

The Asian Age More ill-will

India has created more problems than it has resolved through its decision not to participate in the Saarc Summit. The reasons ostensibly are the security situation in Bangladesh and the political turmoil spelling an end to democracy in Nepal. India cannot but be concerned about these issues but the question that has led to widespread resentment in the region is whether India should have held Saarc hostage to these considerations. And what it will achieve as a result, except ill-will that it cannot really afford more of in the region. The strong statement issued by India against the decision by King Gyanendra to dismiss the government and assume all powers was a good beginning and could have been developed as more facts were ascertained, and a proper policy formulated. After all, the King has declared that he will hold the reins of power for three years, so the question begging an answer is whether India will not allow the Saarc Summit to be held for this period and probably more. If not, then what was the need to opt out of the Saarc Summit at Dhaka? Again the security situation in Bangladesh has been as bad, and even worse, since the Khaleda Zia government took over and both the women leaders launched a no-holds-barred battle against each other. In fact, South Asia suffers from a major security problem and if it is not Bangladesh today, it could be Sri Lanka tomorrow, and perhaps even India the day after. Saarc then becomes even more relevant today, and efforts should have been made by New Delhi to ensure that the "spirit" of the South Asian process does not become subservient to bilateral politics. The tensions in Bangladesh are spilling over into India's Northeast, but then this major problem cannot be tackled by creating more hostilities where none need to exist. Dialogue is the most powerful weapon of civilised nations, and given its size and its democracy, India should have taken the lead in ensuring that the channels provided by Saarc were not closed in these difficult times.

Make Feb 7 protests a success: Bhuiyan

BSS, Dhaka
BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday urged party leaders and workers to mobilise mass supports for the country-wide protest against all anarchic activities including Kibria murder, hartal, terrorism and bomb attacks.

the murder while the government sought cooperation of all irrespective of party and political affiliations in this regard.

But, he said, despite the government efforts instead of cooperation, Awami League was launching destructive programmes including hartal to destabilise the country. "Awami League has plotted for the postponement of the Saarc Summit, "Bhuiyan said.

Hunger strike in Khulna Feb 8

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Greater Khulna Development Action Committee (GKDAC) will observe a mass hunger strike from 10:00am to 5:00pm on February 8 at Shahid Haidis Park to press home its demand for deep sea port at Akram point.

GKDAC announced it at a meeting on Friday. It also threatened greater movement if this demand is not met.



Opposition Awami League lawmaker Sohel Taj argues with police at Russel Square during hartal hours yesterday.

Foil conspiracies against country: Shaikhul Hadith

BSS, Dhaka

Chairman of Islami Oikyo Jote (IOJ) Shaikhul Hadith Allama Azizul Haque yesterday called upon all patriotic people to foil the deep-rooted conspiracies against the country.

In a statement, he said the conspirators have been trying to jeopardise the independence and sovereignty, make the economy fragile, destroy Islamic norms and values and create an anarchic situation.

He said there is no scope to see in isolation the killing of Shah AMS Kibria, calling for postponement of SAARC summit and India deciding not to attend the summit. The law and order is much better at present than at any previous time, he added. Azizul Haque, who is also the Amir of Bangladesh Khelafat Majlis, urged the countrymen to face the conspirators through political programmes.

He also called upon the people to attend IOJ's rally on February 7 at Paltan crossing.

Cop stabbed, mugged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Muggers yesterday stabbed a police constable and snatched away cash and mobile phone in the city yesterday.

Mohammad Nuruzzaman, 27, was stopped by a gang of four muggers on Zia Sarani at Shanir Akhra at 4:30am when he was returning to his Nurpur residence at Shyampur from police headquarters.

The gang stabbed Nuruzzaman in the head and left hand and snatched away Tk 700 and his mobile phone, said sources. He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital where he is undergoing treatment.

Nuruzzaman, however, did not mention about his mobile phone in the general diary lodged with Shyampur Police Station.

2,549 more held

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 2,549 people, including three listed criminals, on various charges from different parts of the country in the last 48 hours till 6.00am yesterday.

During the period, the law enforcers recovered 12 firearms, 45 bullets and 15 explosives and also filed nine cases against nine people under Arms Act.

80 new books at Ekushey fair

DU CORRESPONDENT

Eighty new books were shelved at different stalls on the fifth day of the month-long Amar Ekushey Book Fair on the Bangla Academy premises yesterday.

Due to 36-hour hartal enforced by the main opposition Awami League, the crowd of book lovers at the fair was thin in the afternoon.

Many publishers said they did not publish new books apprehending fewer visitors on the hartal day.

However, the sale of books was satisfactory, they added.

The cover of late Prof Humayun Azad's last book 'Amar Nutun Janma' was unveiled. Azad's family members were present on the occasion.

Prof Azad wrote the book after he was chopped brutally by unknown

miscreants on his way home from the fair last year.

Writer Pranav Bhatta and Anisul Haq were seen at Annya Prakashani and Samay Prakashani gossiping with their admirers.

A traditional discussion on '50th anniversary of Bangla Academy: Textbook writing in Bangla to spread higher education' was held in the afternoon. Subrata Barua presented a keynote paper on the subject.

It was followed by a cultural function.

The fair will remain open for all from 3:00pm to 9:00pm everyday while on Friday it will remain open from 11:00am to 9:00pm with a two-hour break from 12:00 noon.

On February 21, the International Mother Language Day, the fair will continue from 8:00am to 9:00pm without any break.

'Reduce call charges of mobile phones'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a press conference yesterday demanded that the call charge of mobile phone be reduced to 50 paise per minute as the present call tariff is too high compared to neighbouring countries.

They also called on all cell phone users to refrain from using their handsets a day a week to press the demand for call rate cuts.

Charging high call rates is a means for a handful of businessmen to exploit people, said Tushar Rahman, executive director of Karmakutir Foundation, which organised the press conference.

"If we compare the rates with other Saarc countries, it will be clear that the Bangladeshi mobile phone subscribers are in the worst position in terms of call charges," he added.

"In our country, the cell phone subscribers have to pay as high as Tk 7 per minute call charge while the rate in India ranges between 40 and 80 paise," he said.

Tushar also called on the mobile phone operators to extend the time limit of prepaid cards.

The prepaid card worth Tk 300 expires within 21 days and even in 18 days in some cases, but in Pakistan the validity period of pre-

paid cards of the same amount stretches up to 90 days, he added.

He urged the government to intervene in lowering the call charges.

"In addition, the state-run Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) should introduce its cell phone service with low rates immediately," he said. Abdul Rahman Khan, member of Citizens Rights Movement, threatened to launch a tough movement if the companies do not slash the call rates.

Dr Jasmine Ara Sultan, Sheikh Farid and Faruque Hossain also spoke at the press conference held at the National Press Club.

Clarification

Jamaat-e-Islami sent a clarification last night regarding a report headlined 'Nizami denies party's link with Islamic militants' published in The Daily Star yesterday.

It clarifies that one of the lines of the said report "And those who question us do not have the right to claim themselves Muslims" was wrongly attributed to the party Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami as he had not delivered such speech.

Cut budgetary allocation for defence

S Asian civil society leaders urge Saarc countries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society leaders called on the Saarc countries to reduce the budgetary allocation for defence and focus more on the social development and the participation of people in governance instead.

Investment in defence raises the risk of conflicts in the region and hampers social justice, depriving the poor and women, they said at South Asia People's Summit for People's Saarc.

Organised by the South Asia Partnership (SAP), the two-day event began at Brac Centre Inn in the city yesterday with about 200 representatives from the South Asian countries.

About six to seven percent of the GDP is allocated for the military in Pakistan, 4.5 percent in Sri Lanka, 3.5 percent in India and 1.6 percent in Bangladesh in the name of national security, said Professor Sarfraz Khan of Pakistan.

Pakistan has spent three billion dollars in the last 30 years on its nuclear programme alone, he said, adding that this amount is enough to provide safe drinking water for all the people in South Asia.

Corros of people in the region are living below the poverty line, a major factor contributing to many social problems such as human trafficking, illiteracy and social and economic injustice, said Bushra Gohar, inter-national chairperson of SAP, at the inaugural session.

An estimated two lakh women and children of Bangladesh have been trafficked to Pakistan in the last ten years, said Durga Ghimire of Nepal, referring to reports by Unicef and Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).

Annually, an average of 4,500 women are being trafficked to Pakistan, where they were forced into prostitution, illegal marriage or domestic servitude against their will, said the human rights activist.

Trafficking for sex exploitation has victimised some 30 million women and children of South Asia over the last 30 years. They are tricked, sold,

coerced or forced into a situation of exploitation from which they cannot escape, she noted.

Trafficking has increased 50 percent worldwide between 1995 and 2000, making it a 5 to 7 billion dollar business a year, Durga noted.

"This increased trafficking is associated with the dislocations resulting from economic transition, particularly the increased feminisation of poverty, poor governance, crime, defective policies and lack of legislation and its implementation," Bushra Gohar said.

Besides, thousands of migrant workers from South Asia are working in the Gulf countries in a sub-human condition, Gohar said and called on the Saarc states to make concerted efforts to address the issue.

SAP-Bangladesh Executive Director Syed Nurul Alam said poverty and low capacity of the people has left them more vulnerable during natural disasters.

Referring to the recent tsunami that devastated Southeast Asia, he said hundreds of thousands of people died in the disaster because of a low capacity to face it.

Rokeya Kabir of South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication said the SAP wants the people's voice to be reflected at the state level. "Unless the people's voice is heard, the social justice is not likely to be addressed at the state level."

The speakers also demanded that the Saarc states allow visa-free movement across the region.

India backed opposition by not joining summit

Moudud tells journalists

UNB, Dhaka

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday said that Awami League would have to shoulder full responsibility for the postponement of the Saarc summit and pay the price for it.

"After observing three days' hartal, AL again went for enforcing three days' hartal just to foil the Saarc summit as all the heads of state and government were supposed to come on February 5. On the very day AL called hartal," he said while talking to journalists at his office.

There was no basis of India's plea for not attending the summit and what happened in Nepal was "Nepal's internal matter," he said.

He, however, hoped that the friendly relations with India would further strengthen in the coming days. Moudud also hoped for holding the ditched summit meeting of the seven-nation forum at any nice moment soon with the active participation of all Saarc leaders.

there was no security problem in Bangladesh for the meet. He said, "India's decision not to attend the Summit made the South Asian countries and people frustrated."

He said that that Saarc was not any party programme. He said Awami League's "so-called" programme hampered country's interest. "So they will get more detached from the people of the country and taste its outcome in the next election."

He said it is crystal clear that Awami League announced programme with a design to have the summit postponed, and "it seemed that India just extended its support to the opposition programme by not joining Saarc summit".

The law minister maintained that



Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of ruling BNP, stages a demonstration on the Dhaka University campus yesterday blaming opposition Awami League for postponement of Saarc Summit.



Light to moderate fog likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry over the country having chances of light rain or drizzle in Sylhet division till 6.00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the country during early morning. Met Office said adding that slight rise in night temperature is expected over the country.

Highest temperature 28.5 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Teknaf and lowest 07.3 degree Celsius at Srirangol.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:48pm today and rises at 6:37am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	25.9	13.2	72	39
Chittagong	28.4	12.9	76	67
Rajshahi	26.4	09.8	89	35
Khulna	27.0	10.2	86	63
Barisal	27.0	09.8	89	68
Sylhet	26.7	11.5	85	55
Cox's Bazar	27.5	16.5	63	61