

Condition-free foreign assistance demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Activists of non-government organisations yesterday demanded condition-free foreign assistance and achievement of self-reliance depending on domestic resources.

Ahmed Swapan Mahmud of Voice, Arup Rahi of Lokoj and Zakir Kibria of BanglaPraxis voiced the demands at a press briefing at Dhaka Reporters Unity office ahead of Bangladesh Development Forum meeting slated for May 17-18.

They observed that foreign aid to Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) dipped in the last 20 years. Foreign assistance constituted 10 per cent of the GDP in the 80s which now stands at 4 per cent, they said.

They said donor money returned to them in a raft of ways, adding in the last 30 years there were Tk 1,80,000 crore foreign aid in the public sector, of which Tk 1,35,000 crore returned to donor agencies or countries in different forms. And the most of the remaining amount was gobbled up by their local mediators.

They criticised the role of International Monetary Foundation (IMF), World Bank (WB) and the United States Aid (USAID) in granting loans and aid

Schoolgirl raped, killed in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Miscreants raped a schoolgirl and then killed her at village Gobindagunia of Mirpur upazila on Thursday night.

Police said a gang of six led by one Imrul of the village stormed into the house of one Mehbul at about 11 pm and abducted her daughter Runa Afroz, 14, a student of class eight of Mirpur Girls' High School, at gunpoint and took her to a field nearby.

The gang raped Runa by turn and then slaughtered her.

Police recovered the body yesterday morning and sent it to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

Victim's father filed a case with Mirpur police yesterday accusing Imrul and five others.

None of the gang was arrested till yesterday evening.

Four activists

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blast at a Jamaatul Mujahideen den in Dinajpur town, police said.

During preliminary interrogation, the arrested claimed themselves as members of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami.

Police suspect the fanatics gathered at the frontier town to carry out subversive activities at the ongoing trade fair as well as cinema halls and other places.

Hearing the news, Deputy Commissioner of Dinajpur Muhammad Mosleuddin and Police Super SM Kamal Hossain visited Panchagarh yesterday.

DHAKA TODAY

Film show

Academy Film Society will screen an American Film titled 'Solaris'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6.30pm.

Publication ceremony

The publication ceremony of a book titled 'Bangladesher Ahanker Begum Khaleda Zia' by Momtaj Khan will be held with Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed as chief guest. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 4.00pm.

Human chain

Bangladesh Awami Anjibji Parishad will form a human chain to protest the reinstatement of a convict in Bangabandhu Murder case, an accused in Jail Killing case and switching off of the microphone of the opposition leader in parliament. Venue: Dhaka Judge Court. Time: 10.00am.

BCL discussion

Bangladesh Chhatra League organises a discussion to mark the home-coming day of Awami League President Sheikh Hasina. Venue: Teachers Students Centre of Dhaka University. Time: 3.00pm.

Seminar

Amra Suryamukhi, a socio-cultural organisation, will hold a seminar on Sheikh Hasina's 22 years in national politics: Our gains and expectations. Venue: Seminar room of the Central Public Library, Shahbagh. Time: 5.00pm.

Memorial discussion

A discussion will be held in memory of writer Khandaker Mozharul Karim on the occasion of his 49th birth anniversary.

Child Repression Control Act to be amended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 'Women and Children Repression Control Act, 2000' would be amended shortly to prevent its abuse, Minister for Law and Parliamentary Affairs Moudud Ahmed said yesterday.

He blamed the law enforcers for the abuse of the law.

The law minister was addressing a discussion on 'Child Repression Existing Law and Implementation' organised in the city by 'Save the Youth Forum'.

National Professor Dr MR Khan and the publisher of the daily Jugantor, Advocate Salma Islam, also addressed the meeting.

"We must protect the rights of children through abolishing child labour," Moudud said, emphasising the role of the guardians.

National Professor and child specialist Dr MR Khan said there are anomalies in determining the age of children as laws in this respect are not clear.

He informed the meeting that 7,445 reports of violation of child rights were published in different national newspapers last year, while in 2001 the number was 3,776.

In the first four months of the current year, 194 children were killed, 19 were raped prior to killing, 176 children were raped and 25 came under acid attack.

He urged the government, civil society and NGOs to raise awareness to save the environment.

Lauding the initiative of Nature Alliance, he said the UNEP would work closely with it to improve the environmental situation in Bangladesh.

Chief Engineer of Dhaka WASA Qazi Mohammad Sish depicted a gloomy picture of water supply system in the capital city. About 20 per cent of the city population do

Khosru

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Secretary Nurul Islam from the abduction case. It also demanded rescue of Khosru and exemplary punishment to the persons involved in the kidnapping.

JK Siddiqui who was expected to address the rally as the chief guest could not attend.

However, the minister in a written speech expressed deep concern over the abduction of Khosru. He directed the administration to rescue the victim and find out the kidnappers.

The minister in his speech reportedly claimed that a person like Sitakunda BNP general secretary Nurul Islam could never be involved in such a crime.

On the other hand, local sources and people claimed that around 300

workers in six trucks were hired and brought from some local industrial units to hold the meeting where there was no local participation.

38 killed

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blaze was sparked by a burning cigarette or an electrical short-circuit, while Aaj Tak television quoted officials as laying the blame on a bursting cooking stove.

It is impossible to identify the bodies as most of them are charred and our estimate is that 38 people have died, although some of the bodies may have been burned into two," a railways spokesman said at the site.

The roof of one of the carriages melted in the heat, a rescuer said, adding the fire appeared to have started from that coach, packed with 70 passengers.

The economy-class carriages at the rear of the express were burned, they said, adding the bodies of 35 of those killed were brought out from a single coach.

PTI adds: The Commissioner for Railway Safety Bhupinder Singh on Friday began his inquiry into the Frontier Mail rail tragedy with a visit to the hospitals where the injured are convalescing.

He visited Dayanand Medical College and Christian Medical College hospitals where those injured in Thursday's mishap are admitted, officials said.

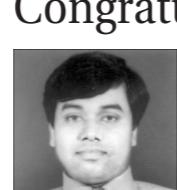
Singh is also expected to inspect the three damaged coaches of the train which have been brought to the local railway yard.

Relatives are still trying to identify the bodies of the victims of a devastating train fire in northern India.

At least 38 people in the fire which broke out on the Golden Temple express train in Punjab state on Thursday.

It is still not clear what caused the fire and an investigation has been ordered.

Congratulations



The Dhaka University has conferred PhD on Md Hanif Uddin, chair and assistant professor of the Department of Information Science and Library Management, University of Dhaka, for his thesis entitled 'Assessment of information needs for the agricultural scientists and researchers in Bangladesh', says a press release.

Dr Hanif is the eldest son of Md Hurmuz Ali Talukder of village Razabari under Kalihati thana, Tangail.

By contrast, the officials who

'Launch campaign for sustainable use of natural resources'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A senior official of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) yesterday laid importance on massive campaign for sustainable use of natural resources as Bangladesh is most vulnerable to environmental changes.

Bangladesh should step up campaign to raise awareness about various environmental threats like climate change, said Peter Repinski, associate expert of the UNEP in Asia Pacific region, at a roundtable in the city.

Peter, stationed in UNEP office in Bangkok, is now on a visit to Bangladesh.

Newly floated 'Nature Alliance' organised the roundtable with the slogan 'Little Care Today, Better World Tomorrow.'

Presided over by convenor of the Nature Alliance Mohiuddin Babar, it was addressed by environmental experts, eminent educationists, journalists, members of the civil society and professionals.

The UNEP official said Bangladesh is on the list of countries which are at high risk of environmental changes.

He urged the government, civil society and NGOs to raise awareness to save the environment.

Lauding the initiative of Nature Alliance, he said the UNEP would work closely with it to improve the environmental situation in Bangladesh.

Chief Engineer of Dhaka WASA Qazi Mohammad Sish depicted a gloomy picture of water supply system in the capital city. About 20 per cent of the city population do

not have access to WASA water, he said.

The city faces a shortage of 13 crore litre of WASA water each day while around 45 per cent water is being wasted, he said.

The chief engineer blamed the big government offices and institutions like secretariats and Dhaka Medical College Hospital for the wastage of water.

He called for sustainable use of water and said that the current crisis can be resolved to a great extent if the wastage and leakage of water are stopped.

He added that there were two gas field development schemes - the Fenchuganj gas field, and the Srikail gas field projects waiting for government funding for a long time.

Dr Maruf

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he did not return.

Latif said they searched nearby areas on Wednesday night but could not find him. His body was found floating in a pond the next morning.

Policemen recovered the body and sent it to the Comilla Medical College Hospital. After autopsy, the body was handed over to Maruf's elder brother Rezaul Karim. Later, the body was taken to Dhaka.

Polybag

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we are aware that some factories are still manufacturing these illegally," said the official of the DoE.

"As these factories spring up in residential areas, it becomes increasingly difficult for us to detect them. Even then we intend to dismantle them as soon as possible," said another source at the DoE.

A nation of shopkeepers?

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the city dwellers has gone up. Economists, however, tend to take the view that the mushroom growth of shops has nothing to do with the strength of the country's economy. Backed by the economic indicators, they say the growth of the manufacturing sector has not been a definite pointer and the purchasing power of people has not improved substantially.

The question still remains how the viability of the big shops, particularly big shopping complexes, can be explained. Are they invisible mechanisms for utilisation of black money that may have been invested in such big enterprises?

True, the manufacturers of indigenous products are benefiting from the increasing number of sales outlets. But it is also true that under the policy of free economy unnecessary imports sometimes enter the local market. In some cases, smuggling adds to the woes of the economy. Since a wide range of consumer goods are imported into the country, it is easy to have shops in posh and middle class areas that are packed with foreign biscuits, fruit juice, cheese, corn-flakes, etc, and also other luxury products.

It may be that due to better quality and import costs, the prices are rather high. But the number of affluent people has also become larger as evidenced by the very large number of cars and other imported vehicles plying the city

roads. These people can easily afford the high prices of the imported consumer goods. In this situation, indigenous products which may not be of comparable quality take a beating in competition with the imported commodities. The end result is that, left to the market forces, the development of the shopping facilities starts at the top where there is more surplus money to spend on non-essential items.

As of now, the precise number of shops and markets approved by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is not available. There is, however, no doubt that the real figures will be much higher than those shown on the DCC list. Add to these, the mini-bazaars (not shopping centres) selling meat, vegetables and other items and thriving not only near government offices and business establishments but also on pavements. This gives a very broad view of the retailing business in the city. Many such non-formal trading spots can be seen in crowded localities like Motijheel, Baitul Mukarram, Gulistan and Mirpur Road between New Market and Mohammadpur and many other congested localities in the city.

There are a large number of pavement hawkers selling a wide variety of consumer articles at lower prices. They are encroachers, but the only extenuating factor that can be advanced in their

favour is that such pavement hawkers need to earn a living by whatever means they can legitimately adopt to keep their body and soul together, and until they are rehabilitated at suitable places, the problem needs to be viewed from an humanitarian angle.

In the heyday of imperial glory, Britons were called a nation of shopkeepers by their detractors.

Are we lagging far behind?

The finding was kept a secret till April 2001.

Water from seven out of 17 deep tube-wells of the municipality was found contaminated much above the permissible level. Two deep tube-wells were sealed off recently as arsenic level was more than 1 mg/l.

Besides, a recent survey shows water from about 60 per cent of more than 2,000 shallow tube-wells installed at private initiative in the town is also contaminated.

The municipal areas with contaminated water include Namangal, Nakhrajpara, Durgapur, Kathalbagicha, Halabandha, Nayensukla and Chandai.

It also established the Expenditure Review Commission and Revenue Reform Commission.

"We will explain delays on the remaining pledges made at the Paris meeting and the government will map out the ways and strategies for the remaining reforms," said a high official at the Economic Relations Division (ERD).

Government representatives of Australia, Austria, Japan, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Russia, Britain and the United States will attend the meeting.

Representatives of the development community including the World Bank (WB), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Asian Development Bank (ADB) will also take part.

Vice-President of the WB for South Asia Meiko Nishimizu and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahaman will co-chair the meeting.

A preparatory meeting was held

On the first day of the last session, the House witnessed a bedlam over the war on Iraq. Almost all the treasury benches shouted at the opposition as if Iraq was a forbidden word in parliament.

The opposition deputies were trying to bring the killing of innocent Muslims in Iraq to the chair's notice.

In the last few sessions, opposition lawmakers were barred from raising a number of issues of public importance including price spiral of essentials, deteriorating law and order, rising crimes, repeated ferry accidents, rise of fundamentalism, corruption and local body elections.

In the last session, the House turned down 113 notices on recent issues by the opposition legislators.

The issues included pushing of Bangla-speaking Indians into Bangladesh in the US terror-risk list and the Iraq war.

Police arrested Tulu, former UP chairman of Naogaon Union of Sonargaon Upazila, along with a group of 10-12 people came to Taltala bazaar at around 9:00 am.

The rowdy group who were heavily intoxicated barricaded the Narayanganj-Narsingdi road for more than an hour and stoned buses and minibuses until police rushed to the spot and removed the barricade