

Ensure people's role

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were held at Sylhet, Khulna and Rajshahi while the rest two will be held at Barisal and in the Dhaka on March 7 and 10 respectively.

The state minister hoped that the workshop would help prepare a national assessment report, reflecting views of people who are facing environmental hazards.

Held in two sessions with Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Kabeer Rahman and Director General of the Department of Environment (DoE) Hedayetul Islam Chowdhury in the chair, the workshop was addressed by CCCI President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury as special guest.

Syed Fahim Monaim, Managing Editor of The Daily Star, gave the vote thanks.

The speakers included CCCI senior Vice-president SM Nurul Haq, Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Abdus Salam Khan, Chairman of FEJB Quamrul Islam Chowdhury and deputy secretary of the forest and environment.

Farid Ahmed Chowdhury said environmental protection is a pre-condition for sustainable development and called upon all to work for attaining this goal.

Syed Fahim Monaim emphasised media role to help prepare the assessment report.

Massive publicity through the media for creating mass awareness and involvement of grass-roots people in policy making are considered vital in the global environmental arena, he noted.

Hedayetul Islam Chowdhury said the developed countries can make much greater contribution to sustainable development than the developing or underdeveloped countries can.

He said necessary laws would be enforced and an environmental court would start functioning in the next two months, he said.

Participants in the work workshop included DC of Bandarban district Mia Mustaq Ahmed, DC of Khagrachhari Mojibur Rahman, DC of Laxmipur SM Zahurul Islam, DC of Cox's Bazar Motiar Rahman, DC of Chandpur Abu Muhammad Muniruzzaman, DC of Comilla Tarik U Islam, DC of Rangamati Dr Zafor ahmed Khan, DC of Noakhali Mostafa Kamal Haider, Dr Yusuf Sharif Ahmed Khan, Dr Hasan Muhammad, Golam Mustafa, Fazle Hasan Chowdhury, resident editor of the Prothom Alo Abul Momen, industrialist SM Fazlul Haq, Journalist Zahidul Karim Kachi, Editor of Giri Darpon and Banobhumi of Rangamati AKM Maksudur Rahman.

Long march to Bibiana Mar 6 to protest gas export

UNB, Dhaka

The National Committee to Protect Oil-Gas in the National Interest yesterday demanded trial of those involved in signing PSCs in a bid to hand over the resources to 'looters'.

At a press conference, the committee that begins an eight-day long march from here to Bibiana gas field on March 6 said the anti-people initiators of the PSCs be the president, prime minister, minister, bureaucrat, expert or businessman should be punished.

They said the production sharing contracts (PSCs) were signed keeping the people in the dark. "People have the legal and political rights to reject the PSCs," said a written statement demanding immediate scrapping of the agreements.

The committee leaders also called for identification of the so-called experts, journalists, foreign missions and international organisations who had launched a propaganda in favour of gas export in the name of development and demanded their trial in local and international courts.

Anu Muhammad read out the statement at the press conference in the presence of committee Convenor Shahidullah, member secretary Golam Mohiuddin and members Bimal Biswas, Shuvrangshu Chakrabarty, Moshrefa Mishu, Ruhin Hossain Prince and Mesbah Kamal.

They said the long march to Bibiana from where UNOCAL proposed for gas export is aimed at resisting local and 'foreign looters' who want to turn Bangladesh into Nigeria, Afghanistan or Myanmar and sought participation of all countrymen.

MCCI

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and other international organisations. "Between 1989 and 1999, Bangladesh benefited from debt forgiveness (conversion of loans into grants) from bilateral donors to the extent of US\$ 679 million. Such benefits will not be available if the country opts out of the LDC group," the MCCI said.

After graduation from the LDC, the country would lose different special treatments and privileges offered by different regional and multilateral trade forums such as SAPTA and the WTO, the MCCI went on.

Taheruddin

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killed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members and at the same time they fired gunshots indiscriminately which caused death of 14 people of Shershah Suri and Shahjahan Road under Mohammadpur thana in the city.

After 20 years of the incident Mohammad Ali of Mohammadpur thana filed a case with Mohammadpur police accusing nine people on November 29, 1996.

The IO of the case, submitted a charge sheet to the CMM's Court against 17 people including Thakur on April 30, 2001.

The same court also directed the Investigation Officer (IO) of the Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni Murder Case to submit a report regarding involvement of Thakur in the case by March 20.

Sheikh Fazlul Haq Moni, founder editor of the Daily Banglar Bani as well as founder chairman of Awami Jubo League, was assassinated by some disgruntled army personnel on August 15, 1975.

Mohammad Shahabuddin a close associate of Moni filed a murder case with Dhanmondi thana accusing 18 people including Taher Uddin Thakur on November 15, 1975.

Dhaka re-elected

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ment on economy.

Khaleda attended all the retreats of heads of delegations and took keen interest in all issues of the Commonwealth. She also attended an unscheduled retreat this morning. Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury said while briefing newsmen.

Khaleda also attended the Sports Lunch hosted jointly by Australian Prime Minister John Howard and British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

On market access of LDC products to major economies, the declaration reflected Bangladesh's proposals, Chowdhury said.

Bangladesh proposals on capacity building of the least developed countries for international trade negotiations have also been included in the communique.

There were extensive discussions on corporate governance and the Bangladesh position on adherence by investors to national laws, and their legal and social obligations has been accepted in the Committee of Whole, Chowdhury said.

On Zimbabwe issue, he said, Bangladesh position is to uphold the principles of Harare Declarations. He said any Commonwealth action on Zimbabwe should not be taken prior to the country's general elections (scheduled to be held on 9th and 10th of the current month).



An Afghan soldier display his rocket launcher as he waits with others to take part in fighting against al-Qaida and Taliban fighters in Gardez yesterday. US warplanes continued to bomb mountains in eastern Afghanistan where a large number of al-Qaida and Taliban forces is believed holed up.

Zimbabwe police break up opposition meeting

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe police yesterday broke up a meeting between opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai and diplomats discussing the food shortages faced by the country, party officials said.

An official said that some 30 minutes into the meeting at a five-star Harare hotel, police went in and cleared the gathering illegal, cutting it short.

"There was a briefing with the ambassadors and while the president (Tsvangirai) was addressing, the police came and disrupted the meeting," Percy Makombe, a press officer with the opposition movement for Democratic Change (MDC), told AFP.

At least 30 people attended the meeting, including foreign diplomats and election observers to the crucial presidential vote set for this Saturday and Sunday, in which Tsvangirai poses the most serious threat ever to President Robert Mugabe's 22-year rule.

The Spanish ambassador to Harare, Javier Sandomingo, confirmed the incident.

"It's totally ridiculous that foreign diplomats can't meet with political leaders of a country," he said in an interview with AFP.

"They were just explaining to us the food situation and their plans for the transition (in case of a victory)," he said.

Sandomingo added: "Foreign diplomats are entitled to meet with political leaders, from the government or the opposition, in order to get information."

According to another MDC

official, who asked not to be named, police said they broke up the meeting because the MDC had failed to comply with a demand to supply details of the people attending and to allow police to sit in on the private talks.

She said they had informed police of the meeting in advance to avoid a repetition of an incident last week, when police broke up a meeting on AIDS at a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), attended by 10 people including Tsvangirai.

Tsvangirai was held at the offices for 30 minutes and the NGO workers were questioned by police over the meeting. "They (police) gave us conditions that we should inform them of who was invited, from which country, and who had confirmed or declined the invitation, and that we should allow plainclothes police to attend the meeting," the MDC official officer said.

"A police officer went in and told the (opposition) president that the gathering was illegal because we had not met their conditions," she added.

Lok Sabha

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from Andhra Pradesh where he was killed in a helicopter crash.

India's parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan and deputy speaker of the lower house of parliament, PM Sayed, received the body at the airport and then escorted it to the parliament where MPs and other leaders were to pay their respects.

C'wealth won't suspend

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They called upon parties to create an atmosphere for a free and fair election.

Present Chairman of the Commonwealth Prime Minister John Howard, its former chairman South African President Thabo Mbeki and Chairman for the next CHOGM Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo will make the decision on Zimbabwe. The decision will be based on the report by the election observers.

Prime Minister Howard said this was a bona fide and fair mechanism to reach a judgement on Zimbabwe.

The Commonwealth Observer Group (COG) will report to the Commonwealth Secretary General Don McKinnon immediately after the elections.

The secretary-general also present at the press briefing said the CMAG, the role of which has been widely interpreted, had a definite

and clearer mandate.

The observer group will stay on in Zimbabwe until they complete the report, he added. The group is scheduled to stay for four weeks.

According to the press statement, the heads of government have recognised that, as stated in the Abuja Agreement, land is at the root of the crisis in Zimbabwe and cannot be separated from other issues of concern to the Commonwealth.

They called upon the Zimbabwean government and the UNDP, which has given an interim report, to reach an early agreement on transparent, equitable and sustainable measures for land reform.

The Commonwealth will be ready to assist Zimbabwe to address the land issue and help in its economic recovery in cooperation with other international agencies, the statement also said.

6 Americans killed as chopper shot down in Afghanistan

AP, Washington

At least six Americans were killed and an unknown number wounded when their helicopter was shot down over eastern Afghanistan, Pentagon sources said yesterday.

Reuters adds: US planes rained bombs on unexpectedly strong Taliban and al Qaida resistance in eastern Afghanistan today, but a new all-out ground assault was held back due to fierce opposition, Afghan fighters in Gardez said.

The biggest US-led ground offensive of the five-month Afghan war was repulsed on Saturday, forcing government troops and US advisers to withdraw close to the nearby town of Gardez, about 150 km from Kabul and 32 km from the fighting.

There are estimated to be about 60 US advisers involved in the battle.

In Saturday's high-altitude fighting in snow-covered mountains in Paktia province near the Pakistan border one US soldier and three Afghans died in attacks on al Qaida-Taliban fighters in caves and bunkers built in the 1980s by Mujahideen fighting occupying forces from the former Soviet Union.

Afghan soldiers reported occasional skirmishes on Sunday in which two more Afghans died.

AL leaders and workers to court arrest to protest torture

UNB, Naogaon

Awami League leaders and workers who fell victim to "political vengeance" before and after the last general election will court arrest across the country to protest the torture on them.

Party President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina made this announcement yesterday at a public meeting in the town, calling upon her workers to regroup and build up a strong resistance against the government she labelled as "rapist and terrorist."

She assured her workers that the party's legal aid committee would provide necessary financial and legal supports for judicial fights against repression.

The AL chief alleged that the "ruling clique" was harbouring terrorists under a blueprint to demolish the Awami League. "But the Awami League is the party of the masses with its roots in this soil. This party can't be destroyed," she said recalling the repression on her party during the period of autocratic government before and after the country's independence.

She also thanked local AL leaders and workers for steering the party through all difficulties, ignoring "widespread repression."

The former prime minister said, "This government has come to power through vote-rigging so they

don't have respect for democracy and fundamental rights."

Citing the suicide of Mahima, a gang-rape victim, Hasina called for a social movement against culprits. "Hate the rapists and be sympathetic to those girls who are victims of bestiality."

She said the government is shedding tears over the depleted reserves of food and foreign exchange to create an excuse for pipeline export of gas to India. "We wanted to keep gas resources for the people; they (government) have given undertakings to hand it over to foreign countries," she regretted.

Party's central leader Matia Chowdhury also addressed the meeting, while Abdul Jalil, Panchanan Biswas and Biren Shikder were among others who attended the meeting chaired by Advocate Fazle Rabbi.

Haji Selim

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April 21, last year, was attacked by the accused in an attempt to murder him.

Later, the complainant of the case filed a criminal case with Lalbagh thana on January 12 accusing Selim and eight other AL activists.

Selim was shown arrested in the case on February 2.

Sabina murder case

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had filed a case with the Magistrate Court on February 12. The court on that day ordered the police to take up the case for investigation.

But sources said the court order has been missing from the Gurdaspur Police Station although the register of the peon delivering the court order shows that the wirelessman Babul Akhter of the police station received it on February 19.

Officer-in-Charge Forkan Ali Shikdar of the thana said he did not get the court order. "I will look into the matter," he added.

While talking to these correspondents yesterday afternoon, Sabina's mother Jahura Bewa, traumatised by her daughter's death, alleged that Sayem and his associates kidnapped her daughter at the dead of night and hanged her.

Poor and landless Jahura Bewa who works as a day labourer in the paddy fields had been living with her two daughters in the tiny 15-foot-by-8-foot hut since the death of her husband Mokkal Ali three years ago.

She said Sayem was caught in the act of sexually assaulting Sabina after he entered her house on February 9, but local BNP leaders took him away saying that they would settle the matter through

Shalish (arbitration). Later, Sayem was fined Tk 15,000 for his misdeeds.

Following the alleged rape incident on February 9, the Shalish had also suggested to arrange a marriage between Sayem and Sabina, but Sayem who had some influence in the area refused to marry her.

Some local people said Sayem and Sabina had an affair for the last six months, adding that Sayem was known in the locality for his unruly behaviour.

Sabina's mother also said that after the killing of her daughter, a section of influential village leaders proposed to Sabina a reconciliation of the issue through Shalish. But, she refused and filed a case with Gurdaspur thana.

Chairman of Dhara Barisa Union Parisad Abdul Aziz also suspects Sayem to have committed the murder but said he believed some of the other accused to be innocent.

A contingent of police has been stationed in front of Jahura Bewa's tiny hut. Sub-Inspector Anwar Ali told The Daily Star that the measure was taken following threats on the family by a certain quarter.

Police Super of Natore said investigation was going on and asked authorities to make sure that no criminals could get away.

Another girl takes life

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this to any one.

Family members found Fahima in that room and brought her back. "On way back, I slapped my daughter and asker her why she was there. On return to house, she kept mum and sat in a room for some time looking down. Then she muttered how can I live any more, every body knows what has happened to me", Sobura said.

Fahima's sister sister-in-law said the family members gathered outside the room to discuss the matter. Her sister Fatema said that their nephew Rakib was inside the room with Fahima but she forced him out and closed its door from inside.

Despite being repeatedly asked to open the door, she did not respond.

"By the time we broke open the door, my daughter was hanging from

the ceiling. She hanged herself with her scarf," Sobura said.

Fahima was rushed to hospital where doctors declared her dead.

Mirpur police visited the spot and immediately apprehended Nasir. Sumon and Halim managed to escape.

Local people said that the gang members lived in nearby slums and were involved in various crimes in Mirpur area for long.

A case was filed by Fahima's father, a grocer, accusing the three youths. The arrested would be produced before the court today. A woman ASI has been assigned to investigate the case.

Recently, Mahima, 15, committed suicide in a Rajshahi village after she was gang raped.

Gujarat calm

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Victims have told horrific tales of families being burned alive as raging crowds carrying swords, knives and hockey sticks freely roamed the streets and set fire to shops and houses.

The bloodshed was only brought under control after thousands of troops were brought in from outside the state.

Large swathes of Gujarat's commercial hub and biggest city, Ahmedabad, which bore the brunt of the violence, remained under curfew on Monday.

"Now that the violence has to a great extent been contained, we plan to focus on relief and rehabilitation," state government spokesman Anil Mukhim told Reuters, adding a survey of damages would be made soon and compensation packages drawn up.

Despite fears the violence could spread throughout the volatile country, it has so far been contained within Gujarat.

AP adds: Authorities yesterday banned public rallies in the southern city of Bangalore, India's technology hub, to prevent violence.

The ban follows the arrests Sunday of 25 Hindu activists who threw stones at shops to force them to shut in protest against Muslims. Police said the detainees belonged to the World Hindu Council, one of the most strident Hindu nationalist groups in India.

The police commissioner banned rallies and processions, and prohibited gatherings of more than four people at one place.

The orders will remain in effect until Sunday, and violators will face up to six months in jail, he said.

Meanwhile leaders of 22 Islamic groups held a sit-in demonstration yesterday in New Delhi to demand that the government put the army in charge of Gujarat.

The Muslim groups accused the state's Hindu nationalist government of failing to protect the Muslim minority, who have been the chief victims of the violence.

"We are convinced that the Gujarat chief minister does not want to restore peace in the state," said Syed Ahmed Bukhari, the chief cleric at New Delhi's main mosque, the Jama Masjid.

Law on information

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information, which is also related to human rights.

"Access to information is human rights," Moudud said, adding that under the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" 1948 and "International Convention on Civil and Political Rights" 1966, a citizens has right to have access to information. Bangladesh is signatory to both the international laws.

Moudud said the new law would ensure access of a citizen to information not only in government matters but also in non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

He said the proposal of the Law Commission on this law had been in cold storage so far and the present government took this initiative to enact the law to ensure good governance and transparency in the

administration.

He, however, said the legislation would take some time as public debate would first be initiated to take into consideration opinions of different professional groups. "But we have started the process."

But, Barrister Moudud said, the new law would bar access to information related to security of the state or state secrecy under official secrecy act, evidence act, rules of business, oath of secrecy etc.

"There has to be a balance between safety and security of state and people's rights," said the law-tur-turned minister.

In the new law, legal remedy will also be provided so that if a person is barred from his right to information, he can go to court and for that Information Tribunal and Information Appellate Tribunal would be set up.

Bank robbery

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and went inside, the customers and employees said.

The bandits stuffed cash and prize bonds into a bag, came out and then forced all the nine employees and six customers into it and locked it.

The rest of the gang were on guard on the corridor during the 'operation'.

"You came for bank dacoity with only one bag", an employee heard one of them telling the others inside the vault.

In all they took away Tk. 17, 528.80 lakh and prize bonds worth Tk 5000, kept in the vault.

The gang also manhandled the manager and the cashier when they refused to hand over the key of the vault. They also took away two mobile phones, one from the manager and the other from a customer.

The incident came to light at about 9: 25 am when a customer entered the bank and found none. He heard screams from the vault. He went close to it and learnt about the whole incident.

The customer informed Mohammadpur police station. Policemen rescued the employees and customers from the vault and informed their seniors and higher officials of the bank.

The bank branch has no armed guard. The only unarmed security man remains busy carrying out orders of employees, some of the employees said.

Bank official said Tk 2 crore is usually kept in the vault on the first and second days of a month. Yesterday was the date for payment of salary of employee of the Jute Research Institute, sources said.

After the incident officials of several agencies including CID and SB of police went to the spot to investigate the incident. Police from both Tejgaon and Mohammadpur thanas also went there.

Police suspect that the gang might have links with any of the bank employees.

High officials of Sonali Bank also went to the spot for on the spot investigation.

Mohammadpur police said last night that the manager of the branch filed a case but none could be arrested in connection with the incident.

Hasina's car

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ing jeans-trousers and shirt, coming from opposite direction suddenly jumped off his rickshaw, broke the flag stand of Hasina's jeep and damaged several vehicles in the motorcade, including hers.

Hasina's security personnel, including Habildar Jahangir, caught Dewan Khaled and started interrogating him but was yet to ascertain his motives. He was dragged into the pickup van of the security men guarding the opposition leader.

Reporters from Dhaka who are accompanying Sheikh Hasina said Dewan Khaled made delirious statements about himself and his deed.

When asked to comment after her meeting at Gobindaganj, the Awami League president said the man attacked her jeep all of a sudden which startled her.

"It's a well-planned attack," Hasina said, adding, "He is planted." She said the government got scared seeing the huge public turnout at each meeting and rally she is addressing during the tour.

Meanwhile, Naogaon District Awami League has called a half-day hartal in Naogaon town today in protest against the attack on the motorcade of Hasina.

Gopalganj Awami League also called for a half-day hartal in the town today.

In support of the hartal programme, BCL, student front of AL, brought out a huge procession in the town yesterday evening.