

AI for independent probe

FROM PAGE 1
rules of the successive governments mainly due to political reasons.

"Since independence there has not been any improvement in the country's state of human rights. Application of repressive laws and police brutality against political opponents had always been a common feature in the process of governance.

"The government must stop manipulating the legal system for its political ends," she said, referring to the recent arrests and alleged torture in detention.

Referring to the spate of arrests since the start of this year, she said arrestees were usually detained under section 54, allegedly tortured in police remand and then charged with criminal offences or detained under the Special Powers Act, which the party in power had promised to scrap earlier.

About the pattern of recent arrests, police remand and detention of some opposition leaders and critics of the government, she said, "Some of the cases appear to be politically motivated. It seemed that the government arrested them because they had to arrest them."

She pointed out that the AI had urged the government to repeal the "repressive" laws, including the SPA, to ratify the Convention against Torture and to investigate and take action against all incidents of torture.

The international human rights watchdog had also asked Dhaka to

adopt legislation giving effect to the international human rights treaties to which Bangladesh is a party.

Irene alleged police and prison authorities had ignored court orders for bail, undermining the judicial system. Those who have been released on bail or by court order declaring the detention illegal have continued to be "harassed or re-arrested on similar charges".

More recently, Irene noted, some selected journalists have either been charged or threatened with the seditious charge in a pattern similar to that of arrest and harassment.

"We called for independent and effective institutions of accountability to be set up for all organs of government, and for effective reform of the police and law-enforcement agencies," the AI chief said.

But, she regretted, her organisation had not received a substantive response on any of those issues so far, "and fears that the window of opportunity has closed".

"An official investigation into the post-election repression on women and minorities was promised, but to this day we have heard nothing. To our knowledge no one has been charged or convicted and no victim compensated.

"But we would continue insisting on the issues," she said. The AI chief said this time she would meet the home and law ministers and officials of the Prime Minister's Office.

Regarding the army deployment across the country, she said the

government called out the army as part of its anti-crime "Operation Clean Heart". Some experts are challenging the authority of the government under Bangladesh law to call out the army to its aid without a formal declaration of emergency. But "AI has taken no position" on the matter.

"In AI's view", Irene said, "under international human rights law, the armed forces are not forbidden from undertaking a policing role. But the key issue is that whoever exercises law-enforcement powers must respect the international principles and standards of policing".

Essentially these require them to respect human rights, that is, not to torture or kill unlawfully the detainees, and only to use reasonable force to the extent necessary.

"We also believe that anyone exercising police powers must be held accountable for any abuse," she said.

The AI secretary general said human rights are universal and that means "they are for the best of us and the worst of us. And so, we do have very serious concerns about the way in which the government has ignored, undermined or openly flouted fundamental principles of human rights law in carrying out its campaign against crime".

She said they were concerned by the "government's readiness to exploit security concerns to clamp down on the legitimate dissent, and its consistent failure to investigate and hold its own officials accountable".



PHOTO: PID

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman and Chinese Minister for Foreign Trade & Economic Cooperation Shiguang Sheng sign economic cooperation accord on behalf of the two countries yesterday.

Dhaka, Beijing pen accords

FROM PAGE 1
cooperation between the two friendly countries would be further strengthened in the days ahead as a result of her visit.

Khaleda Zia's return visit took place in less than 12 months after Premier Zhu visited Bangladesh in January last.

At the talks, Khaleda Zia was assisted by, among others, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Post and Telecommunications Minister Barister Aminul Haq, State Minister for Communications Salahuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Amanullah Aman, Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, ERD Secretary Anisul Hoq Chowdhury, Defence Secretary K M Ehsanul Haque, Textile Secretary Syed Tanveer Hossain, Bangladesh Ambassador to China Iftekharul Karim, Senior Joint Secretary General of BNP Tarique Rahman and Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui.

On the Chinese side, Premier Zhu Rongji was assisted by among others, Foreign Minister Tang Jia Xuan, Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation, Shi Guang Sheng, Director of Industrial Committee of National Defence, Science and Technology Liu Jibing, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Hu Qianwen.

During the talks Khaleda Zia expressed her admiration for the successful holding of the 16th Congress of the Communist Party of China and congratulated the Chinese Premier and the Chinese leadership for electing a new leadership and affecting a smooth transition from one generation to another.

Describing Bangladesh-China friendship as "deep-rooted in history", Begum Zia said that the two countries look upon each other as "true and trustworthy friends".

She expressed her government's commitment to further strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation with China so that the two countries could continue to work together in an environment of peace and stability, essential for social and economic development.

Giving a brief resume of her government's socio-economic programmes, Khaleda Zia said her administration has given special emphasis on creation of employment opportunities, elimination of poverty and illiteracy, ensuring basic healthcare facilities to all and empowerment of women.

Underscoring the need for further expanding trade and investment cooperation between the two countries, the Prime Minister urged the Chinese government to increase imports from Bangladesh for narrowing the widening trade gap.

In this regard, she requested the Chinese government to allow duty-free excess to 34 Bangladeshi items to China as proposed by Bangladesh under the provision of the Bangkok Agreement.

The Prime Minister urged the Chinese investors to avail the incentives offered by her government to increase their investment in Bangladesh.

She also emphasised the need for further broadening the areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and China in cultural and defense fields.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia reiterated Bangladesh's unequivocal support to the "One China Policy".

Referring to the outlook on addressing the scourge of international terrorism, she stated that Bangladesh is cooperating fully with the international community to fight the menace.

The Prime Minister stressed the need for making efforts to address political and economic questions and the causes of deprivation, despair and frustration to effectively deal with the threat of international terrorism.

Referring to the vision of President Ziaur Rahman to promote peace, strengthen security and expand cooperation among the nations of South Asia, she said Bangladesh is committed to promote peace and understanding in the region through dialogue and cooperation under the aegis of SAARC.

The Prime Minister spoke of the policy of her government to strengthen such cooperation also with other regional bodies such as ASEAN.

Premier Zhu Rongji thanked Khaleda Zia for her government's steps to bring changes in the lot of the commonman and assured all out support of his government to Bangladesh in achieving economic development.

Two of the three agreements were signed by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Chinese Minister for Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation Shi Guang Sheng on behalf of their respective countries.

The agreement on Defence Cooperation was signed by Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Director of the Chinese Industrial Committee of National Defence, Science and Technology Lin Jibing.

The signing ceremony was witnessed by the two Prime Ministers.

Later, Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia attended a banquet hosted in her honour by her Chinese counterpart Zhu Rongji at the Great Hall of the People.

Khaleda Zia will meet President Jiang Zemin, Premier Zhu Rongji, Secretary General of Chinese Communist Party Hu Ji Tao and Chairman of National People's Congress Li Peng today.

A team of businessmen and investors led by Board of Investment (BOI) Executive Chairman Mahbubur Rahman, accompanying the Prime Minister, will have separate talks with his Chinese counterpart to step up trade and investment cooperation.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said Bangladesh and China now enjoy excellent friendly relations and our friendship with China has stood the test of time.

Begum Zia leaves Beijing today for Heiko City in Hainan Island. She will also visit Kunming City. UNB adds: Earlier Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was accorded a ceremonial reception by Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji at a grand

function at the historic Great Hall of the People.

Premier Zhu Rongji warmly received Khaleda Zia as she alighted from her car at the northern entrance of the Great Hall.

She was escorted to the presentation line and introduced to the Chinese ministers and high officials.

Then Khaleda Zia introduced the members of her entourage.

The Prime Minister was then led to a rostrum where she took salute from a contingent of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. She inspected the guard of honour as the military band played the national anthems of Bangladesh and China.

On conclusion of the ceremony the Prime Minister accompanied by Premier Zhu Rongji, entered the East Hall of the Majestic Great Hall of the People where the official talks were held.

4 held with forged seals of ministries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four people and seized forged seals of several ministries from their possession in the city's Motijheel area Monday night.

The arrestees have been identified as Kawsar Shaikh, Abdur Rashid Gazi, Syed Momen and Abdull Halim.

Police said Kawsar and Rashid took Tk 5000 from one Khorshed Alam's brother on December 1 pledging to secure him a job with the Public Works Department and got his application signed by the Housing and Public Works Minister.

Khorshed, suspecting foul play, went to the ministry to verify the minister's signature to learn that it was forged. Later, when he lodged a complaint against the two with the Motijheel Police Station, police arrested the con artists.

Sarbahara leader jailed

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Barisal Division, yesterday sentenced a Sarbahara leader to ten years rigorous imprisonment in an arms case.

Judge Abdul Kuddus Mia found Khokon Mridha, leader of the outlawed party, guilty of possessing a pipegun and gave the verdict.

The joint forces arrested Khokon from his residence on October 29 and recovered a home made pipegun from his possession. Later an arms case was filed against him.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case submitted a charge sheet against Khokon on November 20 and it was transferred to the Speedy Trial Tribunal for disposal.

After cross-examination of 14 prosecution witnesses, the judge pronounced the judgement.

India to strengthen military presence along Nepal border

AFP, Patna

India will set up two new military posts near the Nepal border to check anti-Indian forces based in the neighbouring country, Defence Minister George Fernandes said.

"The threat of subversive activities by anti-India militants has increased along Indo-Nepal borders necessitating my presence in the border areas," Fernandes said late Monday in the Muzaffarpur district of the eastern Indian state of Bihar.

"Two military stations will be established in northern parts of the state (touching the Nepal border) to check anti-India activities along the border with Nepal," the minister said.

Nepal, particularly its southwestern area bordering India, is in the throes of an increasingly violent insurgency by Maoists, which has left more than 7,300 people dead since 1996.

Officials have alleged links between Nepal's Maoists and far-leftist outfits active in Bihar, India's poorest state, and other parts of the country.

The Maoist Communist Centre was blamed for an ambush Friday in Bihar's neighbouring state of Jharkhand with killed 18 policemen and injured 25. An Indian Railways official said the group was also behind a derailment of a train in the south of the country Saturday that left 20 people dead and 90 injured.

Sex edn

FROM PAGE 12

Addressing the workshop as chief guest, Mohammad Shahidul Alam, secretary, Ministry of Education said that with the alarming rise in the instances of sexually transmitted diseases and emergence of AIDS pandemic, sex education has become indispensable.

He also said that contrary to popular belief, pre- and extra-marital sex has been found to be prevalent in Bangladesh.

"There is not enough information on safe sex and other related issues in our educational curriculum," he added.

Secretary of the Ministry of Women Mahfuzul Islam presided over the workshop while Suneeta Mukherjee, UNFPA, Bangladesh representative addressed the discussion as special guest.

"It is one of the most neglected issues," said Mahfuzul Islam.

Director of South-South Centre Jalaluddin Ahmed pointed out the need to sensitise participants on the issue in order to develop an advocacy strategy.

Prof. AKM Nurun Nabi, Prof. Rowshan Ara Firoz, and Regional Advisor of population council ME Khan discussed the keynote paper.

Representatives of different social welfare organisations and NGOs of different districts in the country took part in the workshop demanding the need for reproductive and sexual health education among the stakeholders through authentic advocacy.

400 buses

FROM PAGE 1

Already, 12,500 polluters have been withdrawn from the city and the rest 6,575 will be banned from January 1.

But authorities have so far permitted only 5,000 four-stroke three-wheelers, leaving a huge vacuum in the public transport system.

Advocate Taimur Alam Khondakar, chairman of the BRTC, said 100 buses are plying the city roads and an additional 400 will soon be deployed after a contract with private bus owners. He said there wouldn't be any crisis of public transports once two-stroke polluters are banned.

They said the party has not yet decided whether to send a representative or to write a letter wishing success of the AL council. They said it would not be possible for to take any decision as Khaleda Zia is now on a visit to China.

PM invited

FROM PAGE 1

cards reads: Your presence at the council session would inspire us in our struggle under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina to build a 'sonar Bangla' free from hunger, poverty, illiteracy, terrorism and exploitation as dreamt by the father of the nation by resisting all conspiracies of the fascist alliance government".

BNP sources said the invitation cards with such words apparently irked the two top leaders of the ruling party.

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Firecrackers

FROM PAGE 12

In Pirojpur, the joint forces arrested a union parishad chairman.

Akhতারuzzaman Dulal, an activist of the Jatiya Party and member of the district bar association, was picked up at Gouripur and later sent to jail after being produced before court yesterday.

Meanwhile in Sunamganj, a police officer and two soldiers were injured when hit by a passenger bus on Monday.

Sergeant Abul Kalam and soldier Nasir Uddin and Mustafizur Rahman were performing a routine exercise on the roadside at Hajipara when the bus coming from Dhaka hit them at around 6:50am.

A critically injured Kalam was taken to the Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital while Nasir and Mustafiz were admitted to the local BDR hospital.

In a press release yesterday, the police headquarters claimed they had picked up 1,224 people, including two listed criminals, across the country in the last 24 hours till 6:00am.

The law enforcers also seized seven firearms and five other weapons along with 52 rounds of bullet.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police in a press release yesterday said they had arrested 274 people including a convicted criminal during a special police drive in the capital in the last 24 hours ending yesterday morning.

Under the Explosives Act, 1984, a licence is required to import and manufacture explosives. Since then the Ministry of Home has been allowing import of explosives for various purposes. As per the Explosives Act, no one can produce cocktails, crackers or fireworks.

Licences were issued in several places in the country to manufacturers and sellers of crackers and fireworks, despite the ban. The Directorate of Explosives recently issued a letter to the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Sunamganj in this regard.

A huge amount of sulfur, potassium, phosphorus and other chemicals are imported legally each year for sugar mills, match factories and other industries. "A number of explosives are also imported from India illegally," the businessman said.

Sources have said many match factories sell chemicals at a higher price to the people who use them for making crackers and cocktails. Crackers and fireworks are usually manufactured and sold ahead of various social and religious occasions. As the locally made crackers and fireworks fail to meet the demand they are also imported from India.

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Sanctuary for wildlife in Bandarban planned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The government has taken an initiative to build a sanctuary for wild animals in Bandarban district.

State Minister for Forest and Environment Zafarul Islam Chowdhury revealed this at a monthly meeting on law and order and development issues of the district at the conference room of the deputy commissioner (DC) yesterday.

At the meeting, he also directed the officials concerned to start works for the sanctuary.

The minister said attacks by wild elephants have increased in the district in recent times and added that indiscriminate felling of trees has compelled the elephants to come to locality.

He said the sanctuary would save the wild elephants.

Meanwhile, sources said a study has started to build the sanctuary on 12,000 acres of land including 5,000 acres of reserved forest in the southern part of the district.

ADAB president

FROM PAGE 12

regard under the caption, "ADAB needs to reform and free itself from corruption by December next."

Dr. Kazi Faruk also alleged these sorts of defamatory statements by Dr Jafurullah have damaged his image to his relatives, donor communities and friends in the NGOs at home and abroad.

Abdul Matin, country director of the IVS, Mahbub Alam, and Motiur Rahman, deputy director of Proshikha have been made prosecution witnesses in the case.

After hearing, Magistrate Mohammad Emdadul Haque took the complaint into cognisance and ordered a judicial inquiry into the matter.

A total of 45 NGOs have left ADAB, the apex body of NGOs, accusing its leaders of using the forum to advance their 'vested interest'.

Grameen Telecom

FROM PAGE 1

Using the branding success of the word "Grameen" the very first digital cellular mobile service of GrameenPhone soon became the trendsetter.

Starting with only 18,000 subscribers in 1997, today GrameenPhone boasts of more than 750,000 customers an explosive 111 percent CAGR and more than 60 percent mobile market share with 41 percent overall penetration. Balance sheet of GrameenPhone showed a net profit of Tk. 1.40 crore in 2000, which shot up to Tk. 152.20 crore in 2001.

GrameenPhone is one of the highest corporate taxpayers and it has paid more than Tk. 772 crore direct and indirect taxes until March 2002.

The operator has so far invested in excess of US\$ 250 million and has a plan to pump in altogether US\$ 585 million by 2003. It would make GrameenPhone one of the largest private sector investors in Bangladesh.

But such ambitious direct foreign investment in infrastructure may not materialise, if the boardroom battle between Grameen Telecom and Telenor ends up in the courtroom. The parties are reportedly trying to resolve this issue. But when

2 extortionists jailed in Ctg

BSS, Chittagong

The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Chittagong, yesterday sentenced two persons to four years rigorous imprisonment (RI) and fined Taka five thousand each, in default, they have to suffer six more months in jail for their involvement in extortion in the city, court sources said.

Magistrate Wahidul Islam, pronounced the verdict convicting Forkan Uddin, son of Habibul Alam and Yakub, son of Mohammad Shafi Fatikchhari upazila in the district.

The convicts were arrested on October 8 as they demanded Taka 20,000 from a restaurant owner, Ratan Bal, at KB Aman Ali Road. As the victim and employees of the restaurant cried for help, local people rushed to the spot and caught the extortionists. They handed them over to Chandgoan police.

After investigation, police submitted charge sheet against two persons following a case filed by the victim.

Robbers stab 6, loot goods from vessel at Mongla

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Armed robbers stabbed six people and looted valuables including TV set and refrigerator from an Indian vessel at Mongla Port Monday.

According to FIR lodged with Mongla police station on Monday night, the robbers came in two engine boat and swooped on the Indian vessel MV Bishwa Kumudi, a sea going vessel of Indian Shipping Corporation.

They stabbed six people, including four watchmen and took away the valuables.

None was arrested in connection with the robbery till yesterday.

Christmas today

FROM PAGE 1

among the children.

The day is a public holiday. President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina greeted the Christian community on the occasion.

In his message, the President said the ideals of Jesus Christ inspired the mankind towards the path of peace and welfare.

Terming Bangladesh as a land of communal harmony, the president said people of Christian community took part in the country's War of Liberation in 1971, and have been working together for its development.

The Prime Minister, in her message, called upon all to come forward for the services of distressed following the teachings of Jesus Christ.

She said Jesus Christ preached the messages of humanity and sacrificed his life for establishing peace.

Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina in her message said Jesus Christ fought lifelong for establishment of peace and justice in the society and serving the distressed humanity.

She said Awami League is committed to maintaining communal harmony in the country and hoped that the celebration of Christmas would consolidate the existing bond of friendship among the people of Christian and other

Corpns shops

FROM PAGE 1

This committee will approve the allotment of shops. Other members of the committee are deputy secretary (municipality), assistant secretary (municipality), secretary of the city corporation, chief engineer, chief revenue officer, deputy revenue officer and estate officer of the city corporation.

Meeting sources said that the ministry rejected a proposal for inclusion of two ward commissioners in the committee.

The new policy stipulates that shops would have to start business within six months of allotment and possession. Prior permission is required for transfer of ownership and regular deposition of certain fees in the state exchequer.

The policy has been sent to the mayors for their opinion. It asked the city corporations to inform the ministry within next three days if they have any reservations about it.

Talking to reporters, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Haq Zia said the previous DCC mayor had allotted 25 per cent of shops from his own quota.

Land ownership

FROM PAGE 12

ised and it would take around 26 years.

The first land survey in Bengal Province was undertaken during the British rule in 1888. The survey named CS Survey was completed in 1940 after 52 years.

Another land survey was taken up in 1965 and it is yet to be completed. The government thinks that after the introduction of the new plot-to-plot system keeping all data in the computer the necessity of a regular land survey across the country by spending a huge amount of money would end, the proposal said.

Giving a brief resume of her government's socio-economic programmes, Khaleda Zia said her administration has given special emphasis on creation of employment opportunities, elimination of poverty and illiteracy, ensuring basic healthcare facilities to all and empowerment of women.

Underscoring the need for further expanding trade and investment cooperation between the two countries, the Prime Minister urged the Chinese government to increase imports from Bangladesh for narrowing the widening trade gap.

In this regard, she requested the Chinese government to allow duty-free excess to 34 Bangladeshi items to China as proposed by Bangladesh under the provision of the Bangkok Agreement.

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