

DHAKA TODAY

Seminar

On the occasion of holy Eid-e-Miladunnabi, Tarikot-e-Mawla Group, Bangladesh, will hold a seminar and milad mahfil. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 11.00am.

Discussion

Bangla Academy will hold a discussion titled 'Human Rights and Islam' in observance of holy Eid-e-Miladunnabi. Venue: Seminar room of the academy. Time: 4.00pm.

Buddha Purnima

Bangladesh Buddhist Federation organises a function in observance of Buddha Purnima with Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka as chief guest. Venue: International Buddhist Monastery, Merul Badda. Time: 5.00pm.

Peace procession

Sammitto Buddha Purnima Udjapan Parishad will take out a peace procession in observance of Buddha Purnima. Venue: Shikkha Bhaban, Abdul Gani Road. Time: 7.30am.

Nikita Mikhailov retrospective

Zahir Raihan Film Society in association with Russian Cultural Centre organises a 3-day retrospective on Nikita Mikhailov. On the second day, two films titled 'Cruel Romance' (1984), and 'Burnt by the Sun' (1994) will be screened. Venue: Russian Cultural Centre, Dhanmondi. Time: 3.00pm and 5.00pm.

Meeting

A meeting of Bangladesh Athlet Kalyan Samity will be held. Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur. Time: 5.00pm.

REHAB meeting

A joint meeting of REHAB and RAJUK will be held to discuss prevailing situation in real estate sector. Venue: Hotel Sheraton. Time: 11.00am.

Film show

Academy Film Society will screen one Indian film titled 'Dil Chahta Hai' and one

American film titled 'Score'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 3.30pm and 6.30pm.

DHAKA TOMORROW

Art exhibition

In association with Women's Initiative for peace in South Asia, Bengal Gallery of Fine Arts organises an art exhibition featuring 28 women artists of Bangladesh. Venue: Bengal Shilpalaya, Dhanmondi. Time: 5.00pm. The exhibition will remain open till May 20 from 12.00 noon to 8.00pm daily.

Nikita Mikhailov retrospective

Zahir Raihan Film Society in association with Russian Cultural Centre organises a 3-day retrospective on Nikita Mikhailov. On the third and last day, two films titled 'Dark Eyes' (1987), and 'Urga-the territory of love' (1991) will be screened. Venue: Russian Cultural Centre, Dhanmondi. Time: 3.30pm and 5.30pm.

Film show

Academy Film Society will screen one Japanese film titled 'Kitchen' and one American film titled 'One fine day'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 3.30pm and 6.30pm.

Discussion

South Asia Alliance for Poverty Eradication, Bangladesh organises a discussion on Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Venue: CIRDP auditorium. Time: 3.00pm.

Seminar

Rapport Bangladesh Limited will hold a seminar on 'Poverty, Unemployment and Gender Issue'. Venue: Zeenat Bhaban, Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. Time: 8.30am.

Conference

The inaugural ceremony of the national conference of Ganatantri Party will be held. Venue: Mohanagar Natyamancha, Gulistan. Time: 10.00am.

NGOs demand Tk 100cr fund to fight poverty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of non-government organisations (NGOs) sought a Tk 100 crore special allocation in the next budget for poverty alleviation, literacy and nutrition programmes.

They also proposed formation of an independent and autonomous body styled Bangladesh Small NGO Foundation for using the fund under various programmes.

The proposal was placed before Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman during a pre-budget discussion at the planning commission yesterday.

The finance minister assured them of giving special allocation in the next budget.

"I do not see any problem in giving them money, but we need some policy framework," Saifur told journalists after the meeting.

The finance minister however said the government had some reservations about a section of NGOs which are directly involved in political activities.

NGOs under the umbrella of the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh was led by former ADAB chairperson Rasheda K Chowdhury.

She observed the government should give special allocation for education of working children, elimination of urban poverty and providing water and sanitation facilities to the poor.

Executive Director of BRAC Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury, Chairman of the Bangladesh Shishu Odhikar Forum Abdul Huq, Kazi Rafiqul Alam of the Dhaka Ahsania Mission and SM Rasheduzzaman, country director of the Muslim Aid Bangladesh, were among the 19 NGO leaders present at the meeting.

Miladunnabi

FROM PAGE 12

gious organisations have chalked out programmes marking the day.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages wishing the Muslim Ummah on this occasion.

They urged all to follow the ideals and teachings of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) for upholding peace, fraternity and equality as well as ensuring welfare of the mankind.

Newspapers will publish special articles while radio and television channels air special programmes highlighting the significance of the day. The day is a public holiday.

Some solace

FROM PAGE 1

Mohsin's mother Monowara Begum was also satisfied with the judgement. "I am very happy," she said at the court premises.

But Sahana Begum Sanu, sister of Mohammad Saem, the other victim, was not happy, as she was not allowed to give statements before the court during the trial.

"I have lost my brother. But I could not say what I know," said Sanu. She alleged that the public prosecutor did not allow her to speak up as witness.

Saem's elder brother Syed Munna Hossain, who was present at the court, declined to comment on the judgement.

The main accused Sumon and his brother Sujon alleged -- before the court announced its verdict -- that they were politically victimised. Sumon shouted at the crowded courtroom, questioning the validity of the special tribunal.

Sumon's sister called the verdict politically motivated. His father Sultan Uddin Ahmed, acquitted of the charge, termed the judgement one-sided.

Defence lawyers said the convicts would appeal to the High Court against the judgement.

Mohsin and Saem were abducted from home at Sharat Kumar Das Lane on September 15, 2000. Later, their bodies -- severed into pieces -- were dumped into a manhole.

Chechnya

FROM PAGE 1

woman ran up to the crowd and blew herself up when a prayer was being read."

A Russian military spokesman, Colonel Ilya Shabalkin, accused the entourage of moderate Chechen rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov of having a role in organising the attack.

"Maskhadov, who is closely related to Arab mercenaries, is becoming increasingly close to terrorist leader Shamil Basayev," Shabalkin was quoted by Interfax as saying. Basayev is a top radical Chechen warlord.

The military official added that the attack was aimed mainly at Chechnya's chief mufti, Akhmad Shamaev, and other religious figures who were taking part in celebrations of the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed.

Chechnya is a mainly Muslim republic. An official in the pro-Russian administration, Shamsai Saraliyev, told Interfax that most of the victims were elderly people attending the religious event.

"We are still establishing whether there were any officials among the wounded or dead," Saraliyev said.

The blast came 48 hours after a suicide truck-bomb attack on a government building in northern Chechnya that killed at least 59 people.

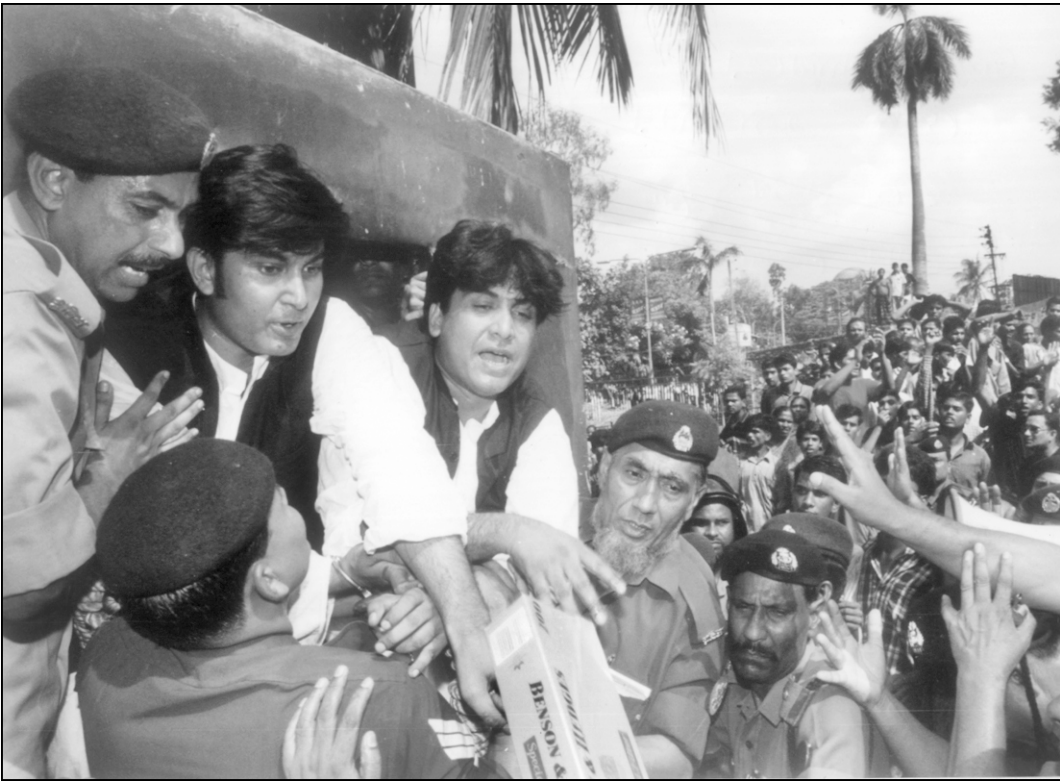


PHOTO: STAR

As the convicted in the Sutrapur double murder are taken away in a prison van, a cigarette carton is being given to them right in front of the policemen, posing security threat.

Governor

FROM PAGE 1

"No-one will be forced to retire, but anyone willing to retire will be welcomed to avail the opportunity," he said while briefing newsmen yesterday at the BB conference room.

Officials and employees of the bank have been agitating since Monday, protesting possible forced retirement.

The governor said the central bank's VERS is more attractive than similar programmes in other government organisations and it has been taken up following detailed discussions between the bank board and the government.

About the ongoing agitation, he said stern action would be taken against those trying to create chaos. "But we are ready to discuss with the agitators if they have any lawful demand."

He described extensively the 'central bank strengthening programme' to be implemented in fiscal 2003-04 and 2005-06 at a cost of \$ 46.13 million. Of the amount, the International Development Agency (IDA) will provide \$ 37 million and the government \$ 9.13 million.

He mentioned that Bangladesh Bank Automation Project, which

includes purchase of hardware, networking training and employing specialists, would cost \$ 32 million of the total fund.

Besides, six per cent of the fund will be spent for employment of local and foreign specialists and advisors for a smooth and timely implementation of the programme.

The reform plan also envisages reducing the 33 divisions of the BB to 27 and ranks of officials to avoid unexpected delay in taking decisions.

Fakruddin said, "Bangladesh Bank has been given much more autonomy now. To discharge the new responsibility, immediate modernisation of the bank with skilled manpower has become a must."

He went on, "VERS is a small component of the reform plan to screen out persons who are not skilled."

The governor further said, "Persons willing to retire voluntarily will be given a large amount of loan remission, an option to retire within a specified period, cash payment of 15 months' salary and all the money due as provident fund, pension and gratuity."

FBI hunts for Saudi bombers

FROM PAGE 12

US targets since the United States waged war on Iraq to stamp out terror and ousted Saddam Hussein.

"Whatever success they (al Qaeda) think they have achieved they will be sorry for, because this country is now united against them in every way," Prince Saud said in an interview on NBC's "Today" show.

An FBI spokesman in Washington said a team of agents had already left for Saudi Arabia. Saudi officials said the prime suspects in the blasts were a group of 19 al Qaeda suspects, who disappeared in Riyadh last week after a shootout with police.

A high-level Saudi security official said the army was erecting checkpoints all over the vast desert kingdom.

"We believe this group is behind the terrorist attack and suspect that they have links to al Qaeda," he told the news agency.

Officials and terror experts said the attacks bore all the hallmarks of Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network, the group blamed for the 2001 attacks on America which prompted a US-led war on Afghanistan to try to root it out.

The US ambassador to the

kingdom, Robert Jordan, criticised the Saudi authorities for not responding quickly to recent US requests for more security at the attacked compounds.

He also said the conservative Muslim kingdom where Saudis sympathise with bin Laden had a "long way to go" to ending terror attacks against foreigners.

"I do believe the crown prince... is sincere," he told NBC's "Today" show. "Executing their plan to provide additional security is another matter."

A US diplomat in Riyadh said the embassy would lay on evacuation flights for any of the 40,000 or so Americans living in the kingdom, the world's largest oil exporter.

The State Department also told dependants and non-essential staff at US missions in the kingdom to leave.

But despite the heightened security threat, many Western firms said they had no plans to walk away from the lucrative business to be had in the world's biggest oil exporter, which also has a huge defence budget.

AMERICATO CUT EMBASSY STAFF

The State Departments ordered

64 dead

FROM PAGE 12

China's market-oriented reform of the state-run coal sector is leading to increased mine accidents while the ruling Communist Party-controlled unions are ineffective in safeguarding workers, labor activists have said.

Last month, two major explosions killed 97 miners in China, with 72 dying at the Mengnanzhuang mine in Shanxi province in the north and 25 in a blast at the Mengjiagou mine in the northeastern province of Liaoning.

Official figures show nearly 1,600 miners died in Chinese mines in the first two months of the year.

Iraqi children

FROM PAGE 12

"This tragedy highlights the terrible danger that unexploded ordnance represents all around Iraq," Winmurst said.

Kathryn Irwin, a spokeswoman for the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), said the ordnance that exploded was an Iraqi rocket.

"There are thousands of stockpiles of weapons in Iraq," she told AFP.

The British army, which was unable to say exactly where the incident took place, has identified 350 unexploded ordnance sites in the governorate of Missan and has cleared 230, according to Major Cameron Day.

Land reform

FROM PAGE 1

to seek solutions to local problems with home-grown expertise and convey the recommendations to the government for implementation, he said.

He urged the civil society to update themselves on domestic problems and make the government resolve the difficulties accommodating the views of local experts.

M M Akash said some major issues, including the challenge of globalisation to the agriculture sector and proper use of rural workforce, were neglected in the election manifesto of the ruling alliance.

Fertiliser gobbles up much of the government subsidy to the sector, he said, adding the administration should raise diesel subsidy as 90 percent machines for irrigation were fired by it.

"Although contribution of agriculture to the GDP is decreasing, the government should raise investment in the sector to build food security," he said.

Professor Dr Mustafizur Rahman said as no political party promoted the culture of accountability, the hopes and aspirations of the common man were not mirrored in their actions.

He urged the government to increase investment in the agricultural sector, saying: "It brings greater profits, creates jobs and ensures food security."

Sheikh Md Faruk, former vice-chancellor of (AUB), asked the authorities concerned to go for genetically-modified (GM) food for higher yields as Bangladesh does not have a huge cultivable land.

Abul Hashem, a farmers' leader, said the government and the civil society should take a closer look at the rural economy.

"The condition of our farmers are much more fragile than we think. They do not have any economic foundation. The government sometimes takes initiatives for them, but their fruits rarely reach them," he said.

Dr Harun Ur Rashid, professor of agro-economy at AUB, called for widespread land reforms to improve the face of rural economy.

He urged the government to take some initiatives to create jobs

for the rural landless.

Professor Abidur Reza said farmers never got proper prices of their products. The government must consider the issue if it wanted to perk up rural economy and improve the living standard of farmers.

SM Bulbul put emphasis on raising poultry birds to satisfy the protein needs of people. Dr Salauddin Bhuiyan said infrastructural development could play a key role to rev up rural economy. It would raise the mobility of agricultural products and raise their prices, he said.

Dr Md Abdul Momen Mian said that both the government and non-government organisations should join hands to improve the situation.

Rokeya Begum, a local leader of the Mahila Parishad, said as women constituted 50 percent of the population, their capacity-building held key to national development.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 12

services.

"If there is a hospital in an area, it does not have the necessary equipment or doctors, while if there is a school in another area, it does not have the required number of teachers...these are not good signs for the country."

The finance minister said he never had such detailed pre-budget discussion in the past. He stressed the need for mobilisation of national resources and better performance on the part of the MPs.

A ruling party lawmaker requested the finance minister to allocate more money for the tourism sector so that it could generate employment substantially.

A lawmaker from Kushtia identified the poor communication network as the main reason behind the rise in criminal activities in the southwestern region and urged the finance minister to raise budgetary allocation for improving road communication in the region.

Another lawmaker stressed the need for overhauling the police administration, saying the law and order situation would not improve without such action.

Tender

FROM PAGE 12

Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in two categories -- liberation war and referendum. Seventeen books were on the life and work of Ziaur Rahman and three on Khaleda.

Publishers alleged that the list included books by a minister, several ruling BNP lawmakers, bureaucrats, committee members and their wives and friends.

Many books by unfamiliar writers were included in the list as textbooks, but many renowned writers were skirted, alleged the publishers.

The list's reference section enlisted 17 books on Ziaur Rahman, including speeches by Ziaur Rahman by SM Bipash Anwar, Zia Bangladeshesher Muldhara by Maruf Kamal Khan, deputy press secretary to the prime minister, Ziaur Rahman O Jatiyatabad by MS Doha, and Political and Ideological Philosophy of Zia by Prof Emajuddin Ahmed.

The list includes a book titled "Muktijuddho: Bangladesh Ziaur Rahman" priced at Tk 4,000 and written and edited by a cartoonist, Iqbal Hossain Sanu. Readers say the book is but a compilation of pictures and documents.

In the liberation war category, books included President Zia Kemal Ataturk of Bangladesh by Prof. Nisar Uddin and Eki Merur Dui Nakshatra -- Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda Zia by Ramkanta Singh, an unknown author.

A book titled Muktijuddhe Bilat Probashider Obodan by Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khondaker Mosharraf Hossain also

got an entry to the list.

Two books -- Chhotoder Soinik Zia and Jonotar Zia by Amirul Islam Kagoji, a journalist working with the Dainik Dinkal -- were also selected. Also, the books titled Bangladeshesher Gonotantra O Begum Khaleda Zia by Kawsar Iqbal, Zia Keno Janopriyo by AKA Firoz Noon, and Zia the Great by Mahmood Shafiq, director general of the National Book Centre and member of the selection committee, were enlisted. More than one selected book were authored by selection committee members.

Prof. Wakil Ahmed, who headed the committee, claimed that the committee tried to include books of higher standards.

"We had to select books from a list the publishers and authors submitted for consideration," he said. "So we could not include some good books, as they were not submitted."

The committee selected 200 books out of over 8,000 for secondary students.

The motive behind the selection was not only to please the ruling BNP but to promote unfamiliar books, sources alleged.

Last year, a committee selected as many as 52 books on Ziaur Rahman and Khaleda for public and college libraries.

The Awami League (AL) also enlisted books for libraries out of political bias. During its rule, the AL selected 34 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, seven on AL President Sheikh Hasina and 13 written by pro-Awami intellectuals.

Buriganga grabbers

FROM PAGE 1

(BIWTA) said the part of the river between Kamrangir Char and the flood protection embankment was not under their jurisdiction. It is the deputy commissioner's office that should look after the river there, he said.

The Daily Star yesterday found workers at sites busy scooping up sands from barges and filling up the river.

Of the six, the largest encroachment is taking place on the western side of the Steel Bridge, where the 'owner' has girdled a large portion of river with bamboo and fences.

Billal, a local man present at the site, said that one Hafiz, a relative of an influential person of that area, owns the first plot.

Haji Monir Hossain, chairman of the Sultanganj Union Parishad alleged that the entire stretch of the said area has been sold through loopholes in the law.

"What you see in front is not the river," said the chairman pointing at Buriganga.

"In fact, people are now showing ownership documents, receipts of khazna (land tax) on this 'land' dating back forty years," Monir Hossain said. "These people are very influential and we could do nothing to stop them."

Mohammad Noor Hossain, a businessman and long time resident of the area, meanwhile said the documents produced by the so called owners were totally fake and obtained through corrupt officials at the deputy commissioner's office.

"Recently, a former member of parliament from the Jatiya Party appeared with ownership documents of six acres inside the river and started to demarcate the area with bamboo," Noor said.

As the area was being filled up, about 7,000 local people gathered there to protest and eventually they forced the politician to withdraw his men.

"We are aware of the existence of about 26 acre government land in the river. But we want that land for a playground and a hospital in the area," he said.

The renewed onslaught on Buriganga comes at a time when the government has vowed to save it. A high-powered task force, comprising Minister for Shipping Akbar Hossain, government high-ups and distinguished citizens, is now working on freeing the river from encroachments and pollution.

WISPA

FROM PAGE 12

against women and trafficking.

As part of WISPA's initiative, a 34-member delegation from Kolkata came to the city yesterday under the theme of 'peace bus trip'. The Indian delegates also visited Pakistan before coming to Bangladesh.

Speakers said it is the women that are the victims in most cases of repression and violence, both in India and Bangladesh.

"The policy of all the South Asian countries should be such that people can live peacefully both socially and politically," Ayesha Khanam said.

"We will visit India within the next six months", Sigma Huda said. Among other things the visiting delegates are here to protest the push back attempts by India, she added.

The delegates include noted women personalities, human rights activists, writers, journalists and lawyers.

They will be in Bangladesh till May 20. They will meet the minister for women and children affairs, the home minister and visit various human rights organisations, trade unions, NGOs and meet with students and teachers.

The WISPA host committee comprises women leaders, human rights activists, actresses, singers and others.

Hamida Hossain, Salma Khan and Ivy Rahman also attended the conference.

Civil society watchdog

FROM PAGE 1

Andolon and Unnoyan Sangram Parishad, presided over the session titled 'Poverty Alleviation and Employment'. Professor Shamsul Islam, principal of Shaheed Nazrul Islam College, was the chief guest. Professor Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the CPD and Dr Binaek Sen of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) also spoke.

Economist Professor Atiur Rahman presented a draft brief and said, "We need structural and social adjustment to address poverty. People want to escape the curse of poverty. We have prepared a strategy giving some directions for poverty reduction and we would like to see them reflected on the government's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP)."

"There are certain issues like that of inequality which we would like the government to address immediately. The rich-poor ratio is on the rise. Unless the poor themselves have a say in policy matters, poverty reduction would remain a far cry. It is their rights and we must respect them."

Other speakers demanded creation of a social safety net for the poor.

"What we are witnessing in the name of poverty reduction is basically business. The NGOs are making money out of the poor with little development done to them," a speaker from the Bangladesh Agriculture University (BAU) said.

Many speakers observed that

poverty reduction policies are not discussed with the stakeholders and demanded free flow of information and access to all relevant documents prepared to help the poor.

Advocate Emdadul Haq said, "There are some NGOs which are making money by charging high interest rates for microcredit. If we really analyse the situation, it would transpire that the credit programmes do not benefit the poor. In fact, loans often become a big burden for them. Such loans with high interest rates should be banned."

Nurul Amin Kalam of the district Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) said, "A civil society vigilance group should be formed to monitor whether the funds for the poor actually reach them with any benefit."

Anil Bandhu Das of the Jatiya Party (Manju) said, "Before addressing the poverty issue, we should work for a corruption-free society. We cannot expect anti-poverty schemes to bring benefit unless corruption is eradicated."

Professor MM Akash of Dhaka University said poverty cannot be changed overnight since it is a gradual process.

But the most important part of poverty reduction is to bring the poor under a safety net or to form a 'poor man's corporation' so that they get share of the fund used for development.