

EU-OIC bid to draw Muslim and Christian worlds closer

Foreign ministers meet in Istanbul tomorrow

AFP, Istanbul

Foreign ministers from the European Union and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference gather here tomorrow for a two-day forum in a bid to foster harmony between the Christian and Muslim worlds, under threat following the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The meeting was called for by Turkey, a predominantly Muslim nation with a decades-old western orientation which has cautioned along with other Islamic countries against identifying terrorism with Islam after the US attacks.

"What we are saying is that there is harmony, not conflict, between civilisations," Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem said in a recent television interview.

"The meeting itself will give this message," he added.

The gathering has attracted foreign ministers from both camps, including France, Germany, Greece, Spain, the Netherlands, Afghanistan, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iran, according to a draft list from the organising committee.

The list also includes EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana and the

secretary-general of the Council of Europe, Walter Schwimmer, along with several intellectuals including American historian Bernard Lewis.

Turkey's proposal for an Christian-Muslim meeting followed attacks against mosques and Muslim interests in the west in the wake of the US terrorist attacks, and massive Muslim demonstrations in protest against the subsequent US-led operation against Afghanistan to root out Osama bin Laden and his allies.

EU countries gave full support to the operation, while the OIC did not explicitly condemn the military strikes, although it did declare itself firmly opposed to the spread of anti-terrorist military action to any other Arab or Islamic country.

Speaking at a seminar in Brussels in October, Cem voiced concern that the Afghanistan operation was increasingly being viewed by the Muslim world as a US showdown with Islam.

"As for wrong perceptions, wrong ideas, one that gives me concern is the 'USA against Islam' kind of demagoguery, which is gaining ground in the Islamic world, I have to confess," Cem said.

"I believe it is our duty to fight against such exhortations, and to fight

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Outlaws, party cadres in Khulna division have over 2000 arms

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Over 2000 illegal firearms are in possession of armed cadres of outlawed organisations and terrorists of some political parties including Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami in the south-western region of the country.

These arms, mostly made in India, include eight-shooter guns, sub-machine guns, light machine guns and pistols.

These do not include the 108 arms looted from police and Ansars in the last five years, police sources said.

The law and order situation in the 10 districts of Khulna division has taken an alarming turn as these illegal firearms are being used to commit murders and other crimes as law enforcing agencies failed to recover those.

According to several sources in police department, terrorists use Indian-made arms like pipe gun,

muscot rifle, pistol and revolver to commit murders and other criminal acts. Their prices vary from Tk 2000 to Tk 5000.

But cadres of outlawed organisations use sawn-off rifle, SMG, LMG and eight-shooter gun in criminal activities, the sources said.

In the underworld, minimum price of an LMG is Tk 3 lakh, eight-shooter gun Tk one lakh, sawn-off rifle Tk 40,000 and sub-machine gun Tk 60,000, according to statements of arrested cadres of PBCP and BCP in courts at different times. They were arrested in connection with murder cases.

Arms made in China, USA and Czech Republic are also being smuggled into Bangladesh through India. These arms reach terrorists through agents secretly.

"Our parties purchase these arms to eliminate class enemies but not good people. Because, we believe in class struggle to establish rights of the proletariat", outlaw

Cement loot Fatullah JCD president, 5 others sued

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'garj

A case was filed against Fatullah thana JCD president and five others accusing them of looting rod and cement from a trawler.

B Islam, a businessman from Comilla, filed the case with Fatullah thana against JCD president Saidul Islam Biplob and his five associates -- Ruhul, Azad, Nur Alam, Ramzan and Jamal -- on Saturday.

In his complaint, the businessman stated that he bought 625 bags of cement and 1500 kg rod from Rita Traders at Pagla on February 7 and loaded a trawler with those goods in Taltala area of river Buriganga.

Suddenly, Biplob and his associates swooped on the trawler and looted the goods at gunpoint.

Police recovered 34 bags of cement yesterday, but could not arrest any of the accused.

Minister promises to recover money from 'hundi' Kajal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday said actions would be taken against Kajal and his associates, who swindled over Tk 1000 crore from the people through a so-called banking operation in the country's southwestern Jessore district.

Replying to a call attention notice of Shahidul Islam of the BNP on issues of public importance, the home minister also assured the parliament that the embezzled money would be recovered and distributed among the victims who deposited money with Kajal's organisation locally known as "Hundi Bank".

"I will make all arrangements to recover the money from Kajal and his associates as soon as possible," the home minister told the House.

During the rule of the previous

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Next hearing of writ against ETV Wednesday

BSS, Dhaka

The hearing on a writ challenging the legality of licensing agreement between ETV and the government continued for the third day yesterday in the High Court.

A division bench comprising Justice Mohammad Hamidul Haque and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultana has heard the matter.

Dr Chowdhury Mahmud Hossain and Dr Abdur Rab, teachers of Dhaka University, and President of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Gias Kamal Chowdhury jointly filed a writ petition challenging the legality of the licensing agreement.

A division of the High Court earlier issued a rule asking the government and other respondents to show cause why the licensing agreement would not be declared illegal.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed took part in the hearing on behalf of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

Artistes of Sur Saptak render songs at a function organised by the Sammilita Sangskritik Jote at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday to mark the golden jubilee of the Language Movement.

AL convention finally kicks off on Thursday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After two deferrals, the much-publicised AL-sponsored national convention on "Crimes Against Humanity" is finally set to kick off in the city on Thursday.

Main objectives of the two-day convention is to protest the repression on opposition political leaders and workers as well as minorities in the post-election violence and express solidarity with them, and find ways to combat human rights violations and promote public opinion against repression in the society.

Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the convention as chief guest Thursday morning, said Justice KM Sobhan, convenor of a 551-member national committee formed in this regard at a press conference in the city yesterday morning. Barrister

Amir-ul-Islam is the joint-convenor of the committee.

Justice Sobhan said that in the past, many elections were held in the country, but none saw the excessive violence and violation of human rights that took place after the October 1 election. "Such level of torture simply reminded us of the violation of human rights by Pakistani occupation forces in 1971."

He said the repression reached a new high before and after last year's election, which is a serious danger to humanity and co-existence of peoples of all cast and creed in the country. "In a word, humanity is at stake," he said adding that the sanctity of human life was in jeopardy today and the right to property denied.

The retired justice of the Supreme Court said the convention was being held to find a way to fight those who are deeply engaged in

violation of human rights and damaging peace and communal harmony through unleashing torture, killing, rape and repression.

The convention will be held at Engineers' Institute on February 14 and 15. About 1500 people from all over the country including victims of repression, political leaders, and local and international human rights activists are expected to participate in the meet. A total of 15 papers are to be submitted to the convention while there will be two key-speakers.

On the concluding day, a declaration is to be adopted seeking an end to crimes against humanity and to establish a culture of peace and co-existence among the country-men.

Giving a brief description of the extent of post-election violence and repression, Justice Sobhan said t h a t

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Tour operators demand regulatory body

'Cut tariff rates for Sundarbans'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Tour Operators Association of Bangladesh (TOAB) has suggested formation of a regulatory body with TOAB representation in it for development of tourism industry in the country.

It also demanded of the government to reconsider the enhanced tariff rates for tour operators and tourists for entry into the Sundarbans.

There should be a code of ethics for conducting tour in the Sundarbans because it is now a World Heritage Site, TOAB leaders said at a press conference at a local hotel.

The abrupt increase in tariff rates effective from February 7 has created serious problems for tour operators as tours are booked in advance, at times three months ahead, TOAB Advisor Hasan Mansur said.

Last week, the government increased the entry fees for Bangladeshi tourists to Tk 50 and for foreign national to Tk 300 per day from an average tariff of Tk 4. The new entry fees for Bangladeshis and SAARC nationals are too high and should be lowered, he said.

The fees for a 'boat' has been increased to Tk 200 from Tk 100, 'boat leaving certificate' (BLC) to Tk 500 from Tk 150 and for hiring a forest guard to Tk 200 from Tk 50 per day.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: MICROCEL

Dazzling dance of laser beams

STAR REPORT

Dazzling fireworks in time with the music will flash through the darkness of Wednesday night and transport thousands of spectators into a synchronised reverie.

With the dusk descending on the Bangabandhu National Stadium, all lights in and around the gallery will be switched off and the spectators will experience the darkest night of the month in laser beams.

Music from the 100,000-watt sound system will shatter the silence, and the sky above will shine with fireworks co-ordinated by laser technology. The beams will then cascade down on the crowds below in synchronisation with the music.

For every person at the Microcel-organised laser show on February 13 and 14, the event will be a unique experience. There will be three different types of laser beams to be thrown on the crowds.

The show has been organised in the open to create a true spectacle, said Managing Director of

Microcel Mamun Chowdhury. "The show features artistic sequences of incredible animation and mind-boggling images -- all in tandem with the choreographed music."

The event, he said, is one of the biggest challenges, as the success would help him market the high-tech software his company has developed with a hundred per cent local expertise.

"There are many who still undermine the ability of Bangladeshi software companies in developing such state-of-the-art software," Chowdhury said.

He said the success of the event would not only earn the company a good name, but help the Bangladeshi software companies gain confidence in the foreign market as well.

He said his company plans to organise ten similar shows in the regional countries to prove that Bangladeshi companies have potentialities in organ

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Just for a better life...

Asia has millions of migrants, some ready to risk all for availing a chance

REUTERS, Kuala Lumpur

From Australia to Malaysia, from Afghanistan to Japan, Asia is struggling with millions of migrants, some ready to risk all for the chance of a better life.

Malaysia's response, among others, is to brandish a whip. Australia is waving money to make the problem go away.

But people dealing with refugees and migrants, pushing a mantra that is slowly gaining acceptance in other parts of the world, say throwing them out is short-sighted.

"By just deporting people the problem will not go away. This is not a sustainable solution," Farooq Azam, Chief of Mission at the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), in Bangkok told Reuters.

Migrants around the world beat a path from poor to

rich nations some of them legally, others hidden in the holds of ships or in the undercarriage of planes.

With the global economic downturn and a climate of suspicion following the September 11 attacks on the United States, many find themselves far from welcome.

Australia's refusal to accept Middle Eastern and Afghan boat people drew brickbats from abroad, but the hard-nosed approach went down well at home.

Azam and others say migration is a fact of life in a global economy.

Governments in host countries, Azam says, need to make a clear assessment of how many foreign workers they need to run their economies and formalise the process.

If they fail to do this, he adds, they will create a culture of illegality among employers, police and bureaucrats.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3