry.

"In some parts of Asia, an increasing crossover is being observed between injecting drug use and commercial sex work, with all the implications this has for further rapid spread of HIV infection from injecting drug users," it said.

The report was critical of Asian governments increased incarceration of drug users, which it said increases the risk of transmitting HIV.

"In many countries in the region, incarceration of drug users ... not only continues but it is being increased," it said.

"This is despite the fact that there is mounting evidence from the Asian region ... that incarceration not only does not help drug dependent people cease drug use but hugely increase risk for HIV transmission among and from these populations."

# 16 more DGMs of Krishi Bank

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The seven DGMs who have been transferred from Dhaka to different areas are: KM Ainul Haq of the engineering department to the divisional audit office in Comilla, AKM Rafiqul Hossain of the general service department to the divisional office in Faridpur, FM Ataur Rahman of the personnel management department to the principal regional office in Mymensingh, Akhter Hossain of the divisional audit office to the divisional office in Barisal, Dr Zillur Rahman of the principal regional office in Comilla, Ferdousi Begum of the loan realisation department-2 to the divisional office in Comilla and Mohammad Abu Yusuf of the personnel manage-

ment department-1 to the principal regional office in Sylhet.

Two DGMs who have been transferred to other departments are: Abdul Gafur Khan of the loan and advance department, Dhaka to the divisional audit office in Dhaka and M Mahatabuddin of the divisional office, Dhaka to the loan and advance department in Dhaka.

Seven DGMs who have been brought to Dhaka are: Muhammad Israfil Khan of the principal regional office, Mymensingh to the loan realisation department-2, Nitai Chandra Das of the principal regional office, Comilla to the engineering department, Ramananda Chowdhury of the divisional audit office, Comilla to the divisional office, Dilwar Hossain Bhuiyan of

the principal regional office, Sylhet to the general service department, Abu Hanif Khan of the divisional office, Comilla to the principal regional office, Lutfar Rahman of the divisional office, Faridpur to the personnel management department-3 and Akikur Rahman Chowdhury of the divisional office, Chittagong to the personnel management department-1.

Meanwhile, the government has transferred 78 DGMs and three AGMs from three other state-owned commercial banks.

The number of the transfers is 30 DGMs from the Agrani Bank, 23 DGMs from the Rupali Bank and 25 DGMs and three AGMs from the Janata Bank.

# Tigers to give up demand

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(LTTE) to the peace negotiating table by the middle of this year.

Bondevik said the "only realistic approach to any lasting peace agreement would be for the Tamil Tigers to give up their long-standing claim to the creation of a separate Tamil homeland".

He added: "This they appeared to be willing to do."

Bondevik said the Sri Lankan government must in return do a "great deal of work" to achieve equal conditions for minority Tamils.

The Norwegians were encouraged by the fact that a unilateral truce reciprocated by the Sri Lankan government was holding since Christmas Eve, he said.

Bondevik said he was assured that Sri Lanka's new government of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was "committed to bringing peace to Sri Lanka".

Wickremesinghe, who came to power promising peace, invited Bondevik to revive Norway's peace efforts which had been on hold since June.

Bondevik's remarks came as Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen arrived here Thursday to meet with Sri Lankan leaders and finalise a formal truce agreement.

The ceasefire is to be monitored by Nordic countries and is expected to clear the way for direct peace talks, official sources said.

Sources close to the peace process said considerable progress had been made in hammering out the truce deal, with both sides agreeing to make key concessions

in a seven-page draft agreement. The agreement will come into effect once both sides have given their consent to Oslo.

"There would be a Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) comprising individuals drawn from Nordic countries," a source said. "They will be assisted by eminent locals."

Twenty-four locals -- with equal numbers nominated by the LTTE and the government -- will assist the foreign truce monitors in the island's six embattled north-eastern districts.

Under the proposed truce deal both sides must stop hostile acts against civilians such as torture, intimidation, abduction, extortion and harassment.

Tigers are to allow unarmed government forces unlimited access along a 90-kilometre (56-mile) stretch of the A-9 road that runs through the rebel-held Wanni region and parts of the Jaffna peninsula within two months of the truce going into effect.

The road should be open to all civilian traffic within a month.

In November 1999, government troops called off a major offensive aimed at capturing the A-9 highway after a 19-month operation claimed the lives of some 3,000 troops. Tigers are also said to have suffered heavily.

Under the agreement unarmed Tigers will be able to enter government-held areas of the island's northeast without being arrested under tough anti-terrorism laws.

Tigers are to stop suicide bombings and assassinations while the

military is to call off its "deep penetration unit" which has inflicted casualties among the rebels in the past.

Meanwhile, Norwegian peace brokers were Thursday holding talks here with Sri Lankan leaders to arrange a formal truce with Tamil Tiger rebels and clear the way for peace talks, possibly by mid-year, officials said.

Constitutional Affairs Minister G.L. Peiris said there was greater understanding between the government and the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of the problems faced by both sides in the pursuit of peace.

"There is tangible evidence of that understanding on the ground," Peiris said, adding that he was optimistic of formalising a bilateral truce within about two weeks without wanting to give a rigid timeframe.

Norway's Deputy Foreign Minister Vidar Helgesen and two other diplomats who arrived here Thursday were holding talks with senior leaders before leaving Friday, officials said.

Peiris said the main thrust of the Norwegian mission was to finalise the bilateral truce in line with a draft document prepared by Oslo.

Both the Colombo government and Tamil Tigers have proposed amendments and additions to it, Peiris said, adding that the government was keen to ensure human rights were protected and civilians benefited from any truce deal.

# British Airways passenger dies at ZIA lounge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A London-bound British Airways passenger died of a heart attack at the passenger lounge of the Zia International Airport yesterday morning, police said.

The deceased was identified as Mohammad Awlad Hossain, 35, son of Wasil Miah of Adittipur of Bahubal in Bahighanji. He was awaiting his British Airways flight BA-154 to London, sources said.

Airport police recovered the body and handed it over to the relatives of the deceased, police said.

A general diary was filed with the Airport police station in this regard.

# Economic agenda

**FROM PAGE 12**  
interests of both countries would have pulled them away from the path of conflict.

Unlike other successful regional organisations like ASEAN or EU SAARC was bogged down in bilateral problems and contentious issues between two or more countries, the foreign minister pointed out.

Morshed Khan felt that SAARC was being constantly afflicted by what he said "bilateral multilateralism or multilateral bilateralism."

One of the problems of the day "is that the power of negotiation is diminishing". "We must know our stakes and negotiate for them."

SAARC, he observed, has become an exclusive club, although it was intended to be an inclusive one.

Although many countries and donors showed interests, their involvement could not be ensured as the organisation failed to provide even observer status to them, he regretted.

While appreciating the role of the BISS in organising the important seminar on SAARC, the foreign minister pointed out that the research institution should emerge as the premier think-tank of the country to provide the foreign policy with ideas and policy inputs.

More than half the director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were present at the seminar, and several made some important observations on the regional organisation.

Referring to the comments by some participants that the SAARC Secretariat was relegated to a mere

post office, he said, "It was kept as a post office because it was meant to be a post office. It shows why it took eight years to launch the organisation since its conception by Bangladesh."

Morshed Khan, however, expressed optimism that SAARC would continue to move along the same lines as visualised by Bangladesh.

Earlier, presenting the keynote paper, Abul Ahsan, a former foreign secretary and first secretary general of SAARC, made several observations on the problems and prospects of the organisation.

SAARC faced constant challenges given the relationship between India and Pakistan and lack of convergence of them and other members, so far as national goals and aspirations were concerned, he said.

Abul Ahsan suggested that SAARC take in earnest the decision of the Ninth Male Summit to initiate a process of informal consultations towards "relieving tensions and building confidence in the region".

Among other participants were former ambassadors Rezaul Karim, Masum Ahmed Chowdhury, Arshaduzzaman, Harunur Rashid, Abul Hashim, group captain (ret'd) Dasatagiri, director generals of the foreign ministry Masud Aziz and Humayun Kabir and Prof. Moniruzzaman Miah.

Ambassador Mufleh R Osmay, chairman of the Board of Governors of BISS, summed up the proceedings of the seminar, while Major General SM Shahab Uddin, director general of BISS, delivered the welcome address.