

## TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT

## US criticises govt for not complying with standards

UNB, Dhaka

The US State Department yesterday said the Bangladesh government does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of child and women trafficking.

The report, however, said that the government is making significant efforts in this regard.

"Over the last year, Bangladesh showed commendable progress in all areas of anti-trafficking efforts, said the "2005 Trafficking in Persons Report".

The US State Department considers Bangladesh a country of origin and transit for women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation, involuntary domestic servitude, and debt bondage.

Bangladeshi women and girls are trafficked to India, Pakistan, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), the report said.

Bangladeshi boys are also trafficked to the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait for forced work as camel jockeys and beggars.

Young boys are lured into forced servitude in the fishing industry in Dublar Char and other islands in the Bay of Bengal region.

The US State Department report said Bangladesh established an inter-ministerial anti-trafficking committee to oversee its national efforts to combat trafficking, created a national anti-trafficking police monitoring unit with presence in all 64 districts, prosecuted an increased number of trafficking and

trafficking-related corruption cases, rescued over 161 boys from servitude in the fishing industry, devised and launched a multi-faceted anti-trafficking public awareness campaign, and increased its cooperation with NGOs involved in the fight against trafficking.

Despite these achievements, Bangladesh continues to face a huge trafficking problem, which is compounded by pervasive poverty, weak government structures, and generalised corruption, it said, adding that Bangladesh should expand its anti-corruption efforts to reduce the witting and unwitting complicity of officials in trafficking.

The US State Department also said that during the reporting period Bangladesh government made marked improvements in investigating, prosecuting, and punishing traffickers.

"Through dedicated district-level anti-trafficking magistrates, the government prosecuted 70 cases of trafficking, resulting in 42 convictions—more than double the 17 convictions from the previous year while 21 cases initiated are in the investigation stage," the report noted.

Bangladesh has also charged 11 officials for trafficking-related corruption prosecution of which are underway, it mentioned.

Although an improvement from the previous year, this anti-corruption effort remains weak compared to the large scale of trafficking in Bangladesh, the report warned.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina receives a crest at a general meeting of the Begum Badrunnesa College Alumnae Association in the city on Thursday. Hasina, also an alumna of the institute, attended the meeting as chief guest.

## One-fifth of Earth's bird species in danger

REUTERS, Johannesburg

More than a fifth of the planet's bird species face extinction as humans venture further into their habitats and introduce alien predators, according to an environmental group.

While there have been some success stories of species that reappeared or recovered, the overall situation of the world's birds is worsening, BirdLife International said in its annual assessment of the feathered fauna.

"The total number (of bird species) considered to be threatened with extinction is now 1,212, which when combined with the number of near

threatened species gives a total of exactly 2,000 species in trouble—more than a fifth of the planet's remaining 9,775 species," BirdLife said on Wednesday.

Several species from Europe appear in the list for the first time, including the European roller, for which key populations in Turkey and European Russia have declined markedly.

BirdLife, a global alliance of conservation groups, said 179 species were categorised as critically endangered, the highest level of threat. They include the Azores bullfinch, one of Europe's rarest songbirds that has fewer than 300 left.

There has been some good news on the bird front.

The ivory-billed woodpecker was sighted in the United States for the first time in decades.

On the Seychelles the magpie-robin, a species that had dwindled to just 12-15 birds on one island by 1965, recovered to over 130 after birds were relocated to small, predator-free islands off Africa's east coast.

But news has been bad elsewhere. BirdLife said two of New Zealand's species have moved closer to joining five others that are extinct there, largely because of introduced rat population explosions in 1999 and 2000.

## Power lines linked to leukaemia: Study

REUTERS, London

A child living near a high voltage power line may run a higher risk of contracting leukaemia—the most common childhood cancer—according to a study published yesterday.

But while it showed an increased incidence of leukaemia in children whose home address at birth was within 200 metres of a power line, the study's authors admitted they had not proved that proximity to the power lines was the cause.

"There is an association between childhood leukaemia and proximity of home address at birth to high voltage power lines," the study concluded.

The team, which included John Swanson the scientific adviser to National Grid Transco plc, said they had no satisfactory explanation for their results in terms of the power lines' magnetic fields directly causing the cancer.

"The findings are not supported by convincing laboratory data... We emphasise again the uncertainty about whether this statistical associ-

ation represents a causal relation," the study said.

Leukaemia is a cancer of immature white blood cells.

Research shows around 1 in every 2,000 children worldwide develops leukaemia before the age of 15, the disease usually occurs between the ages of 2 and 4 years old and the majority of cases can be successfully treated.

The study, the largest to date of the relationship between childhood cancer and power lines, began in 1997 and tracked the records of around 29,000 children in England and Wales— including 9,700 suffering from leukaemia— plotting the distance of their postal addresses at birth from power lines.

Gerald Draper, of the University of Oxford Childhood Cancer Research Group who contributed to the study, said the lack of a causal link should not discredit the study's findings.

"We say the results could be down to chance but they're statistically really strong. It looks as though they are real, we just don't know," he told reporters.



Prof Dr Wakil Ahmed inaugurates a modern library of the Ideal Commerce College on its premises in the city yesterday.