

Uphold existing communal harmony: President

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed has called upon the people irrespective of religious believes to uphold the country's existing communal harmony and values at home and abroad.

"We all are Bangladeshis irrespective of religion, race and caste. We have to build up the country unitedly," the President said this when a 14-member delegation of Bangladesh Buddhist Federation called on him at Bangabhaban in the city yesterday.

The delegation members include Federation Executive Chairman Prof Sukomol Barua and General Secretary Ashok Barua.

The delegation members requested the President to inaugurate the International Buddha

Conference to be held in the city in November.

The president assured them of all cooperation in this regard.

Shah Zafar takes oath as MP

UNB, Dhaka

Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar, elected to parliament in the by-polls of Faridpur-1, was sworn-in yesterday.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar administered the oath in his Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office. Food Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibe Yusuf, Whips Mohammad Ashraf Hossain and Syed Shahidul Haq Jamal were present on the occasion.

Shah Zafar visited the mazar of President Ziaur Rahman and offered fateha.



The British School held a programme on its premises at Dhanmondi in the city recently to exchange views on the objectives and achievements of the school with journalists, diplomats and members of the civil society. From left are Chairman of the school Kabir Ahmed, Mokhlesur Rahman Talukdar, Principal Angela MV Robinson, Carole Anne, Tom Duff and Toff Wahhab.

Not AL, coalition govt

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the FoU had compelled the government to sign the deal. But the FoU did not dictate any legal obligation for the state. It is not even an agreement and it does not give any legal premise to anyone for arbitration. It is the most primary framework for two parties to proceed towards a certain direction. In addition, Bangladesh had no diplomatic or political obligation to Canada over this deal as well.

In contrast, the BNP government did not hesitate to cancel the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for two Di-ammonium Phosphate (DAP) Fertiliser Projects with China and Japan, both of which were signed during the AL regime. A MoU is far more advanced than a FoU in any business because it is followed by initialling an agreement.

Despite the justification, the cancellation of these state-to-state deals had instantly affected Bangladesh-Japan and Bangladesh-China relations. For the sake of the relationship with Japan, the country's biggest bilateral donor, the government reopened the DAP project in late 2003 while the Chinese DAP deal has remained scrapped.

The Japanese aid flow is still suffering due to the cancellation, which Japan views as an instance of 'dishonouring' state-to-state agreements.

On the other hand, the Niko deal did not give Bangladesh any justifiable benefit. In fact, the Niko-Bapex joint venture deal that was initially outlined by the AL government was even better than the deal the current government ultimately signed.

The original draft of the Niko-Bapex deal as okayed by the-then prime minister Sheikh Hasina had the option for "Swiss Challenge".

Under the Swiss Challenge system, Niko-Bapex's unsolicited deal for three gas fields would have been put for an open tender for a better financial offer from any other oil company. The option of Swiss Challenge was incorporated to legitimise the unsolicited nature of the agreement.

But Niko was not interested in Swiss Challenge --which could have helped Bapex secure a better deal with a better oil company. The current BNP government dropped this option along with some other contractual issues, undermining the national interest, and signed the contract in 2003.

That the government holds the sovereign right to cancel a contract even at the final stage has been demonstrated by cancelling the bid for 450 megawatt Sirajganj Power project in early 2004. This bid went to Summit Power and it was okayed by the Cabinet Purchase Committee and the World Bank and other multilateral donors were funding the project when the government cancelled it without showing any reason. Such decision was driven by an anti-Awami League mindset, although the government knew this would jeopardise the future power supply.

There are other instances where the government cancelled or retendered shady deals signed during the Awami League regime.

For instance, the BNP retendered the submarine cable project signed during the Awami League government with SingTel.

The government also cancelled the faulty contract to launch obsolete Personal Handy Phone System in the country.

A number of power projects including the 210 megawatt Khulna plant, 20 megawatt Bhola plant and

Ghorashal Power plant modernisation project have also been shelved.

But on the other hand, like the Niko contract, a number of faulty projects have been given go ahead. The government also did not take any action against any bureaucrat and politicians involved in corruption, although in a white paper it named 40 different projects and purchases which were done through corruption.

The Niko contract was pushed by AL government's energy secretary Dr Towfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury while it was present law minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed facilitated it as Niko's adviser during the AL regime.

After 2001, ex-state minister for energy Mosharraf Hossain pushed the deal to the extent that on behalf Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, he signed the government's approval in October 2003.

The Daily Star previously reported that some powerful young policymakers belonging to the 'alternative powerhouse' of the government are backing Niko and even had business stakes in Niko's Tengratila operations.

Following the second round of Tengratila blowout, Mahmudur Rahman had formed three committees. All of these committees are clear about Niko's incompetence and the faults in the Niko deal.

In addition, all the country's energy experts among other people have demanded cancellation of the Niko contract. But so far the government punished Bapex officials and threatened Petrobangla officials for not watching over Niko. Mahmudur has defended the deal saying that Niko's presence is necessary to finish the remedial works in Tengratila.

JU JCD ATTACK

Punishment to culprits demanded

JU CORRESPONDENT

Two separate processions were brought out on the campus of Jahangirnagar University (JU) yesterday demanding punishment to the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) cadres involved in Thursday's attack injuring five students.

One silent procession was taken out by about one hundred general students of different departments from in front of old Arts Faculty building at 11:00am and ended in front of the administrative building. The processionists submitted a memorandum to the university authorities demanding treatment cost of the injured and ensuring safety of the students.

The other procession was brought out by Progotisheel Chhatra Jote chanting slogans against the 'controversial' role of the university authorities in taking actions against the JCD cadres.

The jote also submitted a similar memorandum to the authorities.

Meanwhile, all the teachers of the Department of Drama and Dramatics in a letter to Registrar Kazi Mohiuddin demanded punitive action against the culprits.

They also urged the authorities to ensure proper treatment of Rakibul Alam Rusho, convenor of Bangladesh Chhatra Union, now undergoing treatment at Health and Hope Clinic in Dhaka.

Women MPs take oath today

UNB, Dhaka

The oath taking of newly elected women MPs in reserved seats will be held at the Jatiya Shagshad Bhaban at 2:30pm today.

Speaker Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar will administer the oath to 36 women MPs who have been requested to be present, according to a PID handout out.



PN Iyer, managing director of Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd., and Nurjahan Begum, managing director of Grameen Sikkha, exchange Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on 'Holcim scholarship for masons' children' at the Holcim Corporate Office in the city recently.