

World Social Summit

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"Some groups in the WSF are against the terrorists," she said with regret.

While most delegates at the Mumbai Resistance were Indian, the participants' list was a kaleidoscope of far-left movements from Turkey to Italy to Chad.

Organisers, however, said the Mumbai Resistance drew 2,000 people, far below the attendance across the street.

At the World Social Forum, activists ranging from pacifist South Korean students to Indian street vendors handed out leaflets, marched to drumbeats and staged impromptu theatre to press their cause.

Jose Bove, the radical French farmer and emblem of the anti-globalisation movement, urged activists to find alternatives to the World Trade Organisation, which he charged was dictating rules for agriculture even at the village level.

Jeremy Corbyn, a British member of parliament, used the forum to urge a common front against Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Corbyn was joined by Palestinian civil society activist Mustafa Bargouti, who charged that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was biding time as the United States was unwilling to press him during a presidential

election year.

"I urge the world to note our sufferings and force Israel to stop building the wall that Sharon is building in our territories," Bargouti said.

Critics of the World Social Forum, which has drawn little interest from the Indian media, say the gathering focuses only on abuses in the world without offering concrete alternatives.

Individual organisers of the Mumbai meeting have charged alternatively that it is focusing too much on the Iraq war or excessively on Indian issues, mostly the centuries-old Hindu caste system.

Iranian rights activist Shirin Ebadi, the 2003 Nobel Peace laureate, agreed with the Iraq focus but stressed there was more the meeting could discuss.

She said there was "not so much balance" in the selection of speakers, with the opening night seeing only one voice from Europe: British MP and anti-war activist Corbyn.

"This meeting is for a better world and needs to focus on all current international issues and one of the most important ones is the problem of Iraq," Ebadi told AFP.

She stressed the forum could also work to ensure universal protection of human rights and to ease income disparity around the world.

Musharraf faces quit

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Daulatana, like other passengers, was not informed about the reason for the diversion and alleged that it was intended to prevent her from attending the speech, telling The Associated Press by telephone: "What kind of general is he who is scared of a woman?"

The speech capped a highly charged two weeks. Musharraf struck a deal with Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to start talks on resolving the standoff over Kashmir; the military has stepped up operations in tribal borderlands to hunt down al-Qaida fugitives; and a car bombing injured 15 people outside a church in the southern city of Karachi.

"We have to carry out operations against foreign elements in our tribal areas, which can be a cause for terrorism, with full force," Musharraf said.

Amid accusations that Pakistani nuclear technology has proliferated to Iran, Libya and North Korea, Musharraf promised to strengthen Pakistan's deterrent while stressing the need to "assure the world that we are a responsible nation and will not use nuclear weapons spread."

Musharraf concluded his speech with a salute and punching his fists in the air. Shouts of protest continued undiminished.

3 GIs, 2 Iraqis

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the country's most controversial military deployment since World War II.

The troops move into Iraq next week and any casualty could rock Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's government.

"We are making history today. It is the first time that we have Japanese troops going into a combat zone since World War II," US forces spokesman Captain Randall Baum said.

In Washington, Bremer expressed "doubts" about Shia demands for elections before the transfer of power, but said: "These are questions that, obviously, need to be looked at."

He said Washington may alter the way a transitional Iraqi assembly is selected and make other "clarifications," but gave few details.

The speech marked a turning point for Musharraf in a transition from military to nominally civilian leader, following a deal with a coalition of hard-line, pro-Taliban religious groups that paved the way for him to finish his five-year term as president until 2007.

The arrangement came just days after Musharraf survived the second of two attempts to assassinate him by suspected Islamic militants, who despise him for allying Pakistan to the United States in the war on terrorism.

Musharraf secured the support of a majority of lawmakers in Parliament and the four regional assemblies, after promising hardliners that he would step down as chief of the army -- where real power lies -- by the end of 2004.

The president remains deeply unpopular among partisans of former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, both of whom are in exile. Musharraf overthrew Sharif's government in a bloodless coup in 1999 and dismissed Parliament.

JRC meet

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Bangladesh Ayub Qadri arrives in New Delhi tomorrow to hold talks with his Indian counterpart A K Goswami.

The main focus of the discussion is likely to be on the Teesta water-sharing. The joint committee of experts will also formulate processes for water-sharing of the Dudhkumar, Muhuri, Dharla, Khawai and Gomti rivers.

So far, the two sides have failed to agree on a draft for an interim accord on sharing Teesta water. They were also unable to finalise the terms of reference for a joint study on demand and availability of waters on the six rivers.

In contrast to the minister-level New Delhi meeting of the JRC in September last year when both sides crossed swords on India's river inter-linking proposal, the forthcoming meeting is expected to be effective, sources said.

The Bangladeshi delegation is likely to reiterate its opposition to river inter-linking project at the coming meeting, they added.

Thai tariff concession

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Khaleda and Thaksin had a 45-minute talks at the Prime Minister's Office soon after the Thai premier flew in Dhaka on a day-long visit to attend an international business conference organised by the Bangladesh chapter of International Chamber of Commerce.

Establishment of a regional road network and enhancing bilateral cooperation in trade and commerce and regional forums came up for discussion between the two leaders, Foreign Secretary Shamsher M Chowdhury told newsmen after the meeting.

The Thai prime minister assured Khaleda of all possible cooperation in Bangladesh's economic development, including in the tourism, aviation and transport sectors.

Thailand want to be a partner of development in Bangladesh, Thaksin said and lauded the leadership of Khaleda and Bangladesh's foreign policy.

The two leaders underscored the need for early implementation of a road network linking Bangladesh, Thailand and Myanmar. They agreed to form a tripartite committee after consulting Myanmar to work out details of the project.

They expressed the confidence that the road link would enhance economic activities, including trade and tourism in South and East Asia.

About a joint venture project for construction of an elevated highway in Bangladesh, the Thai prime minister said the two sides can start negotiating the project after necessary followup actions.

During the meeting, Khaleda sought Thai cooperation for development of tourism and enhancing airport facilities in Bangladesh. Increasing air links between

Carrot of free time fools them all

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Nilphamari

Grameen mobile phone users throughout the district actually wiped off some minutes from their pre-paid and post-paid phone cards while trying to pocket some free talk time. A prankster successfully tricked them into making 10 unnecessary calls.

In the early hours Wednesday, GrameenPhone (GP) users received a text or sms (short message service) that deluded the credulous bunch to take it as an official announcement coming from the GP. The message read: "Grameen Phone celebrates being the largest service provider in Bangladesh. Forward this sms to 10 subscribers and get 100-taka talk time free."

To grab the boon, unsuspecting phone users became enthusiastically busy in forwarding the message to 10 other subscribers, who in their turn also fell for the ruse. The number of deceived GP users thus multiplied in geometric speed.

Their enthusiasm started to fizzle out only when they noticed that -- upon forwarding the message 10 times -- they were not getting any free talktime.

The next day, many of these simple folks called the GP customer service and got irked to learn the unpleasant truth -- that it was not GP's message, that GP did not offer any free talk time at all and that they had been duped.

"By sending 10 text messages, a subscriber like me spent 23 taka for nothing," says Zakir Hossain. "Even if only 1,000 users have fallen for it, they have wasted 23,000 taka!"

Bangla-China Consultations starts in Beijing today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The sixth round Bangladesh-China Bilateral Consultations starts today in Beijing with a view to widening cooperation as well as reducing the huge trade gap between the two countries.

A Bangladeshi delegation headed by Foreign Secretary Shamsher Momin Chowdhury last night left for a three-day visit to Beijing.

The meeting will discuss bilateral, regional and international issues, sources at the foreign ministry said.

The meeting will also review the progress of the agreements signed during the visits of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to the China and Chinese premier to Bangladesh in 2002. The two countries will explore new areas of cooperation.

"China is our important trade partner, but we have also huge trade gap with China. We will try to find ways to reduce the gap and increase understanding on political, economic, trade, cultural and consular fronts," said an official.

Invited by Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi, the Bangladeshi team will also meet Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing.

PCJSS

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In Rangamati district town on Monday, demanding their "equal rights" and "co-existence" in the CHT.

Pahari Chhatri Parishad (PCP) also dismissed the PCJSS demands and demanded abolition of the CHT Regional Council and District Councils.

In a memorandum submitted to the prime minister on January 15, it also demanded the removal of PCJSS demands and demanded abolition of the CHT Regional Council and District Councils.

The Thai premier said they noticed development in the Saarc Summit and added that it was good for South Asia. He also apprised Khaleda of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) Summit in Bali where a treaty on amity was signed.

If this cooperation continues, Asia can easily resolve its economic problems, particularly the alleviation of poverty," the Thai premier observed.

Referring to the forthcoming BIMSTEC meeting in Thailand, Thaksin said it would create an opportunity for further economic cooperation in South East Asia.

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Mob stones Altaf's

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refused to resist the robbers.

They said traders of Kasba cattle market deposited Tk 7.5 lakh with Safizuddin Sarder, a trusted local trader, on Thursday evening as the bank was closed before they could complete transaction and Friday bank holiday.

Safizuddin kept the money in the iron box of his pharmacy, Janata Medical Hall, at Torki Bandar. At around 4:00 yesterday morning, a band of robbers barged into the drug store through the back door and tied and beat Safizuddin up for the money. Sensing the swoop on his neighbour, grocer Dwijen Chandra alias Jantu Mandal rushed to Torki Bandar RRF police camp and asked for help.

However, police declined to come to their aid and instead, detained and interrogated Jantu, locals alleged. When Jantu tried to alert the locals by shouting at the top of his voice, RRF constables Sagar and Kamal allegedly threatened to kill him right there. Police freed Jantu only after the robbers slipped into safety with the booty.

The police officials assured them of immediate action against the criminals and punishment to the police personnel who neglected their duty. The highway was eventually opened to traffic at 1:00am.

A case was lodged with Gourangi Police Station without naming anyone and no body was arrested nor anything recovered.

Deputy Inspector General, Barisal Range, Golam Mustafa admitted the robbery, but denied that bricks and vegetables were thrown on the motorcade.

Amendment to constitution

FROM PAGE 1
tant bills are expected to be passed in this session.

Earlier yesterday, a high-profile meeting between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and nine of her senior cabinet colleagues discussed the details of the draft proposal to bring vital constitutional amendments to increase the seats.

The meeting finalised the draft of the bill expected to be placed before tomorrow's cabinet meeting for approval.

As per the expansion plan, 400 lawmakers will be elected through direct voting while the 50 reserved seats would be distributed proportionately among parliament. A party commanding no less than eight lawmakers in parliament will have a woman legislator, the meeting observed.

Despite staying off the House, the AL is likely to flex its muscle in the streets, as the government is set to take some unilateral decisions in this session.

It has been away from the House since the last budget session in July last year and put several demands before the government since as preconditions for its return.

The president will address the inaugural day of the New Year's session at 4:00pm today. The Business Advisory Committee headed by the speaker will sit at 3:30pm to fix the schedule of the session.

Speaker Jamin Uddin Sircar yesterday said that he would not take any step to bring the AL back to the House.

"I am unlikely to have any desire to initiate any step to bring the opposition to parliament after the main opposition's 15-point demand and the opposition leaders' comment on parliament," the speaker told newsmen at his office at the Lativa Sangsad. With almost no chance of AL's change in stance regarding joining the House, the main opposition party would stage protest against the unilateral government move to raise the seats.

The bill on raising the number of seats in parliament will be passed in the eleventh session. The AL has already rejected the government's plan terming the initiative "motivated."

"We must further protest the government's motivated plan on increasing seats in the Jatiya Sangsad. As the government is doing

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Hartal enforced

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The dawn-to-dusk shutdown call was supported by the ruling BNP, Jamaat, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Jatiya Party and several other socio-cultural organisations.

Members of Khulna Press Club brought out a procession yesterday morning. Similar processions were brought out by political parties to express solidarity with the hartal call. The marchers chanted slogans condemning the murder and demanding arrest of the killers immediately. They also demanded resignation of the home minister.

Meanwhile, the police commissioner has punished four policemen for misbehaviour and assault. Inspector Abdul Gafur, ASI Ali Ahmed and Constable Momin were withdrawn for misbehaving with a number of pro-hartal activists and Inspector Ahmed Molla of Detective Branch of police was closed to Police Line for assaulting a picket in the hartal.

"Police are yet to get any vital information from the arrestees," said a police officer, requesting not to be named.

The sources said the puller of the rickshaw that was taking Manik home from Khulna Press Club was tracked down yesterday, but the tight-lipped BNP did not confirm the report.

Unofficial sources said the rickshaw of Hazer, 35, was found at a Karikar Para garage under Daulatpur Police Station.

Police recovered his body from WAPDA embankment near a primary school.

Bagerhat superintendent of police (SP) said the slain outlaw was wanted by the joint forces in a murder case.

On Thursday night, PBCP Janajuddho armed cadres stormed the house of Syed Abdul Hannan Chishti at Majhiarha village under Tala upazila allegedly to extort money. Abdul Hannan is father-in-law of Shaikh Tayebur Rahman, mayor of Khulna City Corporation (KCC).

Police said the raiders were looking for Syed Mominul Islam, Tayebur's brother-in-law and an assistant teacher of Tala Girls' School, to collect Tk 50,000 which they had asked for earlier.

Not finding him home, the outlaws fired five blank shots and issued death threat to Mominul for not meeting their demand.

Sub-inspector Abdul Khaleque of Tala Police Station said Mominul laid down his life for the cause.

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