

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.

Kerry will win

FROM PAGE 12

shows that Saturn is in the third house from the moon which is highly favourable," he said.

"The planets Mercury and Mars in the fifth and third house have exchanged positions. Success in competition is certain...Kerry will be the new president."

Madan made news after he predicted former Indian premier Rajiv Gandhi would meet a "violent end" three months prior to his May 1991 assassination by a woman suicide bomber said by India to be a member of Sri Lanka's Tamil separatists.

"It does not make me happy when sad predictions I utter come true. I only make them so that people and especially the government can be warned and can take the necessary precautions," Madan said.

"President Bush should also look after his health. His birth chart shows that the Sun is on the ascendant and has eclipsed Saturn, the lord of health," added Madan.

While Kerry and Bush scrambled for late votes across the key battleground states of Florida and Ohio ahead of Tuesday's ballot, pollsters were split on who was ahead but agreed the outcome was too close to call.

Several US pollsters have said the election appeared headed for a photo finish similar to the result in 2000.

But astrologer and writer Abha Bansal, managing editor for the "Future Samachar" (Future News), said nothing could change Kerry's destiny torule.

"Kerry's horoscope shows that he was born to rule -- he has a number of "rajyogis" (ruling signs) which are on the ascendant right now," said the 45-year-old.

She said Kerry was in a particularly strong position because the Moon, which denotes luck in Indian astrology, was in alignment with his professional aspirations.

"His horoscope shows the Moon and Sun (profession) are in line with each other...He will be a stable ruler. Up to January 2006, Mercury is configured in a favourable position, which will bring him money and power.

"Astrologically Kerry is in a very strong place. Jupiter and Saturn are not configured in a favourable position for Bush and he may not get the desired result in these elections," said Bansal. "I would be surprised if he won."

Bansal had predicted the shock exit of former Indian premier Atal

Behari Vajpayee and his Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in a dramatic election loss in May.

Another encouraging finding for Kerry was that Indian astrologers considered he would point the United States in the right direction.

"Kerry's win will rejuvenate the United States and bring peace to the rest of the world," said Delhi-based astrologer Gopi Krishna.

"He set the country on a course correction. Kerry's White House spell will be good for peace in Iraq, the Middle East and Afghanistan," he said.

Colorado

FROM PAGE 12

has happened only three times in US history.

In any case, a local Channel 9 News poll shows 55 percent of voters oppose the amendment while 38 percent support it.

That is because some agree with Colorado's Republican Governor Bill Owens, who called Amendment 36 a "partisan movement" to give Kerry the four-vote Electoral College boost.

"The fact is that if Amendment 36 passed, it would forever make it easy for presidential candidates to ignore Colorado, since our state would be an Electoral College 'lone ranger' among states," he said in a USA Today newspaper opinion column.

Katy Atkinson, spokeswoman for, Coloradans Against a Really Stupid Idea, opposes the amendment, which "could turn Colorado into the next Florida."

Besides, she said, if a candidate is likely to get only five votes -- instead of nine -- Colorado becomes less important politically.

"We will be the least significant state in the country."

"If the administration has to choose between Colorado, which would have one net electoral vote, and say, Arizona, with 10 electoral votes, we will be on the losing end."

Or, said Maryland professor Gimpel, Colorado could set the pace.

"It would give some momentum to reform the Electoral College system, other states would be tempted to reform their laws."

Colorado resident June Ganderson, 76, said she has already voted against the amendment.

"You can't divide your power," she said. "It is better to have one big rock than two medium-size ones."

FM leaves for Delhi tomorrow

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan leaves for New Delhi tomorrow to hand over a letter of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to her Indian counterpart Manmohan Singh inviting him to the forthcoming Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit in Dhaka.

He will call on the Indian prime minister on November 1 and hand over the letter.

Khan will visit New Delhi as special envoy of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as Dhaka hosts the 13th summit of the regional forum January 9-11.

The foreign minister will also meet his Indian counterpart Natwar Singh and Commerce and Industry Minister Kamal Nath.

During this Ramadan, Khan is also expected to visit Nepal and Sri Lanka and after Ramadan to Pakistan and the Maldives to deliver the invitation letters to the heads of government of Saarc member states.

200 shanties

FROM PAGE 1

"The firefighters came about an hour later when we had already put out the flames and managed to save several hundred adjacent houses," said Nur Islam, one of the slum-dwellers.

Around 300 families, mostly of riskshaw-pullers and domestic helps, are now staying in the open. Hundreds of desolate men and women were seen frantically searching through the ashes for remnants of their possessions.

"I couldn't save any of the belongings," sobbed Meena, a home help.

"Daughter of a next-door neighbour informed me of the fire when I was working in an apartment at Bangla Motor," said Meena adding, "But the damage was done by the time I reached home."

"Now I don't even have a glass to drink to break my fast," she groaned in anguish.

"Neither do I have any food to feed my three little children."

Most of the slum-dwellers suffered the same fate. But Hawa having lost Tk 70 thousand in cash and valuables worth around Tk 30 thousand stood out among them.

No-one received any severe injuries. Runu Goura, 60, and Falani, 10, suffered minor burns. Falani got slightly injured when she was trying to get her two-year-old brother out of the shanty.

Firefighters rushed to the spot in nine vehicles and took control of the fire at around 1:30pm, claimed a firefighting official.

He said valuables worth around Tk 10 lakh have been damaged in the fire.

Top outlaw

FROM PAGE 12

one of the chargesheeted accused in traffic surrogate Arif murder case.

Meanwhile, a Bangladeshi extremist was killed in the Indian state of West Bengal on Thursday.

The slain extremist, Bellal Fakir 33, was the leader of outlawed New Biplobi Communist Party (NBCP) in Khulna-Jessore belt. Police said Bellal was wanted in 19 murder and several other criminal cases.

DIG of Khulna range told The Daily Star yesterday that he was informed of the murder of Bellal Fakir.

According to Khulna police superintendent, Bellal fled to India with Manoranjan Goshai alias Mrinal, founder of the outlawed NBCP, early this year during a drive by joint forces. He rented a house in Barasath district of West Bengal.

On Wednesday Bellal along with some of his accomplices went to a bar at Salt Lake area of Kolkata. On Thursday morning, police recovered his body from a bypass road in that area.

Khulna police quoted Rajarhat police of Kolkata as saying that Bellal was strangled as a sequel to internal rift in the NBCP.

Iraq insurgents

FROM PAGE 1

man told BSS.

He said Dhaka would decide its course of action for the release of the driver after getting the details.

AFP adds: The Bangladesh government said yesterday it was seeking the help of the Red Crescent to check the report.

"We are trying to confirm the report and asking for help from the International Red Crescent Society," overseas employment state minister Mohammed Quamrul Islam said.

Bangladesh, the world's third largest Muslim-majority nation, opposed the US-led invasion of Iraq and has repeatedly said it would only send troops to Iraq under UN auspices.

The ministry for overseas employment had not approved any permits for workers to travel to Iraq since the US-led invasion of that country, state minister Islam said.

"If this report is true we will be seeking an explanation from the Kuwaiti firm supposedly employing him as to how he ended up in Iraq," he added.

The Islamic Army in Iraq is the group holding French journalists Christian Chesnot of Radio France Internationale and Georges Malbrunot of Le Figaro newspaper who were abducted south of Baghdad on August 20 with their Syrian driver, Mohammed al-Jundi.

It also kidnapped and executed an Italian journalist.

Arafat flies to France

FROM PAGE 1

One of the doctors treating Arafat earlier said the disease had probably been ruled out but that tests showed him to have an abnormally low count of blood platelets -- which can be caused by leukemia or many other illnesses.

Arafat agreed to go to France after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, his long-time foe, said he would let him return to the West Bank. Israel had previously said that if Arafat left his compound in Ramallah it would not guarantee his return.

France has traditionally good ties with the Palestinians and wants to raise its profile in Middle East peacemaking. President Jacques Chirac praised Arafat on Thursday, saying he embodied the Palestinian struggle for an independent state.

Arafat's slide into illness has raised fears of chaos among Palestinians, whose 4-year-old uprising for a state has stalled.

The death of a leader whom Israel and its US ally see as an obstacle to peace could also shuffle the cards in the Middle East conflict as the United States heads into a presidential election on Tuesday.

European countries, France in particular, have resisted US and Israeli pressure to sideline Arafat.

Danish Foreign Minister Per Stig Moeller, whose country drafted the Middle East peace road map during its presidency of the European Union, played down fears Arafat could leave a security vacuum behind if he failed to recover and return as leader of the Palestinian Authority.

"His role in the process ... has both plusses and minuses. It could be that a new start could open up for some opportunities," Moeller said.

"I do not fear the time after Arafat. I know the Palestinian leaders who are second-in-line. They are sensible people."

Arafat, with his signature black and white checkered keffiyeh (Arab

headdress) and stubble beard, has named no successor since emerging from exile under interim peace accords.

He has not appointed an acting president to cover during the treatment.

The ex-guerrilla, loved by most of his people and reviled by many Israelis, has had stomach pains since last week.

His wife Suha, who lives in Paris, hurried to his bedside for the first time in four years.

After his health deteriorated officials said he had been slipping in and out of consciousness, though on Thursday he was able to eat, talk and say prayers.

Jordanian doctor Ashraf al-Kurdi said he did not believe Arafat had leukemia. But the BBC later quoted Kurdi as saying Arafat would be tested for leukemia when he reached Paris.

Should Arafat die, parliamentary speaker Rawhi Fattouh would replace him as Palestinian Authority president for a 60-day period during which elections would be held.

Arafat's incapacitation or death would raise fresh questions about Sharon's unilateral plan for withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank in 2005, a move that has caused political turmoil in the Jewish state.

Sharon has said that with Arafat in power, Israel has no negotiating partner, forcing him to go it alone to "disengage" from conflict with the Palestinians.

Israel accuses Arafat of fomenting violence after peace talks collapsed four years ago, an allegation he denies.

Arafat shared a Nobel Peace prize with Israeli leaders Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres, but bloodshed swiftly followed failed negotiations on Palestinian statehood in 2000.

EU leaders

FROM PAGE 12

citizens and governments."

The signing ceremony took place in the ornate Orazi and Curiazi hall, where the Rome Treaty which established the European Economic Community -

- the EU's predecessor -- was launched by six countries on March 25, 1957.

The constitution, agreed in June after two years of haggling, aims to streamline EU institutions and prevent decision-making gridlock in a bloc which grew from 15 to 25 members this year, with several more waiting in line.

It notably foresees a longer-term EU presidency to replace the current six-month musical chairs system, while streamlining the executive Commission and creating a new post of EU foreign minister.

But its agreement has been accompanied by a surge of questions over whether the EU has not reached the limits of its expansion -- and question marks over whether the constitution will ever enter into force.

The constitution has still to be ratified by all 25 EU member states to come into force. The trouble is, at least one or two "no" votes are feared in the referenda to be held over the next 48 months.

Analysts say the scale of the political problem will depend on the number of no votes and, inevitably, where they occur. A thumbs-down by Britain for example would fuel talk about sidelining some countries; a negative result in France could lead to a full-blown EU crisis or even implosion.

But of more immediate concern to the EU leaders is the Commission staff. The Rome gathering comes just two days after the European Parliament forced Barroso to withdraw his proposed team after protests over Italy's EU nominee for the sensitive EU justice portfolio, Rocco Buttiglione. Berlusconi's government immediately said it will not drop the cigar-chomping Catholic, but both the Italian leader and Buttiglione are expected to come under growing pressure to "do the honourable thing."

Italy has so far resisted pressure to withdraw Buttiglione, a conservative with outspoken views on gays and women, as its Brussels nominee. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini says Rome hopes for a speedy solution to the problem.

Kiwis complete

FROM PAGE 12

previous best was 52 not out against Sri Lanka on debut in Colombo in 2001, raced to his second Test fifty in just 36 balls. He also became the quickest to score a Test half-century for the Tigers.

Overnight 15, Tapash cracked ten fours and a six each off Vettori and off-spinner Paul Wiseman in his 47-ball innings. But Vettori had the last laugh by having the right-hander stumped by wicketkeeper Brendon McCullum.

Interestingly, Enamul Haque (Jr) who shared 45 with Tapash, remained unbeaten on naught.

Vettori, who took six wickets for 100 in the second innings, came close to finishing with his career best figures in a match, which is 12-149 against Australia recorded in Auckland four years ago. But Tapash's blitz prevented that and Vettori had to remain content with 12-170.

The bespectacled 25-year-old left-arm spinner was adjudged man-of-the-series for his astonishing 20 wickets in two Tests.

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming, who smashed 202 in New Zealand's massive first innings total of 545-6 declared, won the man-of-the-match award.

Babar

FROM PAGE 1

government will continue to recruit honest and sincere people to Rab.

The state minister said the ministry is formulating laws regarding cyber café.

Replying to another question, Babar said he does not think that Rab should be engaged in checking vulgarity in films. He said it is a police duty.

Babar stressed the need for community police and said the country's community police system will be developed.

The state minister handed over a cheque of Tk 2 lakh to Fakrul Alam Kanchan, president of Crab, for construction of its office building.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Ashraf Huda and Crab General Secretary Harunur Rashid also addressed the function.

Dhaka, Kathmandu

FROM PAGE 12

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 first 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 Kwasar.

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.

BNP drops

FROM PAGE 12

Instigated by Awami League (AL) leaders, Mehedi'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 Mehedi'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.

Apress 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 Mehedi'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, Shakhawat Hussein Juman, president of district bar association, were present.

Sylhet traders

FROM PAGE 12

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

FROM PAGE 1

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.

Schoolboy killed

FROM PAGE 12

picked up grocery shop owner Azizul Haq, 38, from Bazitpur Bazar in Alamdanga 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

FROM PAGE 12

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.

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.