

C'wealth to expel

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action against Zimbabwe, calling on leaders to send "a really tough statement making clear our total abhorrence and condemnation of what's happened in Zimbabwe".

"If, after the elections in Zimbabwe, the Commonwealth observers report there was malpractice and intimidation...then it is essential we take action against Zimbabwe if Mugabe is still in power," he told reporters.

Mugabe, who has led Zimbabwe for 22 years, faces a stern challenge from Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the Movement for Democratic Change.

The European Union has already imposed sanctions on Mugabe's inner circle and withdrawn its election observers after Zimbabwe refused to accredit their head. Washington has followed suit.

Earlier, opening the summit with Britain's Queen Elizabeth II, Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon said: "We know we can make a difference in the fight against terrorism". But he added the greatest challenge facing the world was the huge divide between rich and poor.

"No-one in the world can have a secure future when half the world has no future at all," he said. "In the Commonwealth we want to have a spirit of generous globalisation."

McKinnon said children and young people have to be given major priority as they are the future custodians of the Commonwealth. The 54-nation Commonwealth represents 1.7 billion people, about one third of the world's population, but includes some of the poorest nations on earth like Bangladesh and the Pacific island of Tuvalu.

Host Australian Prime Minister John Howard welcomed the leaders, including those from two of the world's richest states Britain and Canada, and called for more open and freer trade to close the gap between rich and poor.

Our correspondent Aasha Mehreen Amin reports from Coolool: A spectacular opening ceremony of the 35th CHOGM took place in the huge auditorium specially designed for the grand event.

The makeshift venue, which can accommodate up to 2,500 people, was adorned with colourful logos of the Commonwealth symbolising the diversity of the member states. Big screens, projectors and acoustic equipment were installed all around the venue and even the pouring

shower outside the massive tent could not dampen the upbeat mood of some 1,500 guests.

The heads of states and governments and representatives of countries were escorted by flag bearers. Among the high profile dignitaries was Queen Elizabeth II and British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also attended the opening.

The programme began with a show titled 'Postcards of Australia' with music played by the Australian Army Band while young girls from the Queensland Rhythmic Gymnastics Academy performed a dance number.

The programme gave glimpses of Australian history, beautiful landscape and modern development in light and sound and through on-screen projections. Indigenous music of Australia's aborigines as well as pop, country and rock music featured in the show.

Referred to as the 'traditional landowners' of Australia, aboriginal artists in a welcome dance, called 'the Gubbi Gubbi', gave an electrifying performance with their catchy beats, haunting chants and flamboyant costumes and body paint.

The dances were followed by the rendition of the Australian national anthem by young boys and girls. A visual history with narration on the significance of the Commonwealth of Nations was shown on the screens.

Next came the 'Australia in the 21st Century' programme. A singer sang 'I am an Australian' while performers danced along. Then came speeches by the Queen, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, Commonwealth Secretary General Donald McKinnon and South African President Thabo Mbeki.

The speeches were followed by a grand finale-- a remarkable cultural show featuring several dances of various ethnic origins. They included a fast paced river dance by young girls in colourful dresses, a vibrant Indian Bhangra and a traditional Samoan dance. At the end all the performers, including the tap dancers who featured earlier in the programme, and the versatile gymnasts danced together, drawing excited applause from the audience. Thus ended the 90-minute highly choreographed opening ceremony of CHOGM.

Paris Club

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a bailout. But the negotiation failed as the IMF conditionalities were too harsh to swallow. The World Bank handed over a huge volume of reform list to the government when it took over.

Saifur said the donors would discuss different reforms ranging from social sector to administration, from budget deficit to rising expenditure.

"There will also be discussions on future reforms," he added. "The trip to Paris has never been a sweet one."

The minister said there are lots to do for improving the economy and many regulatory bodies have to be set up for different sectors.

Meantime, the government has already prepared the draft memorandum for the Paris club meeting, detailing the country's state of the economy and the government's already taken and would-be steps to improve governance and economy.

Saifur will fly off to Paris on March 11. He will be accompanied by, among others, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, State Minister for Mineral Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain, Cabinet Secretary Dr Ali Akbar Khan, Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Siddiqui, ERD Secretary Anisul Huq Chowdhury, Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, and Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan.

Consultancy

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observed.

By contrast, Delwar Hossain, NBR member (income tax policy), said such facilities could be given because the firm provided some technical training.

"I don't see any harm in giving such facilities to a firm under the existing law," said the income tax policy member.

He said the contradiction arises from interpretations of the existing law.

Many other organisations gave such training to their employees and other people but did not get exemption, TA Chowdhury pointed out.

To be exempted from taxes as an educational institute, a firm or an organisation should be completely educational and non-profit-oriented, he said.

Insiders told The Daily Star that the annual turnover of the company would be around Tk 10 crore, making a net profit of around Tk 2 crore.

The government will lose around Tk 60 to Tk 70 lakh in revenues, if the facilities are given.

Many officials of the company with luxurious office premises get higher salaries ranging between Tk 60,000 and Tk 80,000.

The NBR chairman could not be contacted by telephone for his comments.

NGOs decry

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reported move to take steps against some 300 NGOs for their political and business contacts as well as high charges for micro-credits.

Such steps, it said, would frustrate NGO activities in the areas of poverty reduction and good governance, which would cast a negative impact on the country's efforts in that direction.

The meeting regretted the attack on a female worker of CARE allegedly by a ruling party leader and toll collection from many NGOs.

"Moreover, different security intelligence agencies are harassing NGOs in the name of investigation while NGO Affairs Bureau is dilly-dallying about approving projects and releasing funds."

Very recently NGOs have been mandated to collect certificates from DCs and TNOs, which are causing harassment to NGOs, it noted.

The meeting recalled the harassment on NGOs during 1991-96 term of the present ruling party when they formed government with support from Jamaat.

"Hundreds of NGOs suffered administrative harassment and attacks from fundamentalists during that period," it said.

Royal wave

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country are processed.

"More and more people have come on to the streets in the past few months to protest against Australia's policy on illegal immigrants," said Maria Vouklatis, a 24-year-old arts student at the University of Queensland who is one of the leaders of the CHOGM (Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting) Action Alliance.

"It contravenes human rights law and we want CHOGM to take disciplinary action against Australia," she added.

The alliance's protests include those against irradiation of food, the civil war in Sudan -- asking Commonwealth countries for help to end the 19-year conflict -- third-world debt and Aboriginal land claims in Australia.

Covering both sides yesterday were Jan Hilda and Lillian Jones, whose house was situated between two busloads of riot police and the group of protesters.

With a pot of tea on a makeshift card table and scones in the oven, the two, flying the Rainbow flag representing rights for gays and lesbians, were hoping to get the queen to stop for a chat.

"If she stops, we'll tell her our unjust Howard's policy is on immigrants," said Hilda. "We were going to go to Sydney for the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, but decided to stay here and see a real queen instead."



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina addressing a rally at Puthia PN High School ground in Rajshahi yesterday.

Hasina: Punish culprits

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Hasina handed over Tk 50,000 to the father of Mahima and said from now on she will bear the educational expenses of Mahima's younger sister Famiha, a student of class seven at a local girls high school.

Addressing the gathering, Mahima's brother Jahangir alleged that miscreants belonging to ruling BNP brutalised his sister. "We want trial of the culprits," said a pale looking Jahangir.

Talking to The Daily Star Mohima's puzzled father Abdul Hannan made an ardent appeal to all so that the culprits are arrested soon and punished appropriately.

"I am a very simple villager and I have no feud with any family of the village," he said.

Abdul Hannan said another girl was raped in the village about one and a half years ago. If the rapists were punished then, such incident would not have happened again.

When asked, Jahangir said, "The miscreants took political revenge on us as we support Awami League". He said he got a letter from the local BNP office before the last general election which said the Bangabandhu Club in the area would be demolished if BNP comes to the power. Jahangir showed the letter to journalists.

Sohel Rana Babu, cousin of Mahima, said the miscreants had made several attempts on Mahima. He also alleged that local MP went to Puthia thana and charged police for arresting BNP and JCD activists.

A temporary police camp was seen in front of Hannan's house. It was set up prior to the visit of Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury earlier. Police were seen interrogating whoever wanted to visit the house.

Addressing a public rally at Puthia PN High School ground after visiting Mahima's parents, the opposition leader demanded of the government to nab the culprits immediately and give them exemplary punishment.

"Otherwise, people will take revenge. They will never tolerate such repression", she warned.

She also called for united resistance so that no more woman becomes victim of such atrocities.

AL's Puthia Upazilla unit of organised the rally to protest the incident. It was the first such programme of her four-day tour of six northern districts.

"The four-party alliance government has created terror throughout the country by unleashing atrocities on religious minorities, opposition workers and the commonman", she alleged. "Government-sponsored repression must stop."

Referring to Mahima's incident, she said, "It is the worst form of crime against humanity."

"I have come here to console Mahima's family. We will always remain with the family and those who believe in humanity will be with Mahima's family."

"Mahima's incident is not the only one. Several such indiscriminate incidents of repression have taken place in the country," she said listing some of those.

"This is very unfortunate. But it is true that the victims did not get any legal assistance. They were refused when they went to lodge cases with police," she said.

Referring to the home minister's recent remarks regarding Mahima's incident, Hasina said, "There will be no gain by threatening the victims and those who stand beside the victims. Rather, take action against the culprits."

She alleged that criminals belonging to BNP's student wing JCD and Shibir killed Mahima.

Mahima's elder brother Jahangir Hossain, secretary of the local Bangabandhu Club, said, "Terrorists of BNP raped and killed my sister. I demand their exemplary punishment."

"This happened to my sister only because I support AL", he said demanding exemplary punishment to Uzzal, JCD unit president at Puthia College, Farid, Selim and their accomplices.

The rally was also addressed by, among others, AL Organising Secretary Mohammad Nasim, Presidium members Abdul Jalil and Matia Chowdhury, former Local MPs Shamsul Islam Sharif, Raihanul Haque, Panchanan Biswas and local AL candidate in the last election Tajul Islam Mohammad Faruque.

Graft charges

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Inspector Saeed Mahmud accuses Asaduzzaman and 10 others of forgery in selling a two-acre land of the Metal Package Industries in the Nasirabad Industrial Area of Chittagong. It said the government incurred a loss of Tk 1.1 crore as the accused sold the land valued at Tk 2.5 crore at Tk 1.4 crore only.

The other accused in the case are joint secretary and former managing director of Muktiyodha Kalyan Trust Gazi Motiur Rahman, former director of the trust Abdul Matin, former secretary of the trust and current deputy secretary of law ministry Abu Khaled Mohammed Abdus Shukur, general managers of the trust Abul Fazal M Zakaria and Khandker Fazul Haq, deputy general manager Amirul Islam, law advisor Abdur Rashid, Monirul Haq Khan of M/S Rupa Enterprise, Khandker Mahmudul Hasan of M/S Hasan and Co and Sub-registrar of Chittagong sadar Sirajul Maola.

The other case in the process of being filed at Chittagong Kotwali police station by BAC Inspector Abdul Majed accuses the CDA chairman and one AKM Shafiullah of depriving the government of Tk 61 lakh in land tax on sale.

It is alleged that Shafiullah purchased a commercial plot from the government in 1974. He recently sold the plot to Islami Bank at Tk

2.69 crore. As per the rules, if anyone sells a commercial plot, he or she must pay the government 25 per cent of the sale proceed, which in this case amounts to Tk 64.75 lakh as gain tax. But, the CDA fixed and realised a token tax of Tk 3.62 lakh from Shafiullah.

The BAC on February 19 had also lodged a case with Gulshan police station against Editor of Bangla daily Khabar Mizanur Rahman Mizan for acquiring properties worth Tk 33.28 lakh. But he did not show any source of income to justify the acquisition.

2 new judges

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shortage of judges.

On February 17, Chief Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury sent a list of four judges, of whom two might be appointed by the president to the Appellate Division.

On January 17, the government gazetted its decision to restructure the Appellate Division by adding two more judges to the existing five-member body.

The seven-member Appellate Division, with which over 5,000 cases are pending, is now expected to speed up the legal process.

100 more killed

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trucks from approaching, fire brigade officials said.

Thousands of army soldiers tried to control Hindu mobs in Gujrat yesterday.

Police Commissioner G.P. Pandey insisted, "There were no fresh attacks on Friday night across the state."

The bloodshed was triggered by a Muslim mob burning of a train carrying Hindu Nationalists on Wednesday in Godhra town in the state. Since then, right-wing Hindus have been on a retaliatory rampage in this large western state, burning down Muslim homes while many police and soldiers have stood by watching Muslims, including women and children, burned alive.

The federal government has been heavily criticised for not reacting sooner, though the mass violence did not spread across India, despite a nationwide strike call by the World Hindu Council on Friday.

State government officials, speaking on condition of anonymity,

said the death toll in four days of carnage is 408 including those killed in the train and more than 40 killed in police firing. However, the state police control room put the toll at 383.

It is the worst religious clashes in India since 1993, when 800 people were killed during Hindu-Muslim riots in Bombay.

"It's not a good thing what happened but this chain reaction is normal. Now everybody has to suffer," said Satish Aggarwal, a Hindu who operates a dairy kiosk in the Amdupura neighbourhood of Ahmedabad.

In Ahmedabad, many hotels, shops and restaurants have been destroyed and looting has been widespread. Bodies blackened by fire lay in the streets, along with burned-out furnishings and vehicles, shredded clothes and other personal belongings.

Muslims in many areas said police were favouring Hindus. Muslims streamed into hospitals, for treatment of stab wounds and burns, but also for refuge.

3-pt strategy

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mitment to fighting against terrorism, Khaleda Zia said her country would continue to strengthen efforts of the Commonwealth and other international organisations to formulate a collective and effective response to terrorism.

Khaleda Zia expressed the confidence that the present Summit would clearly pronounce its resolve in this regard.

She also outlined the reasons for the postponement of the Summit in October, 2001 and spoke at length on UN Security Council Resolution 1373 to counter terrorism and its full implementations. In this context, she said, "We share the pain and sorrow of all those who lost their near and dear ones during the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York."

ODA Turning to Overseas Development Assistance, substantial debt relief and greater market access of LDC products to rich countries, Khaleda stressed urgent actions in those areas.

She also underlined the need for international action in support of the "weakest and the poorest amongst us."

"Urgent actions are needed in three critical areas -- enhancement of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), substantial debt relief and greater market access if the world's poorest countries, especially the least developed countries (LDCs) are to be helped," she said.

Amid acclamations from other leaders attending the CHOGM, the Prime Minister said, "I urge the leaders of the Commonwealth to add their voice in support of concerted regional and global actions on all three issues."

Conveying the expectations of the LDC countries from the new round of trade negotiations within the framework of WTO, Khaleda Zia said, "A number of Commonwealth countries, have provided privileged access to our exports both bilaterally and under specific regional arrangements."

While extending thanks to such countries, she said the scope of these positive steps now need to be widened globally.

Khaleda Zia said other major markets should also provide complete duty- and quota-free access to LDC products within a specific timeframe.

She said, "We look toward the Commonwealth as an organisation to help us build our national capacities for successful participation in trade negotiations."

The Prime Minister said the post-September 2001 disruptions in the world economic scene have further compounded the problems of the poor. Highlighting one of the major problems currently faced by countries like Bangladesh, she said, "Our problem is due to significant shortfalls in our anticipated export earn-

ings at this uncertain time."

She said much of this has been caused by the recent economic downturn or slow growth in major market economies. Stressing the need for steps to reverse the situation, she said otherwise the loss in growth and mounting hardship to the poor in LDCs would be unmanageable.

In this context, she said the ravages of poverty remain a major concern for the poor countries and added, "This issue was at the very heart of our discussions during the UN Millennium Summit... There we resolved to wage a war on poverty," she said.

"The pledges made at the Millennium Summit should not be overshadowed by the urgency of events facing us today," Khaleda Zia said.

Governance
Underscoring the need for democratic governance as advocated by the 54-nation forum, she urged the Commonwealth countries to strengthen the forces of democracy.

"We are proud to have upheld these values in Bangladesh. We have also contributed in our own modest way to their promotion across the Commonwealth."

Khaleda said, "We have supported the preparations and conduct of elections in a number of the Commonwealth member states."

Referring to Bangladesh's modest contributions to the process of these values, she said, "We are glad that these elections have made important contributions to reinforcing democratic values and spirit all through the Commonwealth."

She said Bangladesh remains supportive of all the Commonwealth initiatives, including the work of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), to uphold the Harare Principles. Bangladesh is proud of its gains in deepening the roots of democracy in the country, she added.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister attended a dinner hosted by the Commonwealth Heads of Government for Queen Elizabeth II to commemorate the 50th anniversary of her status as the head of the Commonwealth.

The Prime Minister will attend the second executive session at the same venue today. She will also attend a dinner to be hosted by Prime Minister of Australia John Howard MP for the heads of delegations.

BCL strike

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streamrollering the opposition student organisation across the country by arresting its leaders and activists under false cases since the political changeover in October last year, he said.

Balaram Poddar, Beg Shahin Jahan and Mihir Kanti Goshal addressed the rally, among others.

Js to probe Mahima case

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punished by the previous government, Mahima's incident might not have happened.

"The opposition leader is now shedding crocodile's tears for Mahima although she did not punish the culprits of thousands of such rape and murder incidents during her rule," the home minister told the House. "She rather protected and rewarded the rapists."

The minister lashed out at the Awami League chief for her visit to Mahima's house and 'sending' leaders of the 11-party left alliance to meet the victim's family.

"All this is designed to discredit the government. They are trying to gain political dividends out of the painful incident. But we will not allow them to fish in the troubled water," Altaf Hossain said while treasury bench lawmakers thumped their desks. "We must resist their attempts to belittle the nation and the government."

The home minister also described how Mahima was gangraped and committed suicide while the police took action so far.

Referring to his visit to the victim's family on Friday, he said a

gang of four young men led by Ujjal, who used to tease Mahima, came to her house at Kathalbaria village at about 5:00pm on February 13. They gagged Mahima with a gamchha (thin towel) and dragged her to a nearby sugarcane field. All the four culprits raped Mahima and left her there.

A devastated Mahima returned to her house and told her parents about the incident.

The culprits snapped Mahima in the nude and circulated the photographs in the locality. Mahima's father and others tried in vain to recover the photos.

The shame was too much for Mahima to bear with and she committed suicide by taking poison four days later.

The police have so far arrested seven of the nine accused in two cases regarding the gangrape and the suicide, the home minister said, assuring the House of exemplary punishment to all the rapists.

"I have ordered the local police to arrest anybody, lobbying for the release of the arrested persons," he said.

JS to debate Gujarat

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Jamaat-e-Islami MP Delwar Hossain Saidee proposed a general discussion on the Gujarat riot.

The Jamaat lawmaker also proposed that the House should adopt a resolution condemning the killing of Muslims by the Hindu radicals. "The House should also condemn the opposition leader for her silence over the brutal murder of more than three hundred Muslims in India," he said.

Condemning large-scale human rights violation in Gujarat, Saidee asked the government to lodge a formal protest with the Indian government.

Earlier, several BNP lawmakers also condemned the Gujrat massacre and urged the government to ensure that the Indian riot did not have any repercussion in Bangladesh.

KSJL lawmaker Abdul Quader Siddiqui said the government should be more cautious about any outbreak of communal violence in the country.

Joyal Abedin Faruk thanked the government for timely action in the wake of Gujarat riot. But he criticised the opposition leader for not condemning the killing of Muslims in India.

Treasury bench member Sarwar Jamal Nizam and Jamaat MP Abdus Sobhan also condemned the killing of Muslims in India and asked the

Indian authorities to punish the killers.

China to import

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itive prices, he added.

Bangladesh exported goods worth 56 million dollars to China while imported commodities worth 575 million dollars from China in 1996-97 fiscal.

Harmony

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extreme communal sentiment."

Appreciating the role of non-communal and democratic political parties and individuals for their stand against violence, Hasina said "politics of violence and vengeance can not bring good to a nation."

The opposition leader urged the government, law enforcers and conscious citizens to remain alert against any evil machination. Awami League, she said, will stand by the people as in the past.

Hasina said Awami League leaders and workers are pledge-bound for peaceful coexistence and maintain communal harmony of all faiths and groups and ensure the spirit of the great Liberation War of 1971.