

Religious freedom a must for harmonious co-existence

Speakers tell discussion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secularism does not mean denying religion, but the anti-liberation forces misled the common people into believing that it means atheism in order to spread an anti-Awami League propaganda, speakers at a discussion said yesterday.

They said secularism is an essential element of democracy and that religious freedom is a must for harmonious co-existence of people of different faiths.

Autocrat Ershad scrapped 'secularism', one of the main pillars of the constitution, in a bid to destroy the spirit of the liberation war, said Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil.

The situation worsened further when the BNP took the Jamaat as its partner to form the government, he said, adding that under the direct patronisation of the BNP, the anti-liberation forces have started propagating that the AL believes in secularism, which means it wants to promote atheism.

The AL is now planning to approach the people of all strata, particularly in rural areas, in a campaign to explain the true meaning of secularism, said the AL leaders.

The Bangladesh Parishad organised the discussion titled 'Secularism does not mean atheism' to avoid any confusion over the issue," said Dr SA Malek, general secretary of Bangladesh Parishad, in his keynote speech.

"During the framing of the constitution, Bangladesh Sheikh Mujibur Rahman categorically said that 'secularism does not mean atheism' to avoid any confusion over the issue," said Dr SA Malek, general secretary of Bangladesh Parishad, in his keynote speech.

By the term 'secularism', Bangladesh meant that people of all faiths would enjoy religious freedom and there would be no discrimination with regard to social, economic and political rights, he added.

The practice of secularism is very essential in this country in view of the socio-political and cultural trends of this region, said Dr Malek.

Bangabandhu himself was a devout

Muslim but did not hesitate to recognise secularism as one of the four pillars of the constitution, as people of different faiths, cultures and races are living in the country, he added.

AL president member Suranjit Sengupta called for the repeal of the fifth and eighth amendments to the constitution and restoration of the constitution of 1972.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Kader observed that the religious fundamentalists in Bangladesh are more powerful than those in Pakistan.

He said the people of the country are still secular in nature; they practice their religion and also respect the religions of others.

Justice KM Sobhan, president of Bangladesh Parishad, AK Azad Chowdhury, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, Colonel (Retd.) Abu Osman Chowdhury, Prof Harun-ur-Rashid, journalist Harun Habib, cultural activist Ramendu Majumder, former ambassador Mohammad Zamir and Major General (Rtd) KM Shafulah also spoke.

REPRESSION BY PAK ARMY IN '71

We can't forget but we can learn to forgive: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Newly appointed Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Babor made a courtesy call on Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina at her 'Sudha Sadan' residence in the city yesterday.

During the hour-long meeting they discussed matters of bilateral interest between the two friendly countries, party officials said. The matters relating to the activities of fundamentalists in both the countries, like the August 17 countrywide serial bomb blasts and last year's August 21 attack on Hasina at Bangabandhu Avenue, also came up for discussion.

After the meeting, AL president member Kazi Zafarullah, MP told newsmen that Hasina hoped relationship among the Saarc countries will be strengthened in the days ahead.

Referring to the repression by Pakistani army during the War of Liberation in 1971, Zafarullah quoted Hasina as saying "We can't forget but we can learn to forgive."

Hasina, also Awami League president, assured the envoy of her party's all possible cooperation for the victims of the recent devastating earthquake in Pakistan.

AL leader Mohammad Ziauddin was also present during the meeting.

2 police die in city road accidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police constable yesterday died in a hospital after sustaining critical injuries in a road accident at Tejgaon on Tuesday night.

Sayedus Zaman, 25, a constable of Riot Police, was crossing the road in front of the Prime Minister's Office when a speeding microbus hit him at 8:25pm.

He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) where he succumbed to his injuries at 4:10pm yesterday.

Another riot police Mohammad Liton, 24, who suffered critical injuries in a separate accident at Tejgaon on Sunday, succumbed to his injuries the following day at the DMCH.

Munshi Premchand fellowship introduced

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's prestigious literary body Sahitya Akademi has announced a Rs five lakh fellowship named after litterateur Munshi Premchand to be given to a leading creative writer from a Saarc country every year.

The fellowship will be for a period ranging from one to three months and the New Delhi-based Akademi will bear the lodging, boarding and travelling expenses of the winning author, said a press release issued by the Akademi.

During the fellowship, the Akademi will also arrange talks and reading programmes for the writer at different places in India.

It has invited names from Indian high commissions and embassies in the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) countries, universities, cultural organisations and eminent scholars for the fellowship this year.

The fellowship has been instituted on the occasion of 125th birth anniversary of Premchand, a prominent figure in Hindi literature, who has influenced several writers in other Indian languages also.

Meanwhile, 60 distinguished Indian writers and eight eminent authors from different countries, including the US, Italy and Pakistan, will take part in a four-day seminar on Premchand beginning in New Delhi today.

Distribution of JU admission form remains suspended for 3rd day

JU CORRESPONDENT

The distribution of admission forms of Jahangirnagar University (JU) remained suspended for the third consecutive day yesterday as the agitators continued their siege programme at the Agrani Bank branches of Shahbag, Farmgate in the capital and of JU in Savar. The activists of JU Progotisheel Chhatra Jote (PSJ) yesterday formed a human chain in front of Agrani Bank branch of JU reiterating their demand to immediately withdraw the price hike of admission forms.

The applicants, who came there to purchase admission forms, also joined the agitators.

The authorities have not taken any decision yet to resolve the problem or declare any fresh date for distribution of admission forms.



Karmojibi Nari, a women's rights organisation, forms a human chain at Mukhtangan in the city demanding declaration of Monga-affected area as disaster area.

HC contempt rule on Patuakhali district judge

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday issued a contempt rule upon Mohammad Abdul Majid, district judge of Patuakhali, to explain why proceedings should not be drawn against him for ignoring court orders.

A division bench, comprising justices M A Rashid and ATM Fazle Kabir, asked him to appear in person before it on November 20 for reply. The judges also directed the district judge to set free the accused of a women repression case on receipt of Wednesday's order.

The contempt rule followed a petition filed by Mohammad Afzal Hosain, counsel for accused Kalam Khondker and Sattar Howlader, who were sent to jail by judge Abdul Majid despite submission of HC orders granting them ad-interim anticipatory bail on August 21 in a women repression case.

Hazari cadre arrested in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Panchlaish Police yesterday arrested an associate of former Feni Awami League leader Joymal Abedin Hazari at Bakhrabad Gas System Ltd (BGSL) office in the port city.

The arrestee identified Momin Ullah Sufian, 40, also a BGSL-listed contractor, was an absconding accused in an arms case under Parshuram Police Station in Feni about three years ago, police said.

Acting on secret information, a team of Panchlaish police raided the BGSL compound at Sholoshahar area at around 1:00pm yesterday and caught Momin.

Launch service on Dhaka-Haimchar route demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Haimchar in Chandpur yesterday at a press conference in the city demanded of the government to execute the court order given on August 30 to run two launches on Dhaka-Chandpur-Haimchar river route considering the interest of the people.

MV Shariyah-1 and MV Takwah, two private vessels, got the recommendation of the shipping minister on September 28 to ply on the route but Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has not given their nod yet, they said.

They also said if the two vessels, which are large and strong, ply on this route, it will reduce the risk of launch capsizing.

President of Launch Owners' Association of Bangladesh KM Mahmudur Rahman, General Secretary Nazimuddin, former principal of Haimchar college AKM Rezaul and some locals of Haimchar were also present.

Meanwhile, BIWTA Chairman Dr Reaz Hasan Khondkar told The Daily Star last night over phone that he received the application of seeking route permit with the recommendation of shipping minister last week and sent it to the port department for scrutinising.

SANITATION SITUATION DCC officials blamed for poor performance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday slammed the officials of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for their negligence in ensuring sanitation facilities for the low-income group and slum dwellers in the city and financial irregularities in this sector.

"Due to the lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of the (slum development) officials, the urban sanitation achieved only a .25 percent coverage rate in the last two years while the countrywide coverage rate rose to 59 percent from 33 percent during the same period," the minister said.

Even the DCC officials don't have any accurate statistics on the number of slums and hanging latrines in the city, he said at a workshop on the city's sanitation situation.

The DCC organised the workshop in the city, attended by ward commissioners.

Citing examples of financial irregularities by the DCC staffs, the minister said there are instances that they have prepared a bill of Tk 25,000 for installing a latrine, whereas it costs only Tk 3,000.

According to a baseline survey conducted two years ago, the sanitation coverage rate for the city was 84.75 percent, the minister said, adding that the rate has now reached 85 percent.

However, he hoped that the DCC would raise the figure to 95 percent in the next six months.

Acting Mayor MA Majid said many influential people build slums in the city with a minimum cost for maximum benefit. Specific rules should be framed to reverse such a trend, he added.

Chief Executive Officer of DCC M Saifuddin Ahmed, Chief Slum Development Officer Shahidur Rahman and Country Director of Plan Bangladesh Edward Thomas Espay were present at the workshop.

Relief for monga-hit people demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) will hold hunger processions in every upazilas of the country today demanding relief and permanent rationing system to resist Monga (near famine situation).

Bangladesh Khetmajur Shamity, Bangladesh Krishak Shamity, Bangladesh Chhatra Union and Jubo Union expressed solidarity with the CPB.

The demands also included preventing corruption and partisanship in distribution of Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) card; forming buffer stock of essential products; and activation of Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) and BADCO.

Workers' Party of Bangladesh (WPB) will observe October 29 as protest day. Rally and march will take place in different districts and upazilas on that day demanding effective measures to resist Monga and a permanent solution to it.



Dr Stefan Frowein, ambassador and head of the European Commission delegation in Dhaka, speaks at the EU roundtable seminar on 'Human Rights/Trade and Development Issues' at Sheraton Hotel in the city yesterday.

GLOBAL AIDS CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

World bodies warn Bangladesh against feeling complacent

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Unicef, UNAIDS and their partner organisations have jointly launched a Global Aids campaign 'Unite for Children, Unite against Aids' at a time when the world bodies cautioned Bangladesh against feeling

complacent at its current low prevalence rate of HIV and Aids.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Unicef Executive Director Ann M Veneman and UNAIDS Executive Director Peter Piot jointly launched the campaign in New York yesterday, according to a press release issued by the Unicef in Dhaka yesterday.

"Unite for Children, Unite against Aids" is a global campaign to alert the world to the fact that children are missing from the global Aids agenda. It provides a platform for urgent and sustained programmes including advocacy and fundraising to limit the impact of HIV/Aids on children and help halt the spread of the disease.

Under the campaign, the Unicef and UNAIDS want to achieve the prime goals of preventing mother-to-child HIV transmission, providing paediatric treatment, preventing infection among adolescents and young people and protecting and supporting children affected by HIV/Aids.

Although many countries in Africa and Asia are ravaged by the disease, Bangladesh's prevalence is still low with only 465 confirmed HIV positive cases.

Unicef Bangladesh Representative Louis-Georges Arsenault warned that Bangladesh's low prevalence rate should not let the country slip into a false sense of security.

"Bangladesh has the unique opportunity of being able to act now and prevent the disease. Many

countries have lost the battle against HIV/Aids. Bangladesh needs to rise to the challenge and keep the rate low," Arsenault said.

"Information, awareness and prevention are the keys to success in Bangladesh especially among the country's youth which makes up half of the total population," he said.

Recent national surveys have shown that knowledge about the disease is quite low with 40 percent of adolescent boys and 53 percent of adolescent girls reporting that they have never heard of HIV/Aids.

Many of those Bangladeshis who have heard about HIV/Aids still do not know how to avoid the infection. Nearly 15 percent of married women who had heard about Aids did not know if there was any way to prevent it.

In South Asia, there are 110,000 children living with HIV/Aids of which an estimated 30,000 need antiretroviral therapy and 40,000 children are newly infected every year meaning that every day 110 South Asian children are infected.

In the region there are 1.3 million children orphaned by Aids and 125,000 pregnant women who need treatment.

South Asia has some of the fastest growing epidemics of HIV and Aids amongst the groups such as injecting drug users, sex workers and their clients in the world.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Khulna, Barisal and Chittagong divisions till 6:00pm today.

Weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country during the period, Met Office said predicting slight rise in day temperature.

Highest temperature 35.1 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sitakunda and lowest 19.6 degree Celsius at Dinaipur.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:22pm today and rises at 6:02am tomorrow.

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

Table with columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening)

SC vacation bench constituted

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court goes into an 11-day vacation on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr beginning October 30, court sources said yesterday.

During the vacation a single bench of the High Court with Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha will dispose of the urgent cases.

The vacation bench will be in session on October 31, November 8 and 9 from 10:30am to 1:00pm.



Gono Forum President and Jatiya Oikya Mancha convener Dr Kamal Hossain addresses a discussion and Iftar party at the National Press Club in the city yesterday.

Obituary



Bazlur Rahman, former general manager of Sonali Bank, passed away on Tuesday night at his residence at the age of 64, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, three sons and two daughter and a host of admirers to mourn his death.

His first namaz-e-janaza was held at Kadam Tala Aman mosque and the second one held on the Sonali Bank Head Office premises.

He will be buried at his family graveyard at Sahebagnagar under Muradnagar upazila in Comilla.

Jahanara Alam



Jahanara Alam, wife of former divisional commissioner late Captain (Retd) ANM Shamsul Alam, passed away due to old age complications at her residence on October 17 at the age of 69, says a press release.

She left behind her two sons, five daughters and a host of relatives, friends and admirers to mourn her death.

She was buried beside the grave of her husband at the Banani Graveyard.

Jahanara was member of Lions Club and Japan Ikebana Flower Club.

Death anniversary



Today is the 11th death anniversary of Rokeya Begum, mother of Hasan Jahid Tusher, Staff Correspondent of The Daily Star, says a press release.

Rokeya, wife of Junior Agriculture Officer (Retd) Miah Md Abdur Razzaque, died on this day in 1994. She left behind her husband, four sons, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at her village Central Jame Mosque at Sreerampur under Sadar upazila of Magura district after Magrib prayers today.

Relatives and admirers have been requested to attend the milad and pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

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