



PHOTO: AFP

(L to R) Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, Maltese Prime Minister Dr Edward Fenech-Adami, Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Botswana President Festus Mogae at the opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Coolum, Queensland yesterday.

# Protesters get royal wave

AP, Coolum, Australia

It was hard to tell the activists from the royalists yesterday when Britain's Queen Elizabeth II glided past a group of protesters in a blue Rolls Royce.

"Say it loud, say it clear, refugees are welcome here," a group of about 200 protesters led by a bearded man with a megaphone shouted as the queen, on her way to open a Commonwealth summit at a nearby resort, drove past.

But even some of the placard-holders applauded as the Queen granted the group a royal white-gloved wave as she turned the corner under a police motorcycle escort and with two Australian army helicopters flying overhead.

Across the road, royal-watchers mixed with kids carrying surfboards on their way back from the beach.

A light drizzle which turned to a steady shower cut short the planned six-hour protest to about two hours before most of the protesters boarded buses to return to Brisbane, about 130 kilometers (80 miles) south.

Brisbane was the original site of the conference planned for last October, but it was postponed following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. Protesters then predicted that up to 10,000 would march in the streets of the Queensland state capital.

But the more secure confines of the Coolum resort and its distance from Brisbane -- along with the rain -- made it more difficult for the protesters to have as big an impact as they had hoped.

The dominant theme yesterday among the protesters watched by an estimated 200 police was Australia's mandatory detention of refugees.

Prime Minister John Howard's government has come under criticism for its headline policy of using the navy to turn away all asylum seekers caught trying to sneak into the country by boat. It also holds many asylum seekers in detention camps while their applications to stay in the

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# Two alleged muggers beaten in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two alleged muggers were beaten and an autorickshaw carrying them was set afire by a mob in the city's Dhanomdi residential area yesterday.

Identified as Mohammad Helel and Moklesur Rahman, the two were caught by local people and pedestrians as they tried to snatch valuables from a woman going by rickshaw on road 12/A. Two others managed to flee.

Dhanomdi police went to the spot and rescued the two alleged muggers from mob fury. They were sent Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

# Consultancy beyond tax outreach

RAFIQ HASAN

A consultancy in the guise of an educational institute will be exempted from income tax.

Chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) Dr. Shoeb Ahmed has already given the Surface Water Modelling Centre (SWMC) approval for permanent tax exemption, sources said.

Running under a trust, the consultancy rakes in huge profits every year by selling software and providing expert advice to various organisations, the sources added.

According to the law, only incomes from house property and micro-credit of such organisations are tax-free.

The SWMC has also been registered as a consultancy with the value-added tax (VAT) authority.

Director of the firm Imamuddin Ahmed, however, told The Daily Star that the main job of the company was to conduct researches and training in river management.

The organisation was not profit-

oriented, he claimed.

"There are some surplus funds, which we funnel to research, training and technology transfer," he said on the telephone.

The sources, however, said pressure was mounted on the NBR officials to provide the facilities to the firm as an influential secretary is its chairman.

A tug-of-war pitched between two members of the NBR over the issue, the sources added.

TA Chowdhury, NBR member (tax exemption and survey), objected to the issue saying he did not find any reason for considering the firm an educational institute.

Besides, a lot of other firms would seek such tax exemption facilities and the government would lose a huge amount of revenues every year, the member reasoned.

Before giving such facilities to a firm, a Statutory Regulatory Order should be issued by the NBR, he

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# Accords signed China to import jute, leather & other goods worth \$4.55m

UNB, Dhaka

China will import jute, leather and other goods worth US\$ 4.55 million from Bangladesh under accords signed here yesterday.

An official announcement said the visiting Chinese Buying Mission signed five import agreements with their Bangladesh counterparts with a view to reducing trade gap, which was over US\$ 500 million annually in China's favour as of 1996-97.

Exports from Bangladesh to China declined by 11 million dollars in 1999-2000 fiscal year.

The mission, a follow-up to the visit of Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, told Bangladesh Commerce Secretary earlier in the day that China is considering matters of awarding duty-free access to 34 selected Bangladeshi items.

The Chinese delegates met the Export Promotion Bureau, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and visited some leather and jute mills during their stay since February 28.

Mission leader Wang Qihui said the sending of the mission is a reflection of Chinese government's keenness to increase imports from Bangladesh. "But balancing trade requires joint efforts from both sides," he said.

Chinese importers are willing to buy commodities from friendly countries like Bangladesh, if they can supply quality goods at compet

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# Hasina's call Maintain communal harmony at any cost

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people irrespective of caste and creed to guard against any evil design to disrupt communal harmony.

"Communal peace and harmony must be maintained at any cost," she said in a statement following the outbreak of communal violence in India's western state of Gujarat.

Hasina said her party has always been against extremism in politics and will remain steadfast against it. The communal violence triggered by the torching of a passenger train in Gujrat and subsequent incidents cannot be supported.

"We strongly condemn this orgy of violence and killings," the Awami League president said, adding, "religious-minded people of our country can never be influenced by

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Hasina Picture

PHOTO: STAR

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina consoling family members of Mahima at their house at Puthia in Rajshahi yesterday.

# NGOs decry govt regulatory steps

UNB, Dhaka

Non-government organisations in an emergency meeting yesterday noted that attacks on them are part of a 'blueprint' of the anti-development fundamentalists in power to destroy progressive social forces.

They viewed that the recent amendments to government policies on NGO affairs are aimed at "nationalising the NGOs" and harass them by restricting their registration and release of funds.

In the emergency meeting chaired by ADAB president Dr Qazi Faruque Ahmed, the NGOs expressed their concerns over the growing incidents of their harassment, attacks on grassroots-level NGO workers, rape, terrorism, toll extortion, and repression on minorities and political workers.

They urged the government to initiate fair investigations into all sorts of "human rights violations so far committed centring the elec-

tions" and put those involved on trial.

"Otherwise," the meeting said in a resolution, "a united social movement will be launched in association with civil society members to safeguard rights of all people irrespective of caste, creed and gender."

In a 10-point charter of resolution, the coalition of NGOs urged the government to stop the "evil move to nationalise" the NGOs through changing the policies and restricting their registrations and fund releases.

They demanded updated and more democratic policies to create a favourable environment for NGOs to work independently.

Any such policies must represent the NGOs, the resolution said, regretting that the cabinet committee on NGO affairs incorporated a central leader of Jamaat-e-Islami that is dead against NGOs.

The meeting scoffed at a

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# JS may debate Gujarat violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A number of treasury bench members yesterday asked the chair to allow a general discussion in the Jatiya Sangsad on the killing of Muslims in communal riot in the Indian state of Gujarat.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, who was then in the chair, apparently supported a proposal that the issue should be settled on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's return from Australia.

"We hope to take a decision to this effect at the Business Advisory Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad after the prime minister is back home," PM's parliamentary Affairs Adviser Salahuddin Quader Chodhury advised the chair as

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# BCL calls strike at edn instts today

DU CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) has called a strike at all the educational institutions across the country today to protest the arrest of its central leaders and demanding their immediate release.

BCL brought out a procession and held a rally on the Dhaka University campus yesterday in support of the strike.

Beginning from the Madhu's canteen, the BCL procession paraded some campus streets before joining a rally in front of the Aparajeo Bangla.

Addressing the rally, the BCL leaders strongly condemned the arrest incident and threatened to go for an all-out movement against the government if their leaders were not freed soon.

They termed the government move as "an attempt to eliminate its political rivals at a time when BCL was going to intensify its movements against the misuse of the BNP-Jamaat coalition government."

The government is

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PHOTO: STAR

Students gather on the Chittagong University campus as classes resumed yesterday after a closure of eight months.