

PM wants close Saarc

FROM PAGE 16 natural partners in development," she told the Vietnamese leaders and elite at the function

On the outcome of the official talks held in the morning, Khaleada said it provided the opportunity to identify new avenues of cooperation and explore potential in different areas such as trade and investment, industry, agriculture, service sectors, science and technology, education and disaster management.

She said her visit to Vietnam has been significant many ways. "It will not only further deepen cooperation and create space for multifaceted interactions but also further consolidate the bonds of friendship existing between our two countries and peoples."

Khaleada recalled that the just and long struggle of the heroic people of Vietnam to achieve national independence under great leader Ho Chi Minh had provided Bangladeshis inspiration during Bangladesh's War of Independence.

Appreciating Vietnam's progress in various fields by adopting 'Doi Moi (renovation)' policy that had taken the country to the position of world's second-largest rice exporter, Khaleada expressed keen interest in sharing the knowledge and expertise, particularly in the agriculture sector.

In his address, Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai said his talks with Prime Minister Khaleada Zia were productive and hoped the commitments that were made at the official talks between the two governments would be realised by both sides for mutual benefit

"This morning we had productive talks in a spirit of mutual trust and understanding. Ways and means for strengthened cooperation have been identified," he said.

Expressing satisfaction over the growth of multifaceted bilateral cooperation, he said many official delegations have been exchanged, various cooperation agreements signed and the two-way trade positively promoted.

"We are convinced that the growth of our relations based on traditional friendship and cultural as well as historical similarities will contribute to the development and prosperity of our two peoples and for peace, stability and cooperation in the region and the world," Khai told the function.

He said cooperation in industry, agriculture and culture has also seen notable progress. "And we have enjoyed close coordination at regional and international fora."

Welcoming the Bangladesh prime minister to Vietnam, Prime Minister Khai said the visit of Khaleada stands as a milestone in traditional friendship of the two countries and helps further promoting cooperation in many fields.

Khai recalled with gratitude the support and assistance extended by the government and people of Bangladesh to Vietnam during their struggle for national independence and today's cause of national construction and development.

The Vietnamese leader also appreciated Bangladesh's active foreign policy and its contribution to peace, cooperation and development in South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Moudud, Sircar

FROM PAGE 1 of this move to get cheap publicity for political purpose." He branded the agitating lawyers as "followers of a certain political party"

SCBA President Mahbubey Alam however said, "Our movement has no relations with any political party." He brushed aside the law minister's remarks and challenged him to prove the allegation, saying in that case, he would step aside from the SCBA presidency.

The speaker on Monday in a ruling said the movement of the Supreme Court lawyers against controversial Additional High Court Judge Faisal Mahmud Faizee is in "violation of the constitution". A judge can issue a contempt rule against these lawyers, he added.

The law minister on the other hand criticised the Supreme Court for not taking action against the agitating lawyers for blocking the chief justice's entryway.

On Tuesday, the SCBA at an emergency general meeting decided to cancel both Sircar and Moudud's membership for their activities against the interests of the Association.

RULING SPEAKER'S PREROGATIVE Speaker Sircar yesterday said the SCBA's membership cancellation is illegal no matter whatever reasons it may assign to its action.

The speaker said he is not worried about the SCBA decision. "Since the decision is illegal, it will die a natural death. I will go to court against this illegal decision when I return to my practice, if they stick to it," he told reporters.

Sircar said since he became Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, his regular SCBA membership turned into associate membership. "To cancel this membership, there are some procedures but they did not follow those."

About the lawyers' remarks on his ruling, he said, "Even the court does not have the right to challenge any proceedings of parliament. How can the lawyers challenge my ruling?"

He also said a ruling is the prerogative of the speaker, which cannot be challenged.

Justifying the ruling, Sircar said he cannot support some lawyers' movement waged to prevent a judge from sitting in his bench. Their action to block the chief justice's way and slogans at the Supreme Court tarnished the court's image.

"When a parliamentarian raised the Supreme Court issue, I observed that the lawyers' movement and demand regarding the judge were unconstitutional.

"The constitution clearly states that without the [nod of] the Supreme Judicial Council a judge cannot be removed. When I see the lawyers obstructing the chief justice, I have the right to say that this amounts to contempt of court," Sircar added.

MOUDUD TERMS IT RIDICULOUS

Moudud termed the SCBA decision "ridiculous." "After becoming minister, I am no more a member or a voter. I am just an associate member. But still they took such an initiative, which is ridiculous."

The general lawyers and the people do not support the SCBA's activities against the chief justice, which tarnished the Supreme Court's image, he told reporters at his office yesterday.

"Such activities have been carried out by some lawyers who are followers of a certain political party. This has no relations with the lawyers' professional interest," he added.

Moudud pointed out that his SCBA membership and Bar Council certificate of enrolment had been cancelled back in 1989. "But I got them back after legal battles."

"The SCBA decision also contradicts its own constitution because it does not contain any rule on cancellation of membership because of a difference of opinion," Moudud quipped.

SCBA STANDS IT GROUND SCBA President Mahbubey Alam refuted Moudud's contention and told reporters the Supreme Court

Havoc at CMCH

FROM PAGE 16 that it issued a notice to the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources asking it not to claim any further arrears from us," he informed.

The electricity bills were due with four different departments under the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources--the PDB, the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa), the Dhaka Electricity Supply Company (Desco), and the Rural Electrification Board.

Terming the act as "quite illegal" Kamal said, "knowing it was a hospital they [the PDB authority] had not served CMCH with any prior notice about a possible power disruption."

The power was restored at the CMCH at about 12 noon after the health secretary communicated with the high officials of the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources.

When contacted, Executive Engineer of the PDB in Chittagong Helaluddin denied the allegation of not serving any prior notice to the CMCH.

"On the 5th of this month we sent a letter to the CMCH requesting them to pay the arrears worth Tk 52 lakh from January to April 2005," he said. "In fact, we served a second notice to the CMCH warning them about power disconnection."

Helaluddin said, "Since we did not receive any response from the CMCH authorities, I went ahead instructing my men to snap the power supply today [Wednesday] at the CMCH."

According to sources, power was restored on assurance that the CMCH would pay all arrears within next week.

Shut hatches

FROM PAGE 1 stop due to strong currents at 7:00pm. They have identified the location of the launch 40 feet below the surface.

Rescue ship MV Rustam reached the spot at late evening and is likely to start operation this morning, BIWTA sources said.

"Four more divers will reach tomorrow (Thursday) from Chittagong and the Rustam may also start rescue operation from the morning," said a navy official.

The launch, MV Raipura, sank in the river near Arichaghat with more than 200 people on board during a storm on Tuesday. Only 20 people of the Aricha-bound vessel could swim ashore.

One of the bodies recovered yesterday was identified as Biren Roy, a rice trader of Putail village in Manikganj sadar upazila.

Several hundred people, mostly relatives of the missing people, have crowded the bank of the Jamuna for news of their dear ones.

Meantime, the BIWTA has formed a three-member probe team headed by Chief Engineer and Chief Surveyor of Sea Directorate Monirul Islam. JR Sharier and Khabiruddin of the directorate are the other members of the team. They have been given three days to submit a report.

PATUAKHALI LAUNCH MISHAP Two probe bodies have been formed to investigate Sunday's launch sinking in the Bura Gourango river in Galachipa, reports our Patuakhali correspondent.

Police yesterday recovered four more bodies including one child and three women from the river, raising the death toll to 82.

The Patuakhali deputy commissioner on Tuesday formed a three-member investigation body headed by Additional District Magistrate Monjur Alam Bhuiyan, sources said.

The BIWTA yesterday formed another three-member probe body headed by AKM Fakrul Islam, engineer and surveyor of the shipping department.

Both the probe bodies have been asked to submit their reports by May 22, while the local one starts investigation tomorrow, said the sources.

Meantime, the BIWTA will compensate the families of each person died in the accident Tk 20,000. The authorities have already distributed Tk 2,000 to each family in this regard.

Sultan Ahmed, BIWTA assistant director, yesterday filed a case with the Marine Court against two persons including the launch owner, Sahjahan Khan, also president of the local unit launch owners association.

The same launch under the name the Queen of Patuakhali had earlier sunk thrice due to overloading, leaving as many as 40 people dead.

In an overhaul in 1997, the owner changed the launch's wooden body into steel and also renamed it the Prince of Patuakhali, BIWTA sources said.

The launch was plying on the route from Patuakhali to Char Montaz without permission.

"We had asked all five launches and all single deckers here not to ply on the route from March 15 to October 15 as they are not fit to move in inclement weather," said Sultan.

However, no launches are plying on the route since the accident on Sunday.

Several hundred relatives of the missing passengers are still waiting on the banks of the river. Many are scouring the river for themselves with boats and trawlers for the bodies of their dear ones.



Prime Minister Khaleada Zia, accompanied by her Vietnamese counterpart Phan Van Khai, walks past as a contingent of the Vietnamese armed forces presents guard of honour after her arrival at the Vietnam Presidential Palace yesterday.

No more money

FROM PAGE 1 Anti-money Laundering Act," he added.

However, chamber leaders led by Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) President Abdul Awal Mintoo urged the government to extend this opportunity.

"There can be both good and bad sides of black money. We may offer the money whitening scope after 20-25 years. But we cannot make such offers every year," Saifur replied.

"On one hand, we are fighting against money laundering under the Anti-Money Laundering Act and on the other, we support whitening of black money. This is self-contradictory," he added.

"Internationally, there has been a lot of regulations such as anti-terrorism and anti-money laundering laws. In such a context, if we allow ill-gotten money to be whitened, we will defy our international obligations," Saifur argued.

Although many economists believe there may be more than Tk 50,000 crore in black money in the economy, in the last three years only about Tk 1,800 crore have been whitened, according to an NBR report. Economists argue that the provision to whiten money is an injustice to honest taxpayers.

President of the Bangladesh Indenting Association (BIA) Moazzam Hossain alleged in the meeting that there are more than 100,000 foreigners doing business without paying taxes.

"We do our business by paying taxes. But there are many foreign businessmen who do not," he added.

Citing statistics of the Board of Investment (BoI), he said there are more than 100,000 foreign businessmen who mostly reside in different hotels and guesthouses.

Many of them are involved in the indenting business, which they operate through computer networks, making their business activities undetectable to the government, Hossain alleged.

In response, Saifur urged the businessmen to help the govern-

ment detect them.

Saifur pointed out that the commerce ministry and not the finance deals with foreign businessmen.

"I cannot interfere in the commerce ministry's affairs," he quipped. "But I will talk to the commerce ministry regarding this matter and take necessary actions."

The businessmen placed 322 proposals on Vat, tax and import duty at the meeting.

Many of them criticised the bonded warehouse facility, saying that a significant portion of the fabrics imported duty-free through such warehouses slips into the local market, hurting the local textile industries.

"I have heard such allegations before. Deep at night, they smuggle the fabrics," Saifur noted. Without mentioning his opinion on the matter, he told the businessmen, "You launch a movement against such a practice."

A businessman mentioned NBR harassment and said: "The way the NBR officials treat us, it seems that we are criminals and they are policemen."

Saifur replied, "They not only harass you, but they do the same with me too. If you have specific allegations we can take actions."

Responding to the businessmen's pleas to reduce taxes, Saifur said, "If we cut taxes, where do we get the money? Shall I just print notes? Bangladesh has the world's lowest tax-GDP ratio.

"For the sake of your business, we need infrastructure and for that we need money," he continued. "To transport goods from Chittagong to Dhaka, we need roads. Construction of each mile of road needs between Tk 12 crore to Tk 15 crore. Besides, there are other infrastructure issues such as gas or power to care of. So without paying tax, you cannot expect these facilities."

"I shall try to meet your demands, which are acceptable," Saifur said.

Cops yet to find lead

FROM PAGE 1 The case was transferred to Detective Branch (DB) of police yesterday afternoon. "We were already conducting a shadow probe and found some clues to the murder but we cannot disclose that now," said DC of the DB Shohidul Islam.

Police sources also said the investigators are focusing on if any feuds over the formation of Kafrul thana unit committee of the AL led to the killing.

Khorshed headed a seven-member committee tasked to form the committee.

Yesterday, police produced two youths arrested late Tuesday night from Tejgaon area on suspicion of their links to the killing before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Dhaka, seeking a seven-day remand.

The court placed the two -- Ismail Hossain alias Sujon and Mohammad Soheli on remand as prayed.

In the remand prayer, Investigation Officer (IO) Sub-Inspector Giasuddin said the arrestees are close associates of listed criminals of the area. They were found wandering in the locality just before the killing of Khorshed.

Referring to primary investigation, the IO claimed the arrestees in connivance with others killed Advocate Khorshed in a planned way.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court lawyers observed a daylong abstention from work yesterday, protesting the killing of their fellow lawyer Khorshed.

Sammilita Ainjibi Samannaya Parishad held a protest rally on the Supreme Court premises.

Members of Dhaka Bar Association irrespective of their political affiliation protested Khorshed's killing for the second consecutive day yesterday.

Around 1,000 lawyers joined a mourning procession that paraded the premises of the District Judge's Court and the CMM's Court.

KHORSHED LAD TO REST

Advocate Khorshed was buried at Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard yesterday evening.

Earlier, his body was taken to his village home at Ramganj in Laxmipur in the morning. After namajez-janaza, the body was brought back to his Tejgunipara

residence the capital to enable his wife and children to have a last glimpse of the late leader.

At about 6:30pm, the body was taken to the graveyard where a large number of AL leaders and activists attended his burial.

Nor'wester victims

FROM PAGE 16 witnessing the ruins after the 25-minute storm that razed to the ground some 35,000 tin-roofed or mud houses in the two districts. Nearly 1.5 lakh people have been affected by the nor'wester.

Power supply in the affected villages of Sadar, Bagatipara and Lalpur upazilas of Natore and Godagari, Durgapur, Puthia and Bagmara upazilas of Rajshahi remained snapped as some 300 electric poles were uprooted by the storm.

"We restored power supply in municipal areas by early hours today (Wednesday). We hope to restore normalcy in power supply to the villages by Friday," Nurul Huda, chief engineer, Power Development Board, Rajshahi region, said.

The homeless people were living in the open and many of them were starving yesterday. Most of the injured were unable to receive treatment.

"I do not want to live anymore. Give me some poison," said 26-year-old Hawa Begum who lost her only son Sabuj in the storm. The 12-year-old boy died on the spot after an electric pole fell on their hut while he was asleep.

Afsar Uddin built a tin-roofed house borrowing Tk 7,000 from a rural cooperative society. "The storm has destroyed the house but I have to pay off the loan," said Afsar whose injured wife Rizia Khatun was admitted to Natore Hospital.

District officials said some 44.5 tonnes of rice and Tk 50,000 were distributed in Natore and 25 tonnes of rice and Tk 10,000 in Rajshahi.

"We received an allocation of Tk 3 lakh, 500 tonnes of rice and 1,000 tins of biscuits from the relief ministry. The biscuits are likely to reach here by Thursday," said Natore Deputy Commissioner Illias Hossain.

Hartal passes

FROM PAGE 1 said the shutdown is called also in demand of resignation of the BNP-Jammat-led coalition government for its failure to run the country.

During yesterday's hartal, shops, business establishments and educational institutions remained closed while vehicles, excepting a small number of autorickshaws and buses, stayed off the streets. Attendance in government and semi-government offices was thin.

A large number of police, Rapid Action Battalion and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel were deployed at different important points in the capital to avert any untoward incidents.

Pro-hartal pickets damaged a number of vehicles while police charged batons on processions in support of the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown.

Police foiled hartal supporters' bid to bring out processions at Farmgate, Khilgaon, Malibagh, Kalabagan, Demra, Mohammadpur and Russell Square. The pickets damaged several vehicles in Mirpur.

As on the previous hartal days, police cordoned off the AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue and barred party leaders and workers from bringing out procession.

In the morning, scuffles broke out repeatedly between police and AL activists as the law enforcers intercepted their processions in the area.

The AL parliamentary team this time did not bring out any procession from the Sangsad Bhaban area nor held rally at Russell Square during the hartal hours.

At about 11:00 am, police intercepted an Awami Jubo Mahila League procession in Dhanmondi, resulting in scuffles between the two sides. Pro-hartal activists damaged a taxicab in the area. Police rounded up six activists of the organisation.

In Khilgaon area, Bangladesh Awami Jubo League, youth wing of the AL, brought out a procession at about 11:00 am. Police charged batons on the procession near Taltala market and Bishwa Road, leaving 20 injured. Police also arrested an activist, Delwar Hossain.

Police intercepted a Jubo League procession in Kalabagan and Russell Square area at about 10:00am.

They dispersed an AL procession at about 11:00am, led by party leader Shahera Khatun, at Farmgate. Police also charged batons on them as they tried to hold a rally.

In Malibagh area, police attacked a Jubo Mohila League rally and arrested eight activists. Police also charged batons on a procession in Mohammadpur, leaving five injured.

Delhi, Dhaka

FROM PAGE 16 signed by the health ministers of the three countries at the 58th session of the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

Under the MoU, the tri-nation task force would ensure effective collaboration for resource mobilisation, exchange of information, and strengthening of intersectoral cooperation and research.

The strategy would be based on access to early diagnosis and treatment, particularly of the most vulnerable groups, strengthening disease and vector surveillance, integrated vector management, social mobilisation and networking and research.

While the fly-borne disease affects 100,000 people each year in these endemic countries, 147 million people are at risk, a release from the World Health Organisation (WHO) said here.

The disease is transmitted by the bite of the infected female sand fly, Phlebotomus argentipes. In the endemic countries of the region, most cases are limited to 96 districts, half of them across the international borders.

The estimated 100,000 cases of kala-azar in South East Asia constitute about 20 percent of the global cases, the release said.

Illegal 11-storey

FROM PAGE 16 HC order, the statement added.

If the building collapsed, the owner would be held responsible, since Rajuk had sent him several notices, it said.

However, the authorities claimed they have already taken legal measures to lift the stay order, as the structure has become a threat to a large number of people.

"Rajuk will demolish the unapproved part of the building as soon as the stay is lifted," said the statement.

Different newspapers have published reports on the building, which has gone up till 11 storey against its approved six-storey plan.

Musharraf to seek

FROM PAGE 16 It was generally considered that Musharraf would remain at the helm after the elections in 2007, but he had not until now publicly declared his intentions.

The minister said the parties of former prime ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif--who are both living in exile and have been barred by Musharraf from the electoral arena--would back Musharraf.

"All of them are in indirect contact with him (Musharraf)," he said. "Musharraf will win the vote."

Bhutto's party has acknowledged contact with Musharraf for a possible rapprochement but demands that he shed the military uniform and open the door for the former prime minister to return and resume her political career.

"There is no question of the party entering into any sort of talks unless Benazir Bhutto is allowed to return to politics," party spokesman Raza Rabbani told AFP.

The Pakistan Muslim League of Sharif, whom Musharraf exiled to Saudi Arabia in December 2000 for a decade, a year after toppling his government, has denied any contacts.

A spokesman for Sharif's party, Siddique Farooq, said Musharraf was a dictator and his party rejected his regime.

"He is trying to present himself as a democrat with a sham rubber stamp parliament and a democratic label but he remains a dictator," Farooq told AFP.

Musharraf, who grabbed power in a coup in October 1999, appointed himself president in June 2001. He won a heavily criticized referendum in April 2002, followed by a parliamentary vote of confidence a year later.

After initial isolation following the coup Musharraf became a darling of the West in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks on United States when he abandoned the Taliban and joined the international coalition and aided the ouster of the hardline regime in neighbouring Afghanistan.

Musharraf also reneged on his public pledge to quit the military post by the end of 2004, saying the country needed him in uniform to tackle terrorism and face challenges including a turnaround in relations with rival nuclear neighbour India.

The military ruler has been rewarded by the United States with substantial economic and financial assistance.

"He is the most popular leader and he has raised Pakistan's stature in the world," the information minister said.

Armoured cars

FROM PAGE 1 began even before they made their debut.

"Well ahead of the rehearsal, mechanical faults were detected in some of the armoured cars," said a Rab source, asking not to be named. He added that the cars could only take part in the Independence Day parade after a Chinese engineer repaired them in line with the agreement with the supplier.

Another Rab official, expressing anguish over the mechanical problems, said the two armoured cars given to Rab broke down while on the way to Rajendrapur for training. "Later, Rab sent them back to the supplier," he said, but refused to name the supplier.

The armoured cars used by the police are in no better condition either, with six of the 10 lying abandoned at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

In response, the home ministry formed an acceptance committee headed by the additional inspector general of police (Finance) to ascertain the trouble with the armoured cars and to recommend a future course of action.

Sources said the committee, which includes a member of Rab, has already submitted its report to the inspector general of police (IGP). However, the contents of the report could not be known.

"The committee has found some faults. I do not know whether the vehicles will be sent to China or if experts will be brought from China to fix them," said a Rab official, seeking anonymity.

The armoured cars are part of a larger effort to beef up Rab and police forces. The government also plans to purchase two helicopters, one for the police and the other for Rab.

Since Rab began formal operations on March 26, 2004, the government has purchased 1,597 vehicles for the police and 574 for Rab, sources said.

Security experts have repeatedly expressed concerns since the purchase of the armoured cars,

saying that they are not needed for a police crackdown on social criminals and that their use will create panic among the public.

The armoured cars, which are bullet proof and able to run in muddy and hillock areas, were purchased to launch a quick and safe crackdown on criminals anywhere, said a police official.

Dhaka-Beijing

FROM PAGE 16 Bangladesh Chai Xi and other high officials from both the countries were also present.

Some 60 passengers, including Bangladesh Ambassador to China Ashfaqur Rahman and Vice-President of the China Eastern Yunan Airlines Liu Jianguo, came to Dhaka by the maiden flight from Beijing.

The same flight will depart Zia International Airport today at about 4:40pm with the guests who arrived from China and some Bangladeshi passengers.

Primarily, three flights will be operated on the Beijing-Kunming-Dhaka route a week, and there is a preparation for gradually operating direct flight daily, including on the Beijing-Kunming-Chittagong route.

Three flights a week Saturday, Sunday and Wednesday--will be operated on the Dhaka-Kunming-Canton-Beijing route. Flight will arrive in Dhaka at 3:40pm while depart at 4:40pm the same day.

Sky Bridge International will work as general sales agent. Its president said Dhaka-Beijing fare will be \$ 620, while Dhaka-Kunming \$335. But the fares may be revised in the near future.

Meanwhile, to make it popular, the airlines announced special discount for the inaugural flights on May 18, 19, 21 and 23, fixing return ticket price at \$ 249, including \$89 in tax.

The company sources said the China Eastern Airlines, established in 1998, operates on over 80 international and regional routes connecting Asia, Europe, America and Australia in addition to over 330 domestic routes which connect 110 cities in China.

50 rebels, 9 troops

FROM PAGE 16 reported until Wednesday due to the area's remote location and poor communications.

There was no official comment available from the Maoists, who have been fighting since 1996 to install a communist republic, but a source close to the rebels said only six guerrillas died, including their eastern area commander.

Meanwhile, in fresh violence, six rebels were shot dead Tuesday in Chitwan district, 170 kilometres southwest of Kathmandu, where they attacked security forces guarding a college examination centre, state media said.

One student writing exams was wounded, the official RSS news agency said.

"At least 50 Maoists and nine security persons were killed in a clash in the Taple area of Udayapur district," the state-run Nepali language Gorkhapatra newspaper said, referring