

European HR meet

FROM PAGE 16 conference held at University of London on June 17 urged the government to contain "human rights abuses especially the repression on minority communities and civil society members".

It also called for repeal of the fifth and eighth amendments to the Constitution as well as 'racist laws such as the vested property legislation'.

The conference reminded the government that to uphold the constitutional rights of the people, it must lift the ban on Ahmadiyya publications, restore the Ahmadiyya mosques to the sect, and ensure the rights of the Ahmadiyyas as well as other communities to jobs in public services and elsewhere.

Participants in the conference described the religious extremism in Bangladesh as threatening to bring down the democratic institutions and undermine the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion.

They expressed concern that the Bangladeshi authorities have not only failed to 'stop the rise of religious fanaticism, but have colluded with the extremist groups to violate the human rights of minority people'.

REJOINER & REPLY Bangladesh High Commission in London protested the steering committee chairman of the conference Lord Avebury's statement on the remarks of Bangladesh High Commissioner to UK AH Mofazzal Karim regarding the conference.

In the rejoinder Karim expressed disappointment over the "false statement" by

A The Daily Star report on Monday contained House of Lords member Avebury's statement. The report was entitled 'Disappointment over HC Karim's statement'.

The rejoinder sent to The Daily Star yesterday from external publicity wing of the foreign ministry reads: "The High Commission finds it

difficult to believe that the honourable Member of the House of Lords could use such unparliamentary language and would rather tend to think that the honourable Member has been misquoted by the staff correspondent."

"Moreover it is not clear as to which of H.E. Karim's statement is referred to in the news item or which part of the speech he made on the 17th June is 'false'," reads the rejoinder.

The High Commission reiterates that the conference on Bangladesh was a pre-planned event to malign the present government and tarnish Bangladesh's image, says the rejoinder.

"The Bangladesh High Commission strongly upholds the statement of H.E. the High Commissioner to the conference to be the correct reflection of the state of affairs of Bangladesh as against the baseless, malicious and motivated propaganda launched by the organisers of the conference."

In reply, The Daily Star says that the report was based on the statement issued by Lord Avebury after the conference.

Avebury, the vice chair of the UK Parliamentary Human Rights Group, also said in his statement: "It is clear to me, from the High Commissioner's determination to bring in extra people who were not invited, and from the conduct of his group when they refused to accept the Chair's ruling, that their object was not to contribute to the discussion of the unacceptable human rights situation in Bangladesh but to sabotage the initiative if possible, and if not, to creating disorder by willfully choosing not to comply with universally accepted rules of debate."

Aug 21 attack

that she is involved in all criminal activities in the country.

"Sheikh Hasina should be brought under interrogation to halt criminal activities as she is the mastermind of all criminal activities and patron of criminals," Pintu said taking part in the discussion on the proposed budget for 2005-06.

The BNP lawmaker from Lalbagh hardly spoke on the budget but he fired a broadside at the Awami League (AL) chief and his party colleagues. "The motive behind the August 21 grenade attacks would be unearthed if Hasina is quizzed," he said.

"Sheikh Hasina has become insane after the arrest of top terror Arman. She is making insensible statements about the August 21 grenade attacks," he added.

The BNP lawmaker also demanded interrogation of his main competitor in the Dhaka-8 constituency, AL leader Hazi Mohammad Selim, and Dr HBM Iqbal, another former lawmaker of the AL, for involvement in criminal activities.

He told the House, "We, the people of Lalbagh and Hazaribagh, did not allow the Awami League to conduct political activities in the area for the last three and a half years."

Pintu ended his 15-minute speech amid desk thumping by Leader of the House Khaleda Zia and senior members of the treasury bench.

Saifur snubs

FROM PAGE 1 meeting told The Daily Star quoting Saifur as saying.

The finance minister said the previous tax on handset has been reduced from Tk 1,500 to Tk 300. "The decision will help curb smuggling of cell phone handset in the country," he said, adding that from now on mobile phone operators will import handsets directly and customers will get good handsets.

The delegation told the finance minister that the imposition of the new tax will also have adverse effect on the government's revenue collection and its direct and indirect income from the tax and VAT will reduce as the growth of the sector is going to be hampered.

The finance minister suggested the private cell phone operators to reduce their high call tariff and blamed them for not providing reduced rates on weekends. Reduction of call tariff will ultimately help further growth of the sector, he said.

In a bid to reduce pressure on the customers, the finance minister suggested them to arrange instalments for selling SIM cards.

Assuring the operators of all co-operations from the government, he called upon them to help curb tax evasion in the sector and enhance facilities for the cell phone users.

Earlier, the delegation of private cell phone operators met with the Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haq, National Board of Revenue (NBR) Chairman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury, and World Bank Country Director Christine Wallich in a bid to pursue the government to reconsider its decision.

The government had reduced the mobile handset tariff in fiscal 2004-05 to Tk 1,500 from the previous Tk 4,000.

Rare Pangolin

FROM PAGE 1 group to sell the mammal. "The zoo staffs told us they were willing to take it if it was free of cost," Tutul said.

Principal Curator of the National Zoo, Mafizur Rahman, however, denied being approached by any group in this regard. He also said there was no pangolin in the zoo. There are a few pangolins in the Botanical Garden and some of them at times go out of the garden, he mentioned.

Hundreds of people flocked to Sagar's house at Nawabar Bagh to have a glimpse of the rare mammal, which was kept in an iron cage.

A police team from Mirpur visited Sagar's house and asked him to hand over the pangolin to them, but Sagar refused to comply.

Later, another police team led by Additional Deputy Commissioner of DMP Nazrul Islam raided Sagar's house and arrested him with the mammal. Police filed a case against Sagar under the Wild Life Protection Act.

"The highly endangered species is not available in Dhaka," said Noorjahan Sarkar, professor of Zoology department of Dhaka University, "the pangolin might have come from the hilly areas of Sylhet."

She also said some of the species are available in the Sylhet region and one of the pangolins was found in Mymensingh in the 1970's.

While the schedule 3 of Wild Life Protection Act 1974 says the pangolin shall not be hunted, captured or killed, section 26 of the Act says, if anyone violates the law, he would be put in jail for a minimum of six months up to one year or may be fined Tk 500 to Tk 1000.

Galib adjourned

FROM PAGE 16 madrasa at Shahjahanpur upazila in Bogra was scheduled to take place yesterday.

Militant leader Galib is kept under special security for the hearing of another case under the Explosive Substances Control Act at Gabtoli thana of Bogra on Wednesday.

Foreign secys

FROM PAGE 1 The issues on the table include security, border management, cross-border movements, cooperation in water resources, economic cooperation, defence exchanges, consular and cultural exchanges.

Ahead of the meeting, Hemayatuddin said Dhaka attached considerable importance to the deliberations. Observing that he has an "open, fresh and positive mind" for consultations with Saran, he said, "We will discuss all issues of bilateral interest and cooperation."

"We are looking for a positive consultation and attaching considerable importance to the meeting which is also significant for our foreign policy," Hemayatuddin said.

In another development, India said it was willing to issue the maximum number of visas to Bangladeshis as part of efforts to further improve people-to-people contacts with the country.

Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahamed conveyed this development to Hemayatuddin when the latter called on him in New Delhi, the sources said.

During the 20-minute meeting, Ahamed said India considered Bangladesh an important neighbour strategically, politically and economically.

England flay

FROM PAGE 16 wickets at Bristol on Sunday.

Hampshire fast bowler Chris Tremlett was handed a one-day international debut in place of the rested Darren Gough.

Left-arm spinner Ashley Giles, fit again after a hip injury, replaced batsman and part-time off-spinner Vikram Solanki.

Bangladesh, who went down to a 10-wicket defeat against England in Thursday's series opener at The Oval, made one change from the team that beat Australia by five wickets at Cardiff on Saturday in the biggest upset in one-day international cricket history.

Left-handed opening batsman Shahriar Nafees, 19, was handed his one-day international debut in place of Nafees Iqbal, relegated to 12th man duties after making eight against Australia.

\$1.9b health plan

FROM PAGE 16 On essential service packages (ESP) and non-public sector healthcare providers, it pointed out that the ESP defined under HPSP was directed towards rural areas, and a major gap was left in coverage of urban areas. Little attention was paid to non-public sector providers although they deliver the largest part of healthcare services, particularly curative care.

With some exceptions, service quality, particularly in the public sector, deteriorated significantly and the share of the public sector spending to deliver primary health care declined during the last few years.

About the community clinics (CCs), it said the intention to increase the delivery of services through the CCs failed.

World Bank Country Director Christine Wallich, in a letter to Health Secretary A F M Sarwar Kamal, said, "We are concerned at the decline in share of the public health services delivery and insufficient level of transfers of public health subsidies to the poor."

Asked about the observations made in the aid memoire, the health secretary said, "To overcome the problems, we are giving priority to social developments and increased annual budget spending."

Sarwar added, "The HPSP was a failure but many of the lessons learnt from it would be useful in implementing the present health, nutrition, and population sector programme (HNPSPP)."

Hasina urge north

FROM PAGE 16 developed nations.

The former prime minister regretted that "enthusiasm displayed in the Millennium Summit in New York in 2000 by some of the resourceful members of the UN has ebbed significantly, thereby slowing alarmingly the progress towards some of the vital MDGs".

Hasina, also president of the Awami League (AL), said actual challenges for the global community, in both the developed and developing worlds, are to mobilise financial support and political will, re-engage governments and reorient development priorities and policies.

Now on a four-day visit to France, Hasina is attending the meetings of the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe (CoE) and official meetings with the representatives of Hanns Seidel Foundation and members of the government.

She said some 1.2 billion people in 43 countries are living on less than a dollar a day. At the present slow rate of progress, country reports of several countries indicate that achievement will drastically fall short of the target.

At this slow pace, she observed, it will take additional 10 years, or even more, to achieve the MDGs considering the growth of popula-

tion among the poverty-stricken countries within the targeted period of 2015.

Hasina said the Awami League government was successful in making Bangladesh food-surplus, ensuring availability of food to all, and freeing the people from hunger.

On safe drinking water, she said it is estimated that more than a billion people around the world still lack access to safe water.

On women empowerment, another aspect of MDGs, she said after five years of the millennium summit, it is told two-thirds of women around the world-- obviously from developing countries-- remain illiterate, and 80 percent of the world's refugees continue to be women and children.

Hasina said her government had made special effort in freeing women from the scourges of poverty by allocating substantial funds and microcredit to poor women. The efforts have been reasonably successful in pulling two million women and their families out of poverty trap and its related miseries.

Earlier, Sheikh Hasina was welcomed by President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Rene Vander Lenden and shown the functioning of European Parliament and its committees.

22 BJMC mills closed

FROM PAGE 1

the mills, the corporation might be able to produce only half their capacity in the current fiscal year.

This year saw a slump in raw jute production -- 35-lakh bales that fall roughly 10 lakh bale short of annual average -- due to unfavourable weather.

Talking on the crisis, BJMC Director Alam told The Daily Star: "He (the chairman) remained rigid on pricing and as a result we failed to buy sufficient quantity of jute from the farmers in time to feed the mills."

But Chairman Solaiman alleged that in the name of high market price, low quality jute was purchased at inflated price.

"A departmental case has been filed against the director on the charge of forcing various mills to procure low quality jute worth Tk 5 crore at inflated rates," claimed the BJMC chairman.

"We met the prime minister and sought Tk 30 crore in loans from banks to procure raw jute to feed at least seven relatively better performing mills," he added. "By the time we received the money, jute price had gone up to as high as Tk 900 to Tk 1,000 from Tk 470 a maund at the beginning of the season."

As the bitterness between the chairman and the director increased, the chairman wrote to

the ministry for the removal of Alam and lodged a departmental case against him for procurement of low quality jute for Latif Bawani Jute Mills, Karim Jute Mills, Hafiz Jute Mills, RR Jute Mills, and MM Jute Mills.

Accordingly, Alam was removed from the post who then went to court to file a writ petition. A High Court Division served a rule on the ministry and the BJMC chairman to show cause why Alam's removal should not be declared illegal. It also directed the corporation to let Alam continue in his post until the petition is disposed of.

On June 19, the BJMC chairman went to an Appellate Division seeking leave to the High Court's stay, but again the court directed both parties to maintain status quo.

Alam now claims that he was barred from discharging his duties in violation of the court ruling and his office room was put under lock and key on June 20. The BJMC chairman denied Alam's allegation and said, "I sought the ministry's directive regarding the court's ruling."

Meanwhile, as a tension was prevailing over the issue at the BJMC headquarters in Dhaka, anger froths among thousands of workers and employees of the closed mills, mostly in Khulna-Jessore region.

7 Asia-Pacific

FROM PAGE 1

against the larger economies in the region.

The leaders of the apparel exporters associations from Bangladesh, Laos, Cambodia, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan and Sri Lanka hoped the bill will also create incentives for investment and opportunities for employment in 14 LDCs and Sri Lanka.

They formed a seven-member committee to work out a yearlong action plan for further lobbying for the passage of the bill tabled in the US Congress and Senate early this year.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Anisul Huq, Association of the Lao Garment Industry President One-Sy Boutsivongsakd, Garment Manufacturers Association of Cambodia Secretary General Loo Chee Chien, Garment Association of Nepal President Kiran Prakash Saakha, Joint Apparel Association Forum of Sri Lanka Chief Executive Officer Tuli Cooray, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Bap Kinga and Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce Deputy Abdullah Tokhi signed the declaration.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury attended the signing ceremony.

BGMEA President Anisul Huq said the seven-member group will arrange a joint programme in Washington in September this year to press the US authorities for passing the bill. "We will also organise two more conferences in two signatory countries within the next couple of months," Huq told the reporters.

He said joint efforts are much effective than individual efforts in gaining any rights or opportunity at the international level. The group will be further strengthened as the Maldives and Tuvalu are likely to join the forum in near future, he added.

The BGMEA president said the group will seek help from the international think tanks such as Heritage Foundation, Oxfam and Carnegie Foundation in the process of lobbying.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said Bangladesh has to pay much higher tariff rates on its export goods than those from the developed countries.

"With an export of \$2.40 billion to the US market, Bangladesh products

are charged a \$331 million tariff and in contrast French exports are charged only \$330 million for a \$24.2 billion export," the minister added.

Terming the tariff rates "discriminatory," he said such high tariff rates undermine the LDCs' competitive strength in the US market.

Morshed emphasised the need for joint efforts by the civil society, think tanks and private sectors in the least developed countries in support of the bill.

Before signing the declaration, the business leaders from the seven countries presented the vulnerable state of their apparel exports in the quota-free regime.

They said more than 40 percent of the garment units have been closed or their production suspended after the expiry of the multi-fibre agreement (MFA). Six LDCs lost 30 percent employment in the sector in the first five months of the post-MFA era.

US under secy

FROM PAGE 1 London and South Asia from June 21.

He will depart from Washington on June 21 for meetings in London. On June 22, he will meet counterparts from the US Security Council permanent member states and others to discuss UN reform.

Burns will also meet his counterparts from Japan and Australia as part of the US-Japan-Australia strategic dialogue. On June 23, he will accompany Secretary Rice at the G8 foreign ministers meetings.

Burns will then return to India and Bangladesh.

In New Delhi, he will meet senior government officials and political leaders to discuss developments in the US-India strategic partnership in advance of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Washington visit.

In Dhaka, Burns will discuss the political climate and bilateral issues of mutual interest in meetings with government officials, political leaders and members of the civil society.

He is expected to meet Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and other high government officials.

Burn will return to Washington, DC, on June 27.

Why VAT on Teletalk SIM not illegal

HC asks govt to explain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday ordered the government and the Teletalk authorities to reply as to why the levying of Tk 1,200 as VAT on Teletalk SIM cards would not be declared illegal.

The HC rule that came in response to a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by six Teletalk lottery winners also ordered the respondents to show cause as to why they should not be directed to sell the SIM cards at the previous rate of Tk 1,800.

The PIL filed with an HC bench on Sunday challenged the legality of the notice issued by Teletalk Bangladesh Limited to levy Tk 1200 as VAT on each SIM (subscriber identity module) card according to a Statutory Regulatory Order (SRO) by the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

On hearing the petition yesterday, the court asked the respondents to make the reply in seven days, and set June 29 as the next date for hearing.

Finance secretary, telecommunications secretary, chairman of the T&T Board and National Board of Revenue (NBR), and Teletalk managing director are among the six respondents of the petition.

Idrisur Rahman, the lawyer representing the petitioners, told the court that 50,000 people had won the lottery and of them, 20,000 were already given SIM cards between June 4 and June 9 at the rate of Tk 1800.

The Teletalk authorities kept the SIM card distribution stopped for the next two days, he added.

The NBR on June 09 issued an SRO imposing Tk 1200 VAT on each SIM card. Responding to the SRO, Teletalk in a notice on June 13 announced that the lottery winners will have to pay an additional Tk 1200 along with the earlier declared Tk 1800 to collect their SIM cards.

"It is illegal to slap Tk 1,200 as VAT on a SIM card without informing the lottery winners," said the defence.

He also contended that the government cannot impose the extra VAT unilaterally, because Teletalk had signed an agreement with the government before the lottery where they said they would sell a SIM card at Tk 1,800.

So, obliging the rest 30,000 Teletalk lottery winners to pay the additional amount is discriminatory and illegal, he maintained.

Two BNP cadres

FROM PAGE 16 drug smuggling, and gave information about their den, said Rab sources.

A Rab team then took Shamim to Nabiganj to search for arms while another team took Biplob and Alam to Isha Khan Fort at Hajiganj.

Accomplices of the two arrestees opened fire on Rab at Hajiganj and the latter returned fire. At one stage, the two arrestees attempted to flee but were killed in firing. Their accomplices then retreated and Rab found their bodies and recovered two revolvers with seven bullets, Rab said.

A local at Hajiganj Bazar, Kazi Michir Ali, told reporters that he heard gunshots when he was going to say prayers at a nearby mosque at dawn.

"I heard someone announcing over microphone from the mosque that Rab and criminals are locked in a gunfight, and asked the locals not to come out of their houses," he said.

Police later sent the bodies to Narayanganj General Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Rab and police said Alam was an accused in an extortion case filed with Bandar Police Station but they could not confirm if Biplob had any criminal records.

Biplob was linked to the Awami League cadres during the AL rule and later changed over to BNP camp when it came to power, locals said.

The two were found active in BNP processions and public gatherings. They also had photographs with some BNP leaders, lawmakers and even ministers.

Meanwhile, thousands of people gathered to see the bodies of the two cadres and chanted slogans of joy.

India to issue

FROM PAGE 16 economically, and was ready to extend all cooperation for further improvement of relations.

New Delhi would like to issue maximum number of visas to Bangladeshis even if the figure is "hundreds of thousands", he said.

The Bangladesh foreign secretary, who is in New Delhi for talks with his Indian counterpart Shyam Saran, told E Ahamed that Bangladesh has a lot of goodwill for India who has always helped the former.

Petrobangla running

FROM PAGE 1

there have been no fresh recruitment since 1999. Many experts have retired and many experts have left Petrobangla for other jobs.

There are about 450 people in Petrobangla now.

Job satisfaction in Petrobangla started waning after the prime minister became the energy minister during the previous Awami League rule in 1998-99. This was done apparently to give the energy sector more importance. A state minister was appointed to bridge the gap between the prime minister and affairs concerning the energy sector, which has many companies and bodies to deal with gas, power, mineral resources and petroleum. The BNP government followed the same structure.

However instead of gaining importance, Petrobangla the national body for coordination, monitoring and technical services in the gas sector actually lost many executive powers.

Foreign companies that used to deal with Petrobangla first and the ministries later now deal in the opposite direction. As a result, the oil-gas dealings have become weaker. For example, the ousted state minister hammered the faulty deal of Niko Resources that gave an unexplored gas field to Niko in the name of a 'marginal gas field' ignoring the reservations of Petrobangla.

Similarly, the Petrobangla chairman, who appointed board members in its nine affiliates, like Titas gas or Gas Transmission Company Ltd, could no longer make such appointments after 1999. Instead the state ministers and the minister (the prime minister) took the charge. This process interrupted appointments of competent members as ministers tend to promote and appoint people on political considerations.

"Petrobangla has become rather a clerical body. An engineer would not want to work here. But it needs engineers, drilling experts and other technical hands. Because we deal with pipelines, gas fields, gas processing, geological data and all kinds of technical agreements with different oil companies," the source pointed out.

Unfortunately the technical division is the most affected part of Petrobangla. More than 70 percent of positions for technical jobs remain vacant.

Though Petrobangla has to deal with huge financial objections worth several hundred millions of dollars with oil companies, it does not have adequate manpower to deal with audit issues.

It has a law division, but it does not have any lawyer or an official with a law background. But it must deal with legal interpretations of agreements all the time.

In monitoring the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs) under which the oil companies like Cairn or Chevron-Texaco (which took over Unocal) work in Bangladesh, there are some experienced and senior hands. However, there is almost no person who has good knowledge in the modern technolo-

gies in oil and gas explorations that are applied by the oil companies.

The boards of the nine affiliates of Petrobangla remain equally stagnant although their manpower scenario is not as bad as that of Petrobangla. Many of the board members, who are government officials, appointed in 2002 are no longer involved in the concerning sector. For example, the chairman of Titas board used to be the secretary for power. He is now serving in another ministry holding the same position.

The nine affiliates were announced as 'autonomous' bodies in 2003. Although legally they had always been autonomous-in practice, the state minister or the minister made appointments in the boards since 1998-99. After announcing them autonomous again, neither the Petrobangla chairman nor the ministry has reconstituted the board. No one gave any directive on how to change these boards in the last two-three years.

Yet since 1999, when the last recruitment was made, Petrobangla's volume of work and earning rose sharply as gas supplies increased by several hundred million cubic feet per day (mmcfed) since then. Its total earning exceeded the Tk 2000 crore mark five-six years ago, making Petrobangla the top earning government organisation.

Petrobangla's gas production in the last fiscal year (2003-04) was equivalent to 1.2 million metric tonnes of oil worth 4 billion dollars. This means local gas production had saved the nation about Tk 2400 crore worth of foreign currency.

"But such contributions remain largely ignored by the government. It annually allocates around Tk 600 crore to 800 crore for gas sector development whereas it spends four times more in rural infrastructures like roads and culvert constructions (Tk 2679 crore in the 2004-05 fiscal) because such spending is in high demand among parliamentarians," the source observed.

Since 1994, the gas sector brought in 1.2 billion US dollars of foreign direct investment. As a result, Petrobangla now buys around 330 mmcfed gas from 12 million dollars to Cairn and Chevron-Texaco. It is set to buy more gas from the oil companies from 2007. It is also going to deal with Tata's \$2.5 billion investment proposal which heavily relies on using gas.

"Petrobangla has to negotiate with oil companies. It has to interpret. It has to understand