

Six Asian nations sign human trafficking pact

AFP, Yangon

China and five Southeast Asian nations yesterday signed a landmark accord here to fight the modern day slavery of human trafficking in the region.

The United Nations-brokered agreement between Cambodia, China, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam and host Myanmar is the first of its kind in the world, UN officials have said.

"We will challenge the traffickers that we mean business," Myanmar's newly installed premier, Lieutenant General Soe Win, told the representatives to the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT).

"We will break the vicious cycle of trafficking in the region."

The memorandum of understanding lays out areas of coopera-

tion "to combat all aspects of human trafficking," the grouping, which includes UN agencies, said in a statement at the conclusion of the one-day meeting.

The plan is expected to be in place in the first quarter of 2005.

Some 800,000 men, women and children are estimated to be trafficked annually across borders worldwide in a billion-dollar illicit trade. Most victims of trafficking are severely exploited and many are sexually abused.

Human trafficking is considered a surging crisis in Asia, and several countries of the region have been strongly criticized for failing to recognize the scale of the problem.

"This gathering today underscores the Greater Mekong Sub-Region's commitment to addressing a transnational problem that has

serious national implications," said Charles Petrie, the UN's resident coordinator in Myanmar.

In July the UN warned that the cross-border framework could be hampered by the "two-edged sword" of socio-economic development in Southeast Asia, which is shifting towards greater mobility for the purposes of promoting economic opportunities and jobs. The result can often be illicit trafficking of people and drugs, it said.

A senior officials meeting on the anti-trafficking pact is scheduled for either next March or May in Hanoi.

Thailand has been acknowledged as the main "destination" country for migrant workers in the region, where an estimated 1.5 million legal as well as illegal workers from neighbouring countries head.

Dhaka, Kathmandu

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discussion on certain points. A source who attended the meet said a small committee may be formed today that will draft a work plan and submit it by July. Bangladesh will also take initiative to sign such a bilateral treaty with Bhutan and China, the source added.

Both the sides agreed on joint studies about type, duration and causes of flood and its possible mitigation, sources said. The experts also talked about possibility of arresting, delaying and diverting the floods, they added.

"If we can make a dam in the uppercatchment of the Ganges we'll be able to delay and divert the flood. At least we'll be able to change nature," said a flood expert who attended the meet.

After the devastating floods in 1988, the then king of Nepal and Bangladesh government agreed to work together about flood mitigation. Initially, the two countries formed a study team comprising experts from both sides and a joint technical committee in 1989.

Earlier on Thursday, a six-member experts team headed by Modan Lal arrived here to attend the third meeting of the joint technical committee.

On the first day of the talks, the experts discussed building some water reservoirs in Nepal that will provide water in the lean period to the Ganges and also generate hydropower.

The experts pointed out that the Kosi, Gandaki and Karnali – three major rivers of Nepal – originate in glaciers of the Himalayas and form part of the Ganges river system. They provide 71 percent of the dry season flow of the Ganges and an average 41 percent of its total flow.

They also discussed forming a multilateral river commission for basin-wise management of the international rivers and working out effective measures to mitigate flood problem in this region.

Nepal is providing -- Bangladesh flood information for the last two years.

Cox's BAZAR MURDERS

Most fishermen stay indoors in panic

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

After Wednesday night's grisly murders of 14 fishermen in the Bay, insecurity and panic have gripped the fishermen villages in Cox's Bazar.

Most of the fishermen remained indoors since Thursday, cancelling their scheduled sea-bound fishing trips.

Pirates killed 14 fishermen aboard a fishing boat in the Bay on Wednesday night before looting fish worth Tk 1.5 lakh and equipment.

Moheshkhali police are quizzing Nurul Haq, the lone surviving fisherman of the boat, FB Kawtar.

Police handed over the bodies of 14 fishermen to their relatives at 4:30pm yesterday after autopsy at Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

Shahadat Hossain, owner of the boat, filed a case with Moheshkhali Police Station yesterday.

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BNP drops

Instigated by Awami League (AL) leaders, Mehedhi's pro-AL family falsely accused them of their involvement in the killing, they claimed.

They alleged the AL leaders, who had earlier made an attempt on Mehedhi's life, assaulted BNP leaders and vandalised their vehicle when the latter went to console the bereaved family.

However, they expressed their solidarity with the family's demand of judicial probe into the death.

Jubo Dal, too, cancelled its protest programmes including mass-resignation and mourning rally scheduled yesterday.

A press release and sources in the youth front of ruling BNP said they took the decision as the victim's family accused the BCC mayor and Jubo Dal central secretary of the killing.

The ward commissioners of BCC except two of Mehedhi's family and four of AL, meanwhile, condemned the family's allegation.

Nazrul Islam Razan, district BNP secretary and Jubo Dal president, read out a statement in the news conference. Among others, Mahmud Golam Salek, city BNP president, Asaduzzaman Khasru, secretary, Shakhatwan Hussein Jumman, president of district bar association, were present.

Sylhet traders

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Md Habibur Rahman, owner of Al Rahman Trading Company of the city's Kalighat area has been missing since October 17. His brother Rafique Uddin lodged a GD (general diary) with the Kotwali Police Station next day. Later on October 21 he filed a case, which was transferred to the Detective Branch (DB) after two days.

The police on October 22 arrested Emad and Ashok, nephews of Habibur Rahman, and his former driver Manzurul Islam.

They were sent to the jail lock-up after the end of their second time remand on Thursday. The DB, however, failed to extract any significant information from them.

Meanwhile, the two wives of Habibur Rahman alleged that by harassing his innocent nephews, police are creating new problems.

For fortune

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once and be a millionaire within a short time.

Shyam Lal was first taken to a clinic in Naogaon, where doctors had his stomach x-rayed and found six spikes stuck inside. But considering the operation too risky, they referred him to Rajshahi.

A fresh x-ray at Mukti Clinic in Rajshahi confirmed the presence of six spikes and some wires in his stomach.

Doctors at the clinic decided to perform an "exclusive operation" on Shyam Lal, on Sunday to remove the spikes from his stomach.

The clinic authorities have decided not to charge anything for the operation as they deem the case "exceptional and major", said the clinic sources.

Shyam's brother said it was not the first time that Shyam swallowed spikes. He did it before, only six months ago, and underwent a potentially complicated operation to have those removed.

The BTB Chairman Nurul Islam and Mohammad Obayedullah, director of BTB's mobile project, had denied The Daily Star any comment.

There are an estimated 1.2 million illegal immigrants in Malaysia, mainly from neighbouring Indonesia and the Philippines, drawn by jobs in construction, plantation work and services.

Schoolboy killed

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picked up grocery shop owner Azizul Haq, 38, from Bazitpur Bazar in Alamganga upazila on Wednesday night.

The gang asked some witnesses to reach the news to the victim's family and tell them to pay Tk 1 lakh as ransom for his release.

Police said they heard of the incident, but nobody came to them to file a case.

The family did not go to the police station as the kidnappers threatened to kill the victim if they inform the police, local people said.

Cool response

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Monday to help the repatriation and he would meet Indonesia's Manpower Minister Fahmi Idris on Wednesday to discuss the exercise.

A total of some 400,000 illegal workers were expected to return to their countries of origin during the amnesty period, he said.

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Wang Shengniu, Huawei's Project Manager could not be reached while Khalid Shams of Siemens refused to comment.

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