

India wants end to nuclear sanctions

AFP, Kalpakkam

India has urged the West to remove blocks on the transfer of critical nuclear technology, offering an assurance that New Delhi had effective tools to prevent proliferation.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said India, which declared itself a nuclear state with a string of weapons tests in 1998, was determined to carry on with its atomic energy programmes to augment the country's ailing conventional power sector.

"India will not be the source of proliferation of sensitive technologies. We will ensure that those technologies, which we already possess, will be effectively safeguarded," he said at a nuclear facility in this southern Indian city yesterday.

"While we are determined to use our indigenous capability to fulfil our national interest, we are doing so in a manner that is not contrary to the larger goal of nuclear non-proliferation," Singh said.

Singh criticised the US-led sanctions which were slapped on rivals India and Pakistan after their first nuclear tests, saying such

restrictions harmed development.

"Technology denial and closing avenues for international cooperation in such an important field is tantamount to denial of developmental benefits to millions of people, whose lives can be transformed by the utilisation of nuclear energy and relevant technologies," he said.

Singh did not name rival Pakistan but made reference to recent disclosures of proliferation from the neighbouring country.

"India remains faithful to the 'atoms-for-peace' policy despite the well-known and glaring examples of proliferation which have directly affected our security interests."

"(And) constraining those who are responsible and rewarding those who are irresponsible -- the international community should face up to the implications of the choice," he said in Kalpakkam, the hub of the country's civilian nuclear programme.

India, which refuses to endorse either the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty or Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, hopes to generate 20,000 megawatts of electricity from its atomic powerplants by 2020.

OMS enters third day

FROM PAGE 12
has opened 160 OMS centres at 80 markets in the capital, no such centre was found yesterday at different kitchen markets including the ones at Indira Road, Hatirjheel, Mohammadpur Town Hall, Banani and Gulshan.

Locals, roadside vendors, shopkeepers and many other people in the areas said they do not know of any OMS drive, and buy rice from market as usual at higher prices.

Rickshawpuller Shahidul of the city's Shahjahanpur area, while waiting for passenger at Gulshan-2 kitchen market, said, "I don't know of any OMS centre either in my area or in this area. I am to buy one kg of rice at Tk18 or more."

Saiful Islam, a vendor at Mohammadpur Town Hall market, said he has seen OMS programme on television but has not seen any sale centre in the market.

Many people at and around Mohammadpur Krish Market also expressed their ignorance about the government drive.

Inside the market, this correspondent saw one Delwar Hossain, on behalf of dealer Rokeya Begum, selling OMS rice to three people at a shop in a murky and narrow alley.

Delwar said more than 300 kg of rice

was sold out by 12:30pm but failed to show any record.

The OMS centre at Palashy kitchen market was closed by 12:30 pm and the dealer claimed the day's allotment of 513 kg rice was already sold.

Wife of a Dhaka University house tutor alleged, "Dealers sell only a small portion of OMS rice to poor people and sell the rest to traders at a higher price."

A dealer, Khurshed Alam, however said, "It is a profitless job as we have to bribe food officials to get the OMS allotment."

Prices of minikit rice in the city's retail markets were Tk 22-24 a kg,

Najirshail Tk 20-22 and Pajam Tk 18.

Traders however said wholesale prices of coarse rice has come down and it will take some more days to have its impact on the retail prices.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports that sale of rice at most of the OMS centres yesterday was done within two hours, hardly leaving any impact on retail rice market.

"The allocation is too inadequate but the rush of people for it is high," said one dealer, Shahjahan Ali.

Buyers at Lalpur upazila in Natore district alleged OMS dealers were selling rice to traders instead of poor consumers. Ruling BNP members were appointed as dealers, they said.

Two factions of BNP clashed in Lalpur on Thursday over appointment of dealers, leaving three local leaders of the party injured.

Rajshahi regional Food Controller AZM Mansur Hossain however said 603 tonnes of rice was sold on Thursday against 1,544 tonnes allocated. A total of 1,957 dealers have been appointed in 16 northern districts for OMS programme, he mentioned.

Our Barisal correspondent reports OMS sales started at 15 centres in the city yesterday. But rice price in retail market remained unchanged.

The daily allocation of 510 kg rice was too inadequate to meet the requirement.

Our Bogra correspondent said OMS operation started on Thursday with 258 dealers in the district with five in Bogra town.

Sources said the allocation of 510 kg of rice could be given to only about one-fourth of people who queued for it.

Similar reports were received from Natore, Jaipurhat and Naogaon.

In Comilla town, OMS rice was selling at different shops at Tk15 to 17 a kg, another report said.

Compensation

FROM PAGE 1
on 11 September 2004 ordered the SR Steel Complex to pay Alam's father Siddiqur Rahman Tk 21 thousand in compensation for his son's death.

On October 4, Siddiqur Rahman approached an advocate of the labour court for filing a vokalatnama for receiving the compensation money. But the lawyer turned down his request demanding Tk 3,000 as fee.

"The following day, I offered him Tk 500 that was all I had with me, but to no effect," Siddiqur Rahman told The Daily Star, "I even knelt down to his feet but he got harsher."

"An advocate named AKM Mohiuddin Chowdhury noticed my plight and advised me to seek help from the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust," he added.

"Blast finally got me the money," he said with gratitude.

Though nothing could compensate for the loss of his son, yet for the family living in abject poverty a reasonable amount of compensation could at least ease things for some time, said Siddiqur who grappled to run the family.

Alam's father and relatives said they bore the cost of Alam's treatment despite financial hardship.

But the factory authorities in a report claimed that they had borne all the expenses and made arrangements to send Alam's body to his home at village Daranhat in Thakurgaon.

Siddiqur Rahman alleged that the owner and officials of SR Steel Complex despite repeated appeals did not extend any sort of help -- it is in treatment or in sending the corpse home.

The chief factory inspector later in a report said that an 'uncontrollable back boiling' in the furnace had accounted for the accident.

An official of the Bangladesh Steel Mill Owners' Association seeking anonymity said, "Workers engaged in such hazardous jobs are supposed to wear helmets, gloves, goggles, leather boots and asbestos aprons as protection against such fatal accidents."

More ammo hauls

FROM PAGE 1
magazines with 47 bullets of rifle, 2945 bullets of M16 rifle, 169 anti-aircraft ammunition and 77 bullets of machinegun.

Acting on a tip off, a team of BDR led by Naikhangchhari zonal commander Lt Col Hasinur Rahman conducted raids on Goanchara, Goalmara and Boiddiyapara near Baishari area under the upazila and seized the arms and ammunition kept under the ground, BDR sources said.

In another operation, joint forces of the army and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) yesterday seized two SBBL guns, one wireless set, one mobile phone set, seven sets of army uniforms, and toll receipts from Baidhaphara area under Roangchhari upazila in Bandarban.

They also arrested six criminals and demolished a temporary hideout of the gang.

A huge contingent of army and BDR conducted the raid following Friday's three-hour long gunbattle between the army and armed miscreants at Roangchhari upazila in which two army officials were seriously injured.

Meanwhile, the fate of two abducted Bangalis (non-hillmen) has become more uncertain as hoodlums moved from Betchhara deep into the forest after the Friday's gunbattle.

Earlier BDR jawans on October 16 and 21 seized two AK47 rifles, 44 bullets of AK47, 1556 bullets of M16 rifle, 37 wireless sets and nine binoculars from different areas of Naikhangchhari in three different operations.

Judge

FROM PAGE 12

statement on behalf of the families.

In the verdict, the judge himself admitted that there had been serious flaws in investigation of the case, but strangely enough, he did not ask for further enquiry, said Nasim.

He said the judge did all this only to pave the way for acquittal of the rest of the killers when the case would be moved to higher court.

Mohammad Nasim and other members of the families once again described the judgment as a farce.

Earlier on October 20, a Dhaka court sentenced three to death, 12 to life imprisonment while acquitted five in the long-drawn judgement in historic Jail Killing Case. The families outright rejected the verdict.

They said they are determined to challenge the verdict in the High Court.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at the press conference declared to mobilise the people in protest against the judgment.

Nasim said it is not only the present BNP-Jamaat alliance, the government of Ziaur Rahman too had halted the trial.

"Former president Justice Sayem formed an inquiry commission immediately after the killing, but president Zia slapped a freeze on the commission's activities after taking power at gunpoint."

"After assuming power in 2001, the present government of Khaleda Zia first transferred the investigating officer Kahan Akand and then dismissed him from the job. Then they replaced the public prosecutors appointed by the Awami League government with those loyal to them," he continued.

Syed Ashraful Islam, son of Syed Nazrul Islam, said, "We, like the public, are utterly disappointed with the SCBA had no right to take such a decision. It also asked all lawyers to attend the function at 10:30am today."

The SCBA started boycotting the CJ's court in protest against the August 22 appointment of 19 additional judges to the High Court, terming it 'political appointment.'

The boycott started on August 30, two days before the SC went on summer vacation.

The CJ, all the judges and lawyers of the Supreme Court exchange greetings after long vacation at a get together, which is a convention of the court.

"If the newly appointed judges attend the function, we will not be there," SCBA Secretary Bashir Ahmed yesterday told The Daily Star after the meeting held with its president Rokan Uddin Mahmud in the chair.

"I just can't accept that my father's killers would get away with the murder," he said with tearful eyes.

Khairuzzaman Liton, son of AHM Quamruzzaman, criticised the judge for terming prosecution statements by the families of four national leaders emotional. He questioned, "How come the judge acquitted the killers calling the prosecution statements emotional?"

Referring to the amount of compensation, former chairman of a labour court Abdur Rob Molla said, "The amount of compensation for a worker's death is inadequate by today's standards. Death compensation should be calculated taking the average life expectancy into account."

"On the one hand, labour law provisions are inadequate. On the other, whatever provisions are there, are not enforced properly," Molla added.

The labour compensation law of 1923 provides for Tk 30 thousand in injury compensation and Tk 21 thousand in death compensation for a worker whose minimum monthly wage does not exceed Tk 500.

"It's quite ridiculous that an outdated law, which provides for only Tk 21 thousand in compensation for a worker's death, is still in effect," said Deputy Director (Legal) Farida Yesmin of Blast.

Though the minimum wage was raised to Tk 930 from Tk 500 in 1980 under the aforementioned law, the amount of compensation money in the case of death remains the same, Farida said.

A national law commission was formed in 1992 with Justice Abdul Kuddus Chowdhury as the chairman, to update, co-ordinate and reform the existing labour and industrial laws.

In March 1994, the commission submitted its report with the recommendations for change in those laws.

But no government so far has implemented the recommendations.



PHOTO: PID

President Iajuddin Ahmed and his wife Prof Anwara Begum greet members of the Hindu community at a reception at the Bangabhaban yesterday on the occasion of Durga Puja.

Poor health service

FROM PAGE 1

period, the percentage of those taking private healthcare services that the unqualified practitioners offer rose from 30 percent to 49 percent.

The survey was carried out on 29,490 people and 475 service providers and the finds were shared with 498 community focus groups at the upazila level and upazila health workers. The service delivery survey teams also talked with Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA), Bangladesh Nurses' Association (BNA) and other relevant organisations.

The Canadian International Development Agency funded the survey and a consulting firm carried it out in collaboration with three government organisations and other donors.

The HPSP was launched in 1998 to reform the health sector and a service delivery survey was done in three phases in 1999, 2000 and 2003 in the same areas to review the impact of the programme.

Some 10 percent of the unqualified practitioners had had higher education and at the other end of the spectrum, 10 percent never reached the SSC level. Most unqualified practitioners received some training. Half of them had received Rural Medical Practitioner or Basic Rural Medical Practitioner training.

The village doctors would

come at midnight if they are called, commented members of the community focus groups in rural areas after the service delivery survey teams met them with their findings. "Most of the time we don't find any doctors in government hospitals, so we turn to village doctors. We go to village doctors because they give us medicine on credit."

They observed the village doctors should get more training to improve on their skills. However, they said the government should regulate the activities of the village doctors.

Members of the BMA, however, rejected outright the idea of imparting additional training to unqualified practitioners and giving them certificates. "Don't try to qualify the unqualified," said an executive member of the BMA.

Participants in community focus groups complained of the qualified doctors' rudeness, lack of respect, indifference and a bias towards looking after the better-off patients.

The proportion of households who rated private and NGO services to be 'good' soared to 37 percent last year from 25 percent in 2000.

The main service providers were unqualified village doctors, drug stores, and traditional practitioners. The proportion of service users who visited unqualified

practitioners for treatment rose from 52 percent in 2000 to 60 percent last year. In the same period, there were small decreases in the proportions of people that used private qualified practitioners, coming down from 31 percent to 27 percent, and in case of government services, from 17 percent to 13 percent.

Lack of good quality medicines was the most common problem, the respondents of the survey said.

Over 90 percent of users of private and unqualified practitioners were satisfied with the providers' behaviour in both 2000 and 2003 against only 66 percent of government services users.

It costs about twice as much to visit a government health service provider as for a visit to an unqualified practitioner and about twice as much again to visit a private qualified practitioner.

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People who used government services for preventive purposes, including immunisation, family planning, antenatal care and obstetric services, were nearly all satisfied with the service they received.

The survey last year showed a continuing increase in use of modern methods of contraception. The contraceptive prevalence rate (CPR) was as high among the poorest women as among the less poor.

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Bar postpones

FROM PAGE 1

If the newly appointed judges are present at the function, the SCBA will boycott the programme, according to the meeting resolution, which was sent to the CJ.

The Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Oikya Parishad, a pro-government lawyers' platform, at a meeting rejected such conditions saying the SCBA had no right to take such a decision. It also asked all lawyers to attend the function at 10:30am today.

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