

Mumbai dances to anti-Bush beat

ZAFAR SOBHAN, from Mumbai

Opposition to the policies of the US under President George Bush was the dominant theme on the third day of the World Social Forum here yesterday.

The wrongs of the Bush administration, from its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq to its support of Israel to the destructiveness of its trade policies, were singled out for condemnation by anti-globalisation activists at the WSF, who held weighty conferences and staged raucous processions and performances decrying the malign influence of the US on world affairs.

Day 3 kicked off with a conference on Third World debt, global trade, and investment and privatisation, organised by the Filipino NGO Jubilee South, named for the global movement for write-off of Third World debt. Despite the early hour, several hundred delegates, mainly from

Asia and Latin America, took part in a debate on the link between Third World debt, privatisation and the inequities of the global trade regime.

The conference criticised the destructive impact of the IMF- and World Bank-dictated structural adjustment programmes on Third World economies and the US sponsorship of neo-liberal economic policies and unfair trade laws. "It is America that is the main force behind the unfair rules that dominate the world today," Jubilee South activist Edi Aguilar explained.

Meanwhile, author-activist Arundhati Roy, who was a featured speaker at the plenary session here Friday evening and is one of the stars of the WSF, took time out to address the Mumbai Resistance, an alternative forum organised by left-wing activists who consider the WSF to be too moderate and conciliatory.

Speaking to an audience of over

a hundred across the Western Express Highway from the WSF, Roy said she hoped Bush would suffer the same fate as Saddam Hussein and issued a call to launch a campaign to shut down Halliburton and Bechtel, two giant US firms that have received billion dollar contracts to reconstruct Iraq from USAID.

"If Saddam Hussein deserves to be humiliated and have his fillings counted and his hair checked for lice on primetime TV, then so does George Bush," she told the approving crowd of far-left activists.

Roy is slated to speak later in the evening when, with Egyptian feminist author Nawal el Saddawi and Bangladeshi Secretary General of Amnesty International Irene Khan, she headlines a conference titled "Wars against Women, Women against Wars", focusing on gender issues related to armed conflict.

The Coalition for Nuclear

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A healthcare centre at Muggdapara in Dhaka vaccinates a child against polio yesterday. About 2.4 crore under-five children were up for countrywide oral vaccination under the first round of 12th National Immunisation Day. Six lakh volunteers along with 80,000 health and family planning field staff were deployed to carry out the campaign, the second round of which will be held on February 29.

PHOTO: STAR



Anti-Ahmadiyya move 'very worrying': Irene

AFP, Mumbai

Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan said yesterday the treatment of the minority Ahmadiyya sect in Bangladesh was "very worrying."

Bangladesh earlier this month banned publications by the sect following pressure from Islamic hardliners allied with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government to declare the sect non-Muslim.

Irene, in Mumbai for the World Social Forum, noted that the government had at the same time effectively ensured the security of an Ahmadiyya mosque that was under threat.

"It is a very worrying sign that the government is sending mixed messages," Khan told the news agency.

"In situations like this, you have to nip in the bud the start of the trend towards intolerance," she said.

The Ahmadiyya movement was founded in the late 19th century in what is now Pakistan with the professed goal of reviving Islam by

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PHOTO: STAR

Teachers and students of mass communication and journalism at Dhaka University parade through the campus in a procession yesterday to protest the killing of New Age newsman Manik Saha in Khulna.

6 to walk gallows for Russell killing

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A tribunal in Dhaka yesterday sentenced six people to death and two to life imprisonment after convicting them of killing industrialist Russell Bhuiyan in Narayanganj in 2000.

Mohammad Abu Hanif, judge of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-3, cleared one of the accused of charges in a trial of nine people.

Russell died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital from bullet wounds he suffered in fire in his home village in Rugganj on August 26, 2000.

The convicts to be sent to gallows are Al Hasib bin Jamal, Almas, Anif Mahmud, Abu Taher, Mohammad Khawja and Mohammad Sohrab. Jahid Hassan

and Monir Hossain were jailed for life.

The home ministry recommended withdrawal of the charges against Hasib, the main accused, but the tribunal rejected it after scrutinising the case diary and other documents.

The tribunal acquitted Moinuddin, as the charges against him could not be proved beyond doubt.

Of the convicts, Taher, Khawja and Sohrab are now in custody, while Hasib, Almas, Anif, Aslam and Monir have been evading capture since the incident.

According to the 34-page verdict, the convicts with death sentences can appeal to the High Court against

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'Chatters' led to security clamp at US embassy in Dhaka: official

AFP, Dhaka

The United States said yesterday a rise in the pickup of "chatter" by intelligence agencies was behind its decision to tighten security at its embassy in Bangladesh.

"The intelligence pick up what is called 'chatters' and when the chatter level goes up it is a reason to be concerned," State Department spokesman Philip Reeker told reporters in the city.

Reeker is on a trip to several Asian countries and will fly to Pakistan Tuesday.

The State Department on Thursday said in a statement in Washington that security had been beefed up at its Dhaka mission and that travel restrictions had been

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48-hr blockade in CHT from today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) districts will remain isolated for 48 hours from this morning due to a road blockade and hartal programme called by different regional indigenous political parties and organisations.

The CHT situation may turn volatile as the Bangalee community has also drawn up a programme to oppose the blockade and the shut down.

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) enforces its 48-hour road blockade programme in three hill districts to press home its four-point demand. At the same time Bharat Pratyagata Jumma Sharanarathi Kalyan Samity, the platform of the indigenous

internal refugees, has called a 48-hour hartal from today in Khagrachhari only in demand of food rations throughout the year.

The government has deployed police forces and strengthened army presence at different points of the three hill districts.

The PCJSS demands are full implementation of the CHT peace agreement, appointment of a leader of ethnic origin to the post of chairman of the CHT Development Board by removing Wadud Bhuiyan MP, pulling out of all camps of army, ansars and Village Defence Party from the hill areas and handing over of the charge of CHT Affairs Ministry to a full-fledged minister of ethnic origin.

The PCJSS announced the

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LDCs' MARKET ACCESS WTO on course to devise a formula

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), by June, will come up with a framework to ensure market access of the least developed countries (LDCs) to the developed ones, WTO Director General Supachai Panitchpakdi said yesterday.

The WTO members have already started a post-Cancun dialogue to formulate the modalities for ensuring that, he told pressmen at Hotel Sonargaon prior to his departure from Dhaka. "We believe it will not take much time. By the middle of this year, these

modalities will be worked out."

A small group of WTO members will hold a meeting next week to restart the Cancun dialogues that ended amid disagreements last year. Supachai said. "A new negotiation group will be formed. Then more dialogues will be possible."

"Works for future negotiations are underway. I am impressed with the commitment of the member countries shown in the post-Cancun scenario -- especially the commitments made by the US and the EU," he added. "They are all interested to resume the talks."

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Physician rescued after abduction

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives rescued DR MA Qaiyum, president of Bangladesh Medical Association, Bagerhat unit, from Nakhla para in Dhaka hours after his abduction on Saturday and arrested three suspects last night.

After Qaiyum's kidnap from Topkhana Road, the abductors called his family in Bagerhat and demanded a ransom of Tk 10 lakh for release.

The callers asked the family to take the money to Dhaka's Fuller Road, where the detectives led by Additional Deputy Commissioner Ali Akbar Khan arrested the gang of two men and a woman in the act of receiving the money at 9:30pm.

The intelligence from the arrestees led to the rescue of the physician.

Notebooks sale goes unabated despite ban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is no sign if the government will clamp down on the traders flooding the markets with primary-madrassah-level notebooks despite a ban on their printing and publication.

Booksellers are selling notebooks even in front of the law enforcers, students and guardians alleged.

Government had imposed a ban on the publication and sale of notebooks up to class eight but none has been held for infringement since the enactment of the law in 1980.

One accused of this offence

faces imprisonment for upto seven years and fine of Tk 30,000 or both, according to the law.

Some publishing houses are bringing out notebooks in the name of guidebooks and even putting up advertisements of those in newspapers and magazines.

A section of unscrupulous booksellers compel students and guardians to buy notebooks with the compulsory textbooks of the board, students and guardians alleged. Price of a notebook is three to four times higher than that of a textbook.

During a visit to the city's retail bookshops it was found that booksellers sell textbooks only when

notebooks are purchased.

When asked a retailer at Bakushah hawkers market at Nilkhet in the city admitted that they are selling notebooks with madrassah level textbooks as they were also forced by the wholesalers to buy those.

"As madrassah books offer very little return, we are left with no other alternative than to sell notebooks," said another book retailer on condition of anonymity.

The price of ebtadaye (primary) level madrassah textbooks ranged between Tk 7 and Tk 10 while a notebook is sold for over Tk 35.

The government has published

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AL not going to JS to listen to abuses Hasina tells cultural activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said they would not go back to parliament just to be on the receiving end of 'relentless abusive speeches' the ruling coalition deputies hurl at the opposition legislators.

"We cannot sit in parliament only to add to its beauty and let the ruling alliance men utter abusive words against us," Hasina said and accused the government of not allowing the main opposition to speak in the House.

The AL has been skipping par-

liament sessions since June 25 last protesting what it said were a state minister's indecent remarks against Hasina, also the leader of the opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS).

Hasina also criticised the government move to bring amendments to some constitutional provisions in the current Jatiya Sangsad session and said people will not accept such amendments.

She was exchanging views with a group of cultural activists on the next course of anti-government movement at the party's

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2 hurt in BL College blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two young men were injured in a bomb explosion on the roof of a student dormitory of Government BL College in Khulna last night, police said.

The bomb went off at Mohsin Hall, controlled by the Jamaat-e-Islami-backed Islami Chhatra Shibir, when it was being built.

It could not be confirmed immediately whether the injured were students.

Prayer Timings		
January 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-45	6-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-40	5-46
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Dolphins on the decline

PINAKI ROY

Dolphins popping out of the water are fun to see, but are now an increasingly rare sight.

Freshwater dolphins, popularly known as shusuk, are rapidly disappearing from rivers.

Contamination of rivers, siltation and falling fish populations are the main causes of their decline.

Experts describe their decrease in the last two decades as "alarming" and estimate that numbers are down to a few hundred.

"Just a few years back, dolphins could be sighted in all major rivers around the country. But now they can be found only in some big rivers, such as the Padma and Karnaphuli and

some others in the south," said Ainun Nishat, the country director of the World Conservation Union (IUCN).

"Three decades ago there were dolphins in the Buriganga near Dhaka, which you don't see anymore," he added.

In an attempt to save dolphins, two British and American organisations, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society (WDCS) and Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), joined the IUCN in a feasibility study on the creation of dolphin sanctuaries.

They pinpointed over-fishing as a major cause of the decline in numbers. They also reported that dolphins became entangled in bank-to-bank fishing nets,

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River dolphins were once a common sight, but now they face threats from pollution, erosion and degradation of their habitat, as skeletons of river dolphins, right, bear the hallmarks of the endangered species.



PHOTO: BBC ONLINE / WWF INDIA ONLINE

Sylhet shrine blast toll reaches 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

With the death of another victim of bomb explosion at Shahjalal's shrine in Sylhet at a hospital yesterday, the death toll from the violence rose to five.

Tamjid Ali, 45, of Inatabad village in Sadar upazila died from his wounds at MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital at 4:30pm, hospital sources said.

Two people were killed on the scene when a potent bomb went off in the middle of a huge crowd that gathered to listen to mystic songs at Urs at the shrine on January 12.

Three others died from their wounds at the hospital later.

A Sylhet court yesterday sent six arrestees suspected to be behind the blast to jail after the expiry of their

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