

HR fully compatible

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The heavyweight conference, which attracted an audience of several hundred delegates, also featured, among others, Iranian Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi as opening speaker, Indian social activist Aruna Roy and Senegalese President of the International Federation for Human Rights Sidiki Kaba.

The speakers focused on the impact of globalisation on human rights in the developing world.

"Globalisation has meant an improvement in the lives of only a small minority, but for the vast majority [it] has meant further cultural, social and economic marginalisa-tion," said Sidiki Kaba.

Aruna Roy pointed out that economic rights are human rights and that a sufficiently adverse impact on one's economic situation constitutes a denial of human rights.

The speakers said the new economic order must be assessed by how well it protects human rights and economic development for the few would not justify globalisation if it came at the expense of the human rights of the poor and marginalised.

Khan expanded on these ideas in her interview with The Daily Star immediately after the conference, but advocated for a more nuanced position than that of the rest of the panel.

"Amnesty considers globalisation a political system and we do not take positions on the rights and the wrongs of political systems," she said. "We are interested in critiquing the human rights situation within the system, not the system itself."

There is nothing intrinsic to globalisation that renders it a danger to human rights, she said. Rather, it is the rules that govern the globalisation of the world's economy and how globalisation is implemented by governments around the world that could be considered a threat to human rights.

Body found in Mohakhali

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tejgaon police recovered the body of a young man from Mohakhali yesterday.

Police recovered the body of Rafiqul Islam Rana, 24, from behind Metropolitan Hospital at around 11:45am.

The body had injury marks in the lips, head and neck with hands and legs tied with sweater and trousers, police said.

Miscearans strangled Rana, son of Awlad Hossain, sometime on Sunday night and dumped his body in sewer, police suspect.

However, the reason behind the killing could not be known.

The victim's family identified the body the next day, police said.

"Rana left his Mohakhali residence at around 10:00pm on Sunday to drop his elder sister Rima Sayed at her Nakhhalpara house but did not return," said his brother-in-law Mohammad Panir.

Rana returned home from Malaysia last year and was trying to go there again, relatives said.

A case was lodged with Tejgaon Police Station.

Manik killing protest Journalists block Rajshahi-Dhaka Highway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Journalists in Rajshahi yesterday observed a token road blockade programme on the Rajshahi-Dhaka Highway demanding punishment to the killers of Khulna journalist Manik Chandra Saha.

They also demanded immediate arrest of the murderers.

For 30 minutes, about 100 journalists blocked the highway at Shaheb Bazar point from 11:00am. Activists of various socio-cultural organisations also joined the programme.

Later, they took a procession to the office of Rajshahi deputy commissioner and handed him a memorandum to place it before the prime minister.

In the memorandum, they condemned the killing and demanded punishment to the killers.

Meanwhile, journalists in Chittagong hold a two-hour long work abstention programme at their offices today demanding immediate arrest of the killers of Manik.

They will also observe token hunger strike programme tomorrow to press home their demand.

Demanding punishment to the killers, mass communications and journalism department at Chittagong University brings out a mourning procession on the campus today at 11:00am.

CHT blockade

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press home its four-point demand.

Bharat Pratyagata Juma Sharanartha Kalyan Samity, an organisation of indigenous refugees repatriated from India, called the hartal demanding food ration for the refugees throughout the year.

The PCJSS demands full implementation of the CHT peace accord, appointment of a leader of ethnic origin to the post of CHT Develop-ment Board chairman by removing Wadud Bhuiyan MP, withdrawal of the army camps, ansars and Village Defence Party from the CHT and handover of the charge of the CHT affairs ministry to a cabinet member of ethnic origin.

Besides, the new draft has also excluded another important clause on environment issues and placed labour law and labour standard issue in the preamble instead of putting it in the clauses.

A high government official is likely to go to Washington next month to further discuss the proposed deal.

The US is insisting on retaining a clause in the earlier draft, which aims

Shun overtaking

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Ministers, MPs, city planners and local leaders attended the function, also addressed by Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, DCC Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka, Works and Housing Minister Mirza Abbas, Managing Director of Belhasa Accom Majid Belhasa and DCC Chief Executive Officer Mohammad Habibur Rahman.

Four-and-a-half-month ago, the prime minister also inaugurated the work on the first commercial-cum-parking complex in Motijheel Commercial Area.

Addressing the function, the prime minister hoped that the implementation of the two commercial-cum-parking complexes would reduce traffic congestion in the busy commercial area to a large extent.

She pointed out that the Dhaka city was not planned as a capital of an independent country and the matter was overlooked for a long even after independence, leading to unplanned growth and traffic problem.

The prime minister said her government had initiated development efforts that include construction of flyovers at some of the important points to remove the accumulated problems.

She also said the government was contemplating to set up underground railway in the city for which foreign assistance has been sought.

Airport Road facelift

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month of restraint, a poor country like Bangladesh wastes a lot of money on the prime minister's and president's iftar parties that the report described as politically-directed and wasteful.

Perc that completed its term on December 31 said the poor could have benefited from the fund and the government could have spent the sum on annual allowance for senior citizens or widows on the eve of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

The report also says government agencies waste hefty funds by using cars for extra hours and the ministries tend to buy luxury cars, as there is no purchase policy.

AIRPORT ROAD
Perc cited the Airport Road beautification project under the communications ministry as the worst-case example of state fund waste.

The report voiced surprise that Communications Minister Nazmul Huda expressed ignorance about the project when Prime Minister Khaleda Zia asked him about it at a meeting that came amid a glut of news reports on the wasteful plan.

Hostile politics taints

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way they sometimes act in domestic politics'.

Clasen, who has over 50 years of links with the local business community, said the image of Bangladesh in Germany and in the German business community "especially ... is heavily affected, with your country being reported to be one of the worst places to do business [in]".

"Such reputation is doing gross injustice to your country," Clasen told the luncheon.

Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, German Ambassador in Dhaka Dietrich Andreas and BGCCI President Peter E Albrich also spoke.

Long-term planning and reliability are the most important prerequisites for convincing new potential partners in Germany, Clasen told the Bangladeshi businesspersons.

On privatisation of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the German business leader said a new owner of a privatised SoE does not get adequate cooperation from the government when it comes to getting credits from the financial institutions and hassle-free utility

connections.

He said foreign investors want assurance of regular power supply at reasonable rates for investment.

"The government should fulfil the goal of bringing the entire country under power supply network by 2020 to meet the investors' need," Clasen observed.

Diversification and upgradation of the textile industry are required for sustenance after the phase-out of multi-fibre agreement in 2005, he suggested.

Clasen said the container handling capacity of Chittagong Port is absolutely inadequate. The port labour is highly disciplined and presence of unions at the port is fuelling strikes, he added.

German Ambassador Andreas said time has come to do away with the practice of complaining of corruption and so on in Bangladesh.

According to Andreas, exports to Germany from Bangladesh increased 17 percent in first nine months of 2003 while Germany's export to Bangladesh went up 2 percent during the same time.

BGCCCI President and also Managing Director of Siemens Bangladesh Ltd. Peter E Albrich said Bangladesh's economic growth rate is quite impressive.

Dhaka reviewing

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business leaders and trade experts with Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury in the chair.

According to sources, business leaders vehemently opposed the incorporation of labour issues in the draft, saying in that case the US may impose sanction on Bangladesh exports to its market. They referred to the ongoing dilemma that Dhaka is in over how to allow trade unionism in the export processing zones (EPZs).

"In fact, the revised draft is much improved than the earlier one but it still has some clauses including one on intellectual property rights that may prove harmful to the country in the long run," a ministry official said, seeking anonymity.

The US has proposed promotion of investment climate and expansion of trade in services. On the other hand, yesterday's meeting decided incorporating trade in goods and tariff in the revised draft.

"TIFA will be a platform for trade and investment and there is no significant difference between US and Bangladesh on the issue," the commerce minister said after yesterday's meeting.

A s s i s t a n t U S T r a d e Representative Ashley Wells visited Bangladesh in August last year and met Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed to discuss the proposed TIFA. Both agreed to set the joint council on trade and investment.

The council would primarily be tasked with monitoring trade and investment relations, resolving problems and identifying business opportunities and issues such as intellectual property rights, labour rights and environmental concerns.

The report came after the chairmen of the three committees said at a seminar on December 14 that they were facing difficulties delivering their duties because of shortage of logistic support and neglect of the government and parliament.

The slow functioning of the public accounts committee, Perc says, could not dispose of audit objections submitted to parliament.

"Its main objective to ensure watch of the Jatiya Sangsad on the executive was interrupted," the report says.

The public estimate committee, formed to discipline the management of government budget, could not work in line with the rules of procedure of the House, Perc observes.

The public undertaking committee, tasked with ensuring accountability in government organisations, could not perform effectively although corruption and mismanagement are rife in the state organisations, it says.

A meeting chaired by the prime minister on January 1, 2003 decided to spend Tk 20 crore in two years on the facelift of the 6km stretch of the Airport Road from Zia International Airport to the Staff Road Rail Crossing.

The communications secretary wrote to the principal secretary on March 9, requesting him to ask the Planning Commission to grant the ministry Tk 6 crore for 2003 and Tk 14 crore for 2004 for the project.

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) laid out a similar project, estimating the cost at up to Tk 40 crore to spend on road beautification and increasing its stretch to 7km.

The Planning Commission that received the proposal on May 6 found inconsistencies between the RHD plan and the prime minister's decision and two pre-Ecneec (Executive Committee of National Economic Council) meetings in June and September slashed the cost down to Tk 25 crore.

The original proposal outlined a cost of Tk 1 crore for renovations to 12,000 square metres of Airport

Road dividers and the revised plan retained the component without showing its cost, Perc said.

"It means both the ministry and RHD knew during revision of the proposal that the renovations to the road dividers would not be undertaken," Perc said.

From early September before the revised proposal was approved, the RHD started demolition of the dividers on the road.

"The design and construction (of the dividers) were of international standards ... they were suitable for long-time use. It was illogical to replace them with new dividers," Perc said.

Again on September 16, the revised proposal was placed at Ecneec for approval, but the road divider component was excluded from it this time, meaning the dividers would not be demolished.

But the demolition was going on in earnest the same day and Khaleda visited the site and instructed the authorities to stop it.

"When the communications minister was asked about the divider demolition, he said he was in the dark about the matter. His ignorance is really surprising, especially when the task is undertaken by an agency under his ministry on an important road and newspapers published reports with photographs," Perc said.

Perc also blamed the communications secretary for being inconsistent and said he approved two project proposals on May 7, 2003 -- one on upgrading the Banani-Tongi-Joydevpur Road to an eight-lane highway and the other on the Airport Road facelift.

The next day, he suggested at an inter-ministerial meeting that the two projects should not be separately undertaken.

DB men 'beat up' maids at Azam Reza's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of Police yesterday went to the residence of Azam Reza, the prime accused in the Jayanti Reza murder case, and beat up three maids on the pretext of interrogation, Rini Reza, sister of Azam Reza, alleged.

One of the maids is now undergoing treatment at a city hospital, she added.

The police detectives accompanied by the investigation officer (IO) of the case also asked them to withdraw the statement they had given to Gulshan police, an allegation the IO refuted.

Zia's birth anniversary observed

BSS, Dhaka

The 68th birth anniversary of late president Ziaur Rahman, founder of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), was observed yesterday.

Party leaders, workers and members of different socio-political and cultural organisations converged on the mazar premises in the morning to pay homage to their great leader. They placed wreaths at the grave and offered munajat, seeking peace of the departed soul.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia went to the mazar and placed wreaths. Ministers, BNP standing committee members, MPs, party leaders joined prime minister to pay respect to the late president.

Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Jamir Uddin Sircar and Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister and Secretary General of the BNP Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and senior leaders of the party also placed wreaths at the grave.

Robbers loot Tk 5 lakh in presence of 'patrol police'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Robbers looted goods worth about Tk 5 lakh from a convoy of 10 trucks in presence of patrol police at Rajapur area of Pabna--Nagarbari Highway yesterday.

Agitated truck drivers and villagers barricaded the Dhaka--Pabna Highway yesterday till noon disrupting road communication for some hours.

A police nayek and five other constables of Sathia Police Station have been suspended for neglect of duty. They are nayek Nafis Uddin, constables Azizur Rahman, Salim Uddin, Shakhawat Hossain, Ibrahim Hossain and police van driver Abdus Samad.

Police arrested one Mahon on suspicion of his involvement with the robbery.

Truck drivers alleged that the robbery happened in front of the patrol police, but they did not come forward to stop the looting of goods from the trucks that continued for about two hours. But the villagers came to help them after hearing their scream, the driver said.

60,000 cases

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government formed separate magistrate courts to deal with the PDB cases to ensure that these cases do not get lost in the quagmire of millions of other cases at lower courts.

Before 1988, general courts used to deal with these cases and most of them would remain unresolved. To bring order back to the crisis-infested PDB, the government formed 16 exclusive courts by 1994.

These PDB courts can clear 14,000 cases a year at most, but every year there are about 4,000 to 5,000 more cases that they are unable to resolve, sources said.

As a result, there were 43,000 cases pending with the PDB courts in 1999-2000, according to official records. Next year, the number went up to 48,000 and in 2001 to 51,000. In the 2002-2003 fiscal year, the number of such pending cases stood at 56,728 and at the end of the first four months of the current fiscal year the number has shot up to 60,000.

Most of the pending cases are shelved in Chittagong North and South courts of the PDB. Out of the 60,000 unresolved cases, these two courts have more than 26,000.

The other PDB courts that receive more cases than they can handle are those in Tangail, Khulna, Rangpur, Pabna, Jessore, Faridpur, Noakhali, Comilla, Mymensingh, Barisal, Dinajpur, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Bogra.

Apart from bringing the power thieves to book, another goal of these courts was to augment revenue collection. A smooth and just legal system was supposed to drive consumers to behave appropriately and

BNP

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The issues that were in media attention will also figure in discussion, sources said.

Since the four-party alliance was voted into office, the BNP held two parliamentary party meetings and its coalition partner Jamaat 12, while the main opposition Awami League held 18 meetings until the launch of the 11th session of the Jatiya Sangsad on Sunday.

Of BNP's two meetings, the first elected BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia its parliamentary party leader and the second in June 2002 made a resolution leading to resignation of former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

Rejoinder, our reply

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regulations. "Therefore, the mention of doubling the project cost in collusion with contractors as reported in your newspaper is not based upon facts."

It adds, the estimated amount for procurement of goods and construction was Tk 8643.60 lakh.

"During scrutiny by Titas Board it was found that there was an error in the original estimates and it was ultimately corrected as Tk 9190 lakh," the rejoinder states. Therefore, Titas Board constituted a committee to inquire into the estimates of the project cost. The committee submitted its report to the energy secretary, also chairman of Titas Board, who had initiated the inquiry, it mentioned.

"The decision on this inquiry had no relation with the state minister. Even the file concerned did not go up to the state minister. So, the question of the state minister's protection of corrupt officials and his inaction against them cannot be raised at all."

The rejoinder insisted that the pipelines are being constructed mechanically as specified in the contract. "The pipelines are being laid under due supervision of site engineer and experienced staff and the progress of work is being monitored daily by Titas Gas engineers," it claimed.

It added there is no report of pipe fracture to Titas from any source. The photograph shows a smaller diameter pipeline with RCC coating is being laid manually in a marshy low-lying site and this does not reflect the whole situation at the construction sites. Dredgers will be taken to the river-crossing sites as per the contract.

Our reply: Our story described

WB recommends

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itself for the retirement of more senior officers and inspectors."

"There is no legal provision to directly hire skilled manpower from the private sector, but we can hire external experts, say, for two years to train our officials," the finance minister told the WB team.

Currently 3,000 approved positions stand vacant in the NBR because of the stop in appointments.

The report noted that most of the current NBR staffers had no education in relevant tax administration functions.

It backed an NBR request to modify the selection criteria of the Public Service Commission, the body responsible for recruitment, for selection of more commerce and accounting graduates.

The report detected serious flaws in performance appraisal of staff and termed current remuneration as 'below the living wage', observing that the reward for hard-working and honest professionals was inadequate.

As options to address the problems, the report recommended three steps: the development of a special reward scheme for detection of individual evasion cases, a supplementary reward scheme based on

pay their bills regularly. PDB officials said. But these courts failed to project a strong image due to a number of reasons.

"Under the present system, the PDB courts issue warrants through police offices concerned. But the police offices put electricity-related cases low on their priority lists," said a PDB official. He cited an example: "Last year, police offices in Bogra kept 1,162 warrants issued by the PDB courts pending."

This is not the only handicap of the PDB courts. As per the rule, no-one below the rank of an assistant engineer can file a case. But, the PDB has a scarcity of assistant engineers and their frequent transfers leave many suits deadlocked.

There is also a shortage of magistrates. Again, when a magistrate is transferred, his replacement may join many months later. For instance, the Barisal PDB court does not have a magistrate since April last year. Between 1997 and 2000, there were no magistrate at the courts in Noakhali, Comilla, Barisal, Jessore and Tangail.

The PDB authorities also appear to be reluctant in directing the courts. This is reflected in the fact that although the PDB is supposed to organise a meeting with the magistrates of these 16 courts every three months, it actually held only one in the last two and a half years.

N'ganj JP office

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set up JP office in it. Since then JP's signboard was hanging there.

A leader of BNP's youth wing Jubo Dal said that during the Awami League rule, the local BNP office was raided three times and set on fire. The party's signboard was replaced with a 'bastuhara' (homeless) committee signboard and recorded speech of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was played aloud from there. Osman family was responsible for all these acts, he added.

A group of Jubo Dal activists might be behind Sunday's incident in retaliation for the past acts, he said seeking anonymity.

No-one from the district unit of Zia Academy was available for comments on the matter.

District BNP President and State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim said, "I have no idea who is responsible for the incident but I am sure they are not BNP activists. The district BNP has nothing to do with the incident. I strongly condemn it."

how the Titas Board misled all approving authorities by falsifying the estimates involving the costs of construction and purchase of goods. The rejoinder itself states, "During scrutiny by Titas Board it was found that there was an error in the original estimates and it was ultimately corrected as Tk 9190 lakh".

The rejoinder did not mention that the 'scrutiny' found this small 'error' after approval by all the authorities concerned. It deliberately chose to use the combined costs of purchase of goods and construction instead of giving the breakdowns.

Our story gave the breakdown of these two costs. The original approved estimate puts construction cost at Tk 27 crore (plus 10 percent contingency cost) and goods purchase cost at Tk 57 crore. After the small error was corrected, the revised estimate puts construction cost at Tk 57 crore (plus 10 percent contingency cost) and goods purchase cost at Tk 31 crore. And the ministry does not see the anything wrong in it?

The state minister sought to show he had no links to the investigation report although he played an active role in the contract awarding. He told The Daily Star, "It's true that I did not allow re-tendering because it would have increased the project cost further."

The Daily Star also reported that there is no supervision of the construction works in general. Since there is no supervision, there is no complaint to Titas. It pointed out the issue and put the photograph as evidence.

Before claiming that everything is being done as per contract, the ministry itself should investigate the whole work.

performance and greater autonomy to the NBR in implementation of policies and remuneration in the wake of thereward.

Quoting Bangladesh investment climate survey's identification of the NBR as the highest informal payment receiving government organisation, the report added more strategies to fight corruption there.

Additional strategies include a precise legal framework, transparent procedures and mandatory declarations of wealth by tax officials and their immediate families.

"We want to give a corporate structure to the NBR," Saifur said, pointing out a lack of coordination among the revenue realisation departments -- the customs, Vat and income tax."

The WB report also asked for the continuation of the PSI system since new PSI agents needed to provide the NBR with detailed computerised information on values and classifications that are yet to be realised.

On the PSI, the finance minister said the decision on the PSI system would be taken after evaluating the capacity of the NBR in three months.

The NBR is now implementing an information system development project to acquire the capacity.

Pvt fixed line phone

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(BTBT), does not have adequate interconnection to share with prospective fixed phone operators.

Interconnection is a system that enables one telecoms operator to communicate another through an exchange.

"The move to bring in fixed phone operators without resolving the interconnection issue will only put in place fixed phone intercom system like mobile-to-mobile phones in the country," one expert said.

He said like the mobile-to-mobile subscribers, fixed phone intercom subscribers would not be able even to call for ambulance, police and fire service.

Mobile-to-mobile telephony was developed by the country's cellphone operators in the face of interconnection scarcity.

Considering the scarcity of interconnection, private mobile phone operators have spent about \$2 million on having a separate tandem exchange to resolve the interconnection issue.

Four cellphone operators have about 18 lakh mobile phones, of which only two lakh have the main-frame fixed line access.

The BTRC is considering inviting proposals from parties interested in operating fixed phone. "We (BTRC) will go for an open licensing regime," BTRC Chairman Syed Marghubur Murshed recently told The Daily Star.

The BTRC, however, is also formulating guidelines to resolve the interconnection issues.

The telecoms regulator should encourage floating of infrastructure companies before bringing private operators into fixed line telephony to solve the interconnection riddle, said Dr. MA Awal, former research team member of US-based Lucent Technology and Bell Laboratory.

Allowing infrastructure companies to come into being will help ensure interconnection for both fixed and cellphone operators.

The BTRC may also think of awarding more licences for fixed phone service, technically referred to as Public Switched Telephone

Water talks open

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officials in Dhaka told The Daily Star yesterday.

Of the seven rivers on the JCE agenda, priority will be attached to sharing of the Teesta waters, sources added.

The coriparian countries have so far struck water-sharing treaty on only one river -- the Ganges -- in 1996, while talks continued on the seven others.

Headed by water resources secretaries of the two nations, the JCE is an expert-level supportive body under the Indo-Bangla Joint Rivers Commission (JRC).

The 36th JRC meeting, slated for a January 16 start in Dhaka, was postponed on Indian request, paying way for the JCE meeting to precede the JRC meeting.

Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed told The Daily Star recently that Dhaka and New Delhi would reset the postponed meeting of the JRC, headed by water resources ministers of the neighbouring nations, after the JCE meeting.

Talking to The Daily Star on Sunday night, Tawhidul Anwar Khan, member of both the JRC and JCE, hoped that the sixth JCE meeting would try to make major progress in Teesta water-sharing.