

Imran Khan meets PM, lauds edn programme

UNB, Dhaka

Pakistan's cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan made a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

Imran, the founder chairman of Tehriq-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice), lauded the social reform measures of the former BNP government during the 1991-96 period.

He also showed keen interest in Zia's concept of "Gram Sarkar" and said it was an effective tool to take democracy to the grassroots.

The prime minister, during the meeting, focussed on various measures taken by the present government for socio-economic development.

She particularly mentioned the government's programme in education sector including free education up to higher secondary level.

Appreciating the measures, Imran said Bangladesh and Pakistan have the scope of benefiting from each other's experiences of reform and development.

Gas export

FROM PAGE 12

parliament, she replied, "I do not think it will affect our bilateral relations."

The US assistant secretary of state was optimistic that Bangladesh will send its troops to Afghanistan for a peacekeeping role. However, when asked whether the troops should go under UN blue helmet operations or chapter VII of UN resolution that involves combat role, she evaded a direct reply, only saying, "The matter was under discussion."

When her attention was drawn to the harassment of visa seekers here, she passed the question to the US ambassador who said no new restrictions have been imposed in Bangladesh and previous system of issuing visa is in place, only that processing requires more time.

Asked by a newsman if she had any idea about the whereabouts of Osama bin Laden, she replied: "I do not think I know the answer to that."

Bill: Acid abuse

FROM PAGE 1

Piloting the bill, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed was optimistic that the new law would help check abuse of acid, a prerequisite for controlling acid-related crimes in the country.

He said another bill, introduced in the parliament last week with tough provisions including death sentences for acid throwers, would be placed in the house for passage today.

The law minister observed that controlling abuse of acid was imperative to check acid attacks on innocent people, especially the women.

According to the acid control law, which Moudud said was the first of its kind in the country, the government will issue licence for production and import of acid, while deputy commissioners (DC) will issue license for transportation and stocking and selling of acid.

It has suggested a 3 to 10 years' jail term for unauthorised production, import, transportation, stocking and selling of acid and a maximum of 15 years in jail for unauthorised possession of equipment for acid production.

A person who would let his/her land, house, transport or equipment be used for unauthorised production of acid would get a maximum five years' jail term and be fined, too.

Violation of terms and conditions of license has been made a punishable offence that calls for a five-year jail term while a similar punishment is there for suing someone on false charges.

A maximum of 15 years in jail has been prescribed for the abettor of acid crimes defined by the law.

Members of the home minister-led National Acid Control Council would include the women and children affairs minister, a woman

Rocca tells PM US businessmen keen to invest in telecom & other sectors

UNB, Dhaka

American business community is keen to invest in Bangladesh and is closely looking at the opportunity to come up with investment in different fields, including telecommunications.

This was stated by US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca when she called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday evening.

She also mentioned possibility of export of various other goods including ceramics, seafood and agricultural products from Bangladesh to her country, apart from garments.

Rocca said, "US administration has always recognised Bangladesh as a model of moderate democratic country with deeply entrenched communal harmony."

She said this perception was reinforced during her visit to a US-aided fisheries project at Kaliakoir in Gazipur district where she witnessed people of different religions living side by side in complete harmony and working together.

Rocca described it as a "wonderful feeling" about social amity irrespective of caste or creed.

She noted with satisfaction that the sectarian violence in Gujarat, India had no repercussion in Bangladesh, which is a further proof of communal tolerance in Bangladesh.

On the question of export of readymade garments to USA, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia strongly emphasised the need for keeping the market open for Bangladesh because much of the country's economy depends on it.

Also, the industry employs the highest number of workers, especially female, she told the US emissary, reiterating Dhaka's plea for duty-and-quota-free access of apparels to US market.

In response, Rocca said US administration is happy working with Bangladesh on this and recom-

mended that detailed discussion should be held between officials of Bangladesh government and of US Trade Representative office.

On the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Prime Minister Khaleda said she was then in election campaign in the interior of Bangladesh but strongly condemned the terror act.

Rocca reiterated the gratitude of her government for the support of Bangladesh to the global campaign against terrorism.

Khaleda asked Rocca to convey her best wishes to US President George W Bush.

Labour court

FROM PAGE 12

report on the incident.

They are Zebol Haq, Md Musa, Md Ezharul Haq, Mozammel Haq and Ayub Ali.

Some unruly workers of Chittagong Coaster & Hedge Sramik Dal in an attack on Saturday ransacked the labour court at Katalganj, fearing injunction on the election of their committee that expired in 1994.

Police took them on remand in the afternoon and started interrogation.

Mahima suicide case

FROM PAGE 12

Kanthalbaria village of Puthia thana in the district was gangraped on February 15. The rapists circulated photographs of the rape scene among the local people to humiliate Mahima's family that provoked her to commit suicide.

Police recorded two cases under Section 79(3)/10(2) of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act 2000 and under Section 306 and 201 of the Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC) respectively. Four rapists -- Farid, Faruk, Selim and Iqbal Hossain Uzzal -- were chargesheeted in both the cases while their fathers and relatives were charged for provoking Mahima to commit suicide.

Proshika staff

FROM PAGE 1

Police said Tarek and Haq were moving towards Dhanmondi road number 32 in a motorcycle. A police team asked them to stop but they tried to speed away. The team chased them and caught them.

However, Tarek's family said he was picked up from the residence of the house tutor of Kuwait-Bangladesh Friendship Hall at Dhaka University without showing any warrant.

They said police seized from Tarek two vouchers of a parcel send to a publisher in Iraq for printing of a novel titled "Kanchongram" written by Abul Kalam Shamsuddin, and a newsletter titled "Adhiparamorsho", published by Ain-o-Salish Kendro, a legal aid organisation.

Proshika Chairman Kazi Faruk Ahmed could not be contacted for comment despite repetitive attempts. "He is at an important meeting," one of his aides told The Daily Star when contacted over cell phone last night.

Meanwhile, Shraban Prokashoni, a book publisher in the city, in a statement protested Tarek's arrest on 'false allegation'. Tarek is the writer of a book published by Srabon, it said.

Robin Ahsan, proprietor of Srabon, said the government is harassing progressive people after failing to maintain law and order in the country.

He demanded withdrawal of the 'false' case and immediate release of Tarek.

Mobile sets

FROM PAGE 1

GrameenPhone in an official statement. But the operator feels this will affect the industry as well as the market growth.

GrameenPhone pointed out that the additional charges on SIM card replacement and ownership transfer would hit the general subscribers.

Mehboob Chowdhury, sales and marketing director of GrameenPhone, is sceptic about meeting his target of netting one million subscribers by end-2002. Chowdhury also foresees a booming black market in handsets because of the duty.

Faisal Morshed Khan, managing director of CityCell, said: "The market growth depends on the lower- to middle-income group who would be greatly discouraged by the new tariff."

Jeffrey Ahmed, managing director of Sheba Telecom, urged the government to reconsider the new duty. "The mobile phone market has picked momentum and the fixed tariff would impede its growth," he said.

Dato Aziz, managing director of AKTEL, refused to make any instant comment. He said, "We are assessing the impact and it will be discussed in our board meeting."



US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the latter's office yesterday.

Paris meet begins today

FROM PAGE 1

Hossain, Cabinet Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan, Governor of Bangladesh Bank Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Siddiqui, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan, Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Anisul Huq Chowdhury, planning ministry divisional chief M Sattar Bhuiyan and deputy chief Altaf Hossain.

The country's permanent representative to the UN Dr Iftekhar A Chowdhury and Ambassador to France Jahangir Sadaat will join the delegation in Paris.

Representatives of the donor countries and agencies will attend the meet and the World Bank will play the role of coordinator.

Against the backdrop of deteriorating economic situation and macroeconomic imbalance, the Paris meet -- an annual pre-budget exercise with a break in 2001 -- is being considered by many as a crucial one. And in a deviation from the previous practice of a two-day discussion, this time the BDF is going to meet for three days as the donors will focus on more issues.

The donors will also have a critical look at the report on the government's performance for the last five months and the finance minister and his colleagues will have to satisfy them for increased assistance for the country's development efforts.

Further opening of Bangladesh's market and at a faster rate will also come up for discussion. The issue has already put the country's business community and the donors on two sides of the table. The donors will ask for planned tariff reforms with the aim of giving private sector time to adjust.

The country's average tariff protection, the donors think, is much

higher than that in all other South Asian countries except India as the top tariff rate has remained the same since 1998.

The issue of flexible and market-determined exchange rate will come up at the meet.

Although no financial assistance is pledged the Paris meet since 1999, the government will inform the donors its aid requirement for the next fiscal year.

The country's policy planners think external assistance has a significant role in developing the economy.

However, implementation of 'committed reforms' in different sectors with the prime objective of 'reducing poverty' and 'improving governance' will be the basis of any future assistance, the donors' document noted.

Gas export from Bangladesh will also be discussed at the Paris meet. The country's delegation will place a development plan to bring the entire country under gas transmission facility involving US\$ one billion, sources said.

Independence of the judiciary and administrative reforms will also figure at the meet.

It will focus on the 'precarious situation' at Chittagong port and in telecommunication sector and energy sector which, according to the donors, discourages business and investment. Privatisation of different utilities and setting up of regulatory bodies will also come up.

The donors will press for transparent pricing policy in the energy sector and not having any hidden subsidy in the sector. If there is any necessity of subsidies, the government will have to make budgetary provision for it, they will suggest.

They will also stress time-bound commitment for reducing system loss and collecting unrealised bills in

different utilities.

The donors' document prepared for the meet says the government should privatise Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTB).

It noted that regulatory independence of Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory Commission (BTRC), formed recently, was undermined by the provision of ministerial rather than parliamentary right to oversee.

The Paris meet will begin with a welcome address by Saifur Rahman. He will briefly explain the country's overall situation and government position on governance, public expenditure control, reforms in administration, judiciary and financial sector and other key areas. World Bank Vice President Nieko Nishimijui, Chairman of the Local Consultative Group (LCG) and the IMF representative will also address the inaugural session.

The meeting will then discuss the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), prepared as advised by the donors.

On the second day, the meeting will focus on governance that will include public administration, state owned enterprises (SOEs), energy sector, financial sector and audit and accounting.

The crucial issues of law and order and human rights situation, corruption and establishment of the office of the Ombudsmen will be taken up at the second day's session. Trade policy, investment situation and infrastructure facility will follow.

The meeting will focus on human resource development with special emphasis on education and health on the last day.

SSC, Dakhil exams

FROM PAGE 12

The state minister and the deputy minister for education have already visited several areas and exchanged views with members of the civil society and teachers to create public awareness against copying, he said.

To check copying completely, some long term measures including change in examination system, curriculum and merit judging method are being thought of, the minister said.

Deputy Minister for Education Mohammad Abdus Salam Pintu, Education Secretary Shahidul Alam, the divisional commissioner of Dhaka, chairmen and controllers of education boards were present, among others, at the press conference, held at the conference room of the education ministry.

Leaders of Bangladesh Shikkakh Samity (BSS) at a press conference yesterday also urged

teachers and guardians of students to come forward to prevent coping in the examination.

They also urged the government to take effective steps to stop entry of political men into examination centres during examination and to ensure security of teachers.

Mohammad Azizul Islam, President of BSS and other leaders of the association addressed the press conference, held at the Jatiya Press Club.

They also demanded punishment after probe if any teacher is found helping students in copying.

The others BSS leaders present at the press conference were its Additional Secretary General Khan Mossaraf Hossain, Organising Secretary Mohammad Azizur Rahman and president of its Tejgaon thana unit Basir Ahmed Mujumder

City corpn election

FROM PAGE 1

with the High Court challenging the expansion of ward areas by the previous government.

As in the general election, the commission is considering deployment of army personnel to back up the civil administration on the polling day.

"Mobile phone services, motorised vehicles and launches in the three metropolises will be kept out of operation on the day to avert any untoward incidents," EC Secretary Saiful Islam said while briefing newsmen at the EC Secretariat on the outcome of the meeting.

However, the Awami League, as announced earlier, will not participate in the polls.

Asked to comment on the EC's move to hold the elections, Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman told The Daily Star that his party decided not to participate in any elections under Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MASYed.

People have lost confidence in him for his 'partisan role' in the last general election, he alleged.

Asked whether the AL would resist the polls, the AL leader said the party would sit immediately to take its next course of action. "We will face it politically."

Meanwhile, nomination-hopefuls of the ruling BNP have started lobbying with the party high command for confirmation of their candidatures.

Graffiti of different aspirants, including Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeq Hossain Khoka, Works and Housing Minister Mirza Abbas and former FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo have appeared on different walls in the capital.

Similar campaigns by election

aspirants were reported from Rajshahi and Khulna as well.

Elections to the local government bodies are held on a non-party basis. But, traditionally, the major political parties field their candidates in such elections, although unofficially.

The election to the Chittagong City Corporation was held later than schedule in 1999, also because of disputes over delimitation of the port city.

The first mayoral elections to the four city corporations were simultaneously held on January 30, 1994.

Until then, the government used to appoint the mayors through its executive order, although the ward commissioners were elected through direct ballot.

This time, there would be direct elections to the offices of commissioners, reserved for women, chosen earlier by the directly elected commissioners.

The EC has already rearranged the ward-based voters' lists and appointed officials for conducting of the polls. "The commission has also completed other formalities," said a senior official.

Old cars

FROM PAGE 12

tioned car import last fiscal, according to NBR sources. As many as 13,000 vehicles were imported during the period, 80 per cent of them from Japan.

Around Tk 100 crore is evaded annually in reconditioned car imports as a section of importers pay less duty taking advantage of the five-slab depreciation rates, according to NBR sources.

Israeli troops kill 29

FROM PAGE 1

Thursday.

Israel's army went to Palestinian town of Qalqila and a Bethlehem refugee camp, handcuffing and blindfolding the Palestinian men as it searched for militants in the wake of attacks against Israelis.

"Bases of terror"

The army said the latest offensive, by land, sea and air, was aimed at smashing "bases of terror" used by Palestinian gunmen and bombers to mount attacks on Israelis.

"We intend to form a wall -- figuratively speaking -- between Ramallah, a capital of terrorist activity, and Jerusalem," a senior army official said.

"Most of those who carried out the recent terrorists attacks in Jerusalem and its environs came from Ramallah."

Ramallah, just north of Jerusalem, is a major commercial hub and the seat of Palestinian power in the West Bank.

Shooting erupted as Israeli troops entered the edges of the al-Am'ari refugee camp in Ramallah. In an unusual call, the Palestinian leadership urged residents to resist attempts to round up men and interrogate them to seek out militants.

Zinni, a former Marine Corps general appointed by Washington to reactivate dormant US peace efforts, was due in the region to try to stem the bloodiest two weeks of fighting of the uprising so far. The

violence has raised fears of all-out war.

Raids on Gaza

In the Gaza Strip, four of the Palestinians who were killed died in an attempted raid on a Jewish settlement. Three were killed in a missile strike on a metal-working factory, Palestinian hospital officials and witnesses said. Earlier tanks and troops backed by helicopter gunships had battled into Jabalya refugee camp near Gaza City late yesterday, sparking fighting that left hospitals barely able to cope.

People ran screaming for cover down the camp's many alleys and ambulance sirens wailed as the tanks surged forward.

Hospital sources said 17 people were killed, at least eight of them gunmen, and 50 injured in the densely populated camp of about 90,000 people before the tanks withdrew four hours later.

Young man shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified gunmen shot and killed a young man at Mohakhali in the city at nine last night.

Md Zakir Hossain, 24, son of Abdus Sattar, was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where the doctors on duty declared him dead.

In another incident at 7.15pm, a constable and two pedestrians were injured in an armed attack by terrorists at Shyamoli in the city.

Assailants fired on Constable Rafiqul Islam, 50, of Shyamoli Police Station, during a raid on a slum in the area. The attack left two other persons -- Araj Ali, 45, and Nurul Islam, 32 -- injured.

They were admitted to the DMCH.

Arms loot

FROM PAGE 12

involvement in the incident. They are Murad, Nuru Shaikh, Sobhan and Abul Kalam Azad.

Murad, Nuru and Azad have been taken on a four-day remand which will end tomorrow.

KMP officials still believe the looted gun will be recovered at any cost as the person who is in its possession has been identified. He belongs to a political party and led the operation against patrol police, they said.

A DB official said the motive behind the attack was not only to snatch arms but also to lodge protest against sharing of toll from Customs Ghat.



The Bangladesh Students Union formed a human chain at Dhaka University yesterday, protesting campus violence.

Rules are for the breaking!

FROM PAGE 1

crave for more commercial space from their project. Sometimes the developer seeks help from anonymous architects, changing the plan as per his own convenience.

With a 'dubious monitoring system' in place, construction of these tall commercial buildings is completed not only with inadequate parking facilities but also with various other deviations from original plans. Commercial activities centring these massive structures give rise to regular traffic snarl-ups and pose hazard to public health with noise and air pollution. Here, the problem of aesthetic landscaping becomes secondary.

"It takes between three to four years to complete such a tall building. I don't believe that during this period the Rajuk cannot afford to inspect whether the construction is as per approved plan or not," said an architect of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB).

Architects of the IAB said that the monitoring system of the construction is full of corrupt practices. In fact, there is no monitoring at all. The Rajuk inspectors come to the sites every now and then, but they do not check anything other than their own accounts with the devel-

opers.

"Every time the inspector visits a site, he is several thousand taka richer. He comes and sits with us over a cup of tea and departs with some money. He is happy and so are we," said a site manager at Panthopath.

IAB officials said that nowadays the Rajuk only approves plans designed by members of the institute.

IAB General Secretary ASM Ismail told The Daily Star that the institute has already taken punitive actions against several architects found to have links with deviated building plans.

"If there is a specific allegation against any of our members we will take punitive measures against the architect," Ismail said.

Engineers, architects, town planners and police officials said that in many city areas these buildings are already creating massive traffic problems. The situation is not beyond redemption yet. They said if the authorities were sincere, they could still force building owners to convert ground and first floors into parking lots.

"For instance, Rapa Plaza at the intersection of Dhanmondi Road-27 and Mirpur Road is causing huge

chaos every day. Authorities should immediately look into the matter and force the owner to convert the first floor into a drive-in bay-cum-parking," said a Rajuk engineer.

Despite hundreds of reported irregularities, corrupt officials at the Rajuk, however, keep enjoying immunity from the law.

Sramik Dal

FROM PAGE 1

senior vice president of Sramik Dal Abul Kashem Chowdhury and general secretary Nazrul Islam Khan said the incident was an outcome of intra-party conflict of a particular organisation, which basically originated during the rule of previous government.

They said the two feuding groups were associated with two powerful groups of the previous regime. But the groups during the attack on the court gave 'strategic' slogans on purpose.

"We want to categorically said that Sramik Dal does not believe in terrorism, did not patronise terrorism and anarchy in the past and would never instigate such activities in future," the Sramik Dal leaders added.

Our reply:  
We stand by our report.