

INT'L DAY OF DISABLED PERSONS TOMORROW

Ensuring access to ICT for people with disability

MOON MOON SULTANA

The International Day of Disabled Persons will be observed in the country as elsewhere in the world tomorrow with the slogan 'E-Accessibility.'

This year's slogan focuses on mainstreaming the people with disability into society by establishing their right to access to information and communication technology (ICT).

In accordance with the slogan, Bangladesh will also observe the day with a call to ensure the access of the physically and mentally challenged people to ICT.

Since around 10 percent (WHO estimation) of the total population of the country is physically and mentally challenged, experts consider their right to e-access is a must for the development of the country.

"In education sector, worldwide interest is now in ICT, and in many countries visually challenged persons are being able to use Internet through especially developed browsers incorporating the Braille system," said AHM Noman Khan, secretary general of National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (NFOWD).

"If we can expand the computer facilities for the people with disability in the country, they can outshine the similar people of other countries in competition," he added.

Some other organisations working with physically and mentally

challenged people, however, view the international disability day as an occasion to draw the attention of the political parties of the country to this issue ahead of the next parliamentary elections.

The Action on Disability and Development (ADD) that works with people with disability to promote human rights will observe the day with a call for "democracy, human rights, peace and participation."

"As the parliament election takes place next month, the rights of physically and mentally challenged people to voting and contesting the polls have become a major issue of the day," said ADD Country Representative Mosharraf Hossain. Implementation of the Disabled Welfare Act

In 2001, the government enacted the "Disabled Welfare Act" that included providing special facilities for the welfare of the persons with different types of disabilities.

The act was introduced to protect and safeguard the rights and dignity of the people with disability and to ensure their participation in social and national programmes.

In order to realise the objectives of the act, a committee titled 'National Coordination Committee for the Welfare of Persons with Disabilities' was formed with social welfare minister in the chair.

Representatives of different organisations, however, are not happy with the activities of the committee.

"There is hardly any remarkable achievement of the committee," Noman said, adding that the district level committees do not have any functions.

Mosharraf pointed out that although special facilities for physically and mentally challenged people are included in the welfare act, little has been done when it comes into implementation.

He called for an action plan to execute the provisions of the act to ensure their equal participation in the society.

When contacted, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid, immediate past social welfare minister, said there is controversy over the activities of the National Coordination Committee among the organisations working for the people with disability.

While many organisations feel that the committee should be formed only with the people with disability, while other organisations think that inclusion of persons without any disability is also necessary, he said.

Disability in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)

In a paper presented at a meeting titled 'Donors' Dialogue on Disability' on November 9 this year, Economist Dr Atiur Rahman said the final PRSP sets action in seven different areas including data collection, policy formulation and coordination, access to education, health and public services and ensure

income generating activities.

He criticised the government policy of keeping education of the people with disability under the social welfare ministry.

While a 10 percent quota is reserved for them in government services, it is not the case with the private sector, he further noted.

Many, however, allege that 10 percent quota in public sector is not implemented always.

Visually Impaired Most Vulnerable

According to WHO estimation, about 50 percent of the people with disability in the country are visually impaired. Visual impairment is also considered as a public health problem here.

Along with other physically and mentally challenged people, the visually impaired are left out in every sphere of life including education, employment and games.

"The visually impaired people are not allowed to open account in banks," said Sayeed, coordinator of the Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW), a voluntary organisation working with visually impaired persons, adding that they are also deprived of casting votes in elections.

There is a provision for two reserved seats for them at BRTC public buses, but the conductors often show reluctance to manage the seats for them, he lamented.

DHAKA BOOK FAIR OPENS

Call to promote mutual respect

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country is now passing through a difficult situation marked by intolerance and arrogance, said Adviser to cultural affairs ministry CM Shafi Sami while inaugurating the 13th Dhaka Book Fair yesterday.

He said the society is beset with discrimination and division although the winning of Nobel Peace Prize by Prof Muhammad Yunus had created a scope for united approach.

Everybody will have to work from his own position to establish mutual understanding and respect at this critical moment, he added.

"Being tolerant and respectful to others, we could move forward and work for the advancement of the country," Shafi Sami said, adding that books help increase harmony, tolerance and understanding.

He said he will ask the secretary to the cultural affairs ministry to fix a specific place for holding book fair every year as a pre-fixed place can help build necessary infrastructure for a successful book fair.

The Dhaka Book Fair 2006 started with the slogan 'Books Build a Harmonious Society'.

The fair will remain open from 11:00am to 8:30pm daily except on Friday when it will remain open from 2:30pm to 8:30pm. It will continue till December 16.

A total of 67 publishing houses are taking part in the fair, said Deputy Director of the National Book Centre Aminul Islam.

This year the fair began prior to its scheduled time in view of the national election and Eid-ul-Azha in January, he added.

Secretary to the ministry ABM Abdul Haque Chowdhury, Director of National Book Centre Shafikur Rahman and Assistant Director Nazira Ahmed and publishers were present at the inaugural function.

BNP leader hurt in clash with LDP dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A local BNP leader, who was critically injured during a clash between the activists of BNP and LDP in Sarishabari upazila of Jamalpur district on Thursday night, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital at midnight.

The dead, Haidar Ali Babu, 42, was the vice-president of BNP Pogoldigha Union unit.

Witnesses said Babu was seriously injured during a chase and counter-chase between the activists of the two rival political parties at Boira Bazar at around 7:45pm.

He was rushed to Sarishabari Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he succumbed to his injuries at midnight, sources said.

Local BNP leaders alleged that the LDP cadres chopped Babu with sharp weapons during the clash, leaving him critically injured.

Additional police have been deployed in the area to avert any further clash.

Peshajibi Nari Samaj protests CJ's stay order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Peshajibi Nari Samaj yesterday protested and condemned the stay order issued by the chief justice on the writ petitions challenging the legality of the president's taking over as chief adviser.

In a statement, Parishad leaders said the intervention by the chief justice minutes before a High Court bench was to deliver its order regarding the writ petitions has deepened the constitutional and political crisis, which was created following the president's taking over as chief adviser.

Such a step would push the judiciary into ruination, they added. They also demanded resignation of the chief adviser and the attorney general and reconstitution of the Election Commission (EC).

The statement was signed by Mahfuz Khanam, Shayamoli Nasrin Chowdhury, Selina Hossain, Dr Sultana Shafi, Ayesha Khanam, Dr Mahmuda Islam, Ferdousi Priyabhashini, Sara Zaker, Tasmima Hosain, Dr Dipu Moni and Dr Shirin Shammin Chowdhury.

Correction

Dhaka University Sociology Alumni Association will celebrate the golden jubilee of the sociology department in the last week of January. But in a report published in The Daily Star on November 27, it has been mentioned that the department will organise the celebrations. In fact, the department will celebrate its 50th anniversary on June 28 and 29 next year at the TSC.



PHOTO: STAR

Writer and journalist Shahriar Kabir speaks at a discussion styled 'Historical Background of the War of Liberation' organised by Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee at Islamabadi Memorial Hall in Chittagong yesterday.

DOMESTIC HELP FOUND DEAD

College teacher arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday arrested a teacher of Eden Women's College in connection with the death of an elderly domestic help who worked at her house.

The police recovered the body of Fatema Begum, 50, on Thursday night.

Fatema worked at the house of Shila Islam, a professor of general history, in New DOHS area.

Police filed a murder case against Shila and produced her in the court, which placed her on one-day remand for interrogation.

On Thursday night, police acting on information from the neighbours, rushed to the house and came to know that the body of Fatema was being taken away in a car by Tajul Islam,

Shila's husband, to Joypurhat, the home district of Fatema.

"We immediately ordered Tajul over mobile phone to bring back the body," said Sub-Inspector Saiful Islam.

"When he brought back the body, we found several marks of injuries all over the body."

Shahjahan, another domestic help at Shila's house, told the police that Shila beat up Fatema on Thursday morning as she delayed preparing breakfast.

Shila also admitted that she sometimes beat Fatema as she was not regular in her work and had a stealing tendency but denied the allegation of murder, police said.

Family sources claimed that Fatema committed suicide by hanging herself from the ceiling fan.

Jalil demands removal of foreign secy, 19 envoys

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday demanded removal of Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin and 19 ambassadors and officials who are still serving on contractual jobs under the foreign ministry.

At a press briefing in the city, he produced a list of these officials who are working in Bangladesh missions abroad and the foreign ministry.

They are Permanent Representative at the UN Dr Iftekhar Ahmed, High Commissioner to the UK Sabihuddin, Ambassador to Brunei Hedayet Islam Chowdhury, High Commissioner to Canada Rafiq Ahmed, Ambassador to China Asfaque Rahman, Ambassador to France Mahmud Hasan, Ambassador to Indonesia Salma Khan, High Commissioner to Kenya Maj Gen Sayed Ahmed, Ambassador to Kuwait Maj Gen Rezanur Chowdhury, Ambassador to Libya Maj Gen Jamil Uddin, Ambassador to Morocco Mohammad Al Harun, High Commissioner to Pakistan Shamim Ahmed, Ambassador to the Philippines Nur Mohammad, Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Maj Gen SM Ikramul Haque, Ambassador to Spain Anwarul Alam, Ambassador to Switzerland (Geneva) Dr Taufiq Ali, Ambassador to Thailand Shahed Akhter, Ambassador to Turkey Maj Gen Rezakul Haider and Ambassador to the UAE Nazim Uddin Chowdhury.

'Unite to save nation from grip of fanatics'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Progressive forces under the banner of Bikkhubdha Deshbashi (aggrieved citizens) yesterday urged all to be united to save the nation from present political impasse and the grip of religious fundamentalists.

They also held a rally at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital and brought out a procession carrying national flags to protest religion-based politics, fundamentalism and communalism.

The rally began with the national anthem and paying homage to the heroes of the War of Liberation. Leaders and activists of Bikkhubdha Deshbashi vowed to protect the dignity of the national flag through upholding the spirit of the War of Liberation.

They also placed a seven-point reform proposal to the political parties to make politics free from fundamentalism and communalism and an eight-point proposal to the countrymen to build a prosperous nation.

"Uncertainty has gripped the nation as a by-product of the prevailing political crisis. This is high time progressives forces came out to the street to protest fanaticism," said Motahar Akhanda, co-ordinator of Bikkhubdha Deshbashi.



PHOTO: STAR

BNP-led 4-party alliance stages a demonstration at Naya Paltan in the city yesterday protesting the attack on the Supreme Court.

'Keep adolescents away from election campaign'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Adolescents at a roundtable yesterday urged all the political parties to make a commitment to keep the adolescents, aged below 18 years, away from any sort of election campaign or activities related to the elections.

They also urged the political parties to include adolescent policy into their electoral manifestos and implement it after forming government to establish their rights.

Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS) organised the roundtable at Jatiya Press Club in the city with the assistance of Action Aid

Bangladesh.

The roundtable was held between the adolescents of 'Probortok' forum while the speakers comprised political leaders, university teachers, psychologists and civil society members.

The speakers, however, supported the adolescents' demands and the political leaders assured them that they would include the adolescent policy into their electoral manifesto.

The adolescents presented a set of things that includes using the adolescents in the election campaign, eve teasing, disobeying their opinions, using them to gain political interest, absence of adolescent friendly healthcare, lacking of co-

curriculum activities, non-implementation of child labour acts, police harassment, child marriage and above all absence of adolescent policy before the speakers.

Ataus Samad, advisory editor of the daily Amar Desh, said eve teasing has got the worst shape now as the eve teasers are getting pamper from the local political leaders.

He also said learning of courtesy from the family is a must to curb the social menace.

As the adolescent raised question about the blockade programme, former lawmaker Lt Col Faruque Khan said they have already directed their party leaders to keep the educational institutions out of the purview of the blockade.

Prof Asif Nazrul, a faculty at Law Department of Dhaka University, said eve teasing is a big problem for adolescent girls and a special tribunal, where the trail would be made speedy, is necessary.

Three held for keeping arms

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

At least three people were arrested for keeping illegal firearms and ammunitions here at Ghoraghat upazila of Dinajpur on Thursday midnight, according to police sources.

The arrestees were identified as, Rawshan, 30, of village Chang-Gram under Hakimpur upazila, Enamul Haque 25, and Uzzal 25, both from Lowchochara of Hakimpur upazila of Dinajpur.

Sources said on information a police team of Ghoraghat Police Station raided a Dhaka bound night couch at midnight and found a pistol, an illegal firearm with two magazines and at least 5 bullets in their possession.

A case was filed with Ghoraghat Police Station.

Nirmul body Victory Day programme begins in Ctg

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee started its month-long countrywide programme marking the 35th anniversary of Victory Day in Chittagong yesterday.

Language movement veteran poet Mahbub Ul Alam Chowdhury inaugurated the month-long programme at a ceremony at Moniruzzaman Islamabadi Memorial Hall, jointly organised by Chittagong units of Nirmul Committee and Muktiyuddher Smriti Pathagar.

A discussion titled 'Historical Background of the War of Liberation' was held on the occasion.

Veteran revolutionist Binod Bihary Chowdhury presided over the discussion.

Acting President of the Committee journalist Shahriar Kabir, Colonel (ret'd) Abu Osman Chowdhury, commander of Sector 8 in the liberation war, Ferdousi Priyobhashini, a sculptor and repressed heroine of 1971, Prof Hamida Banu, researcher Dr Mahfuzur Rahman, Abu Saleh and Prof Helal Uddin Nizami participated in the discussion.

Speakers at the meeting said only the spirit of the liberation war can help the nation overcome the ongoing political unrest.

Every dignified nation has something in its history to take pride in and for this nation (Bangalees) there is the liberation war of 1971 in its 4000 years of history.

They said 'We should continue our fight to uphold the spirit of liberation war and help the new generation of this colourful background get rid of every crisis.'

Shahriar Kabir in his speech alleged, General Ziaur Rahman introduced the bad practice of distorting history after the brutal killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 1975 and it is being practiced till date.

Tribute paid to educationist Selina Zaman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a memorial meeting yesterday paid glowing tribute to eminent educationist and cultural personality Selina Bahar Zaman for her remarkable contribution to the fields of culture and literature.

Describing Selina as a multifaceted personality, the speakers said she would be particularly remembered for editing and compiling various books of Nazrul, which would be used as valuable resources for researchers.

Selina Bahar Smriti Parishad organised the meeting at the National Museum auditorium in the city to mark her second death anniversary.

"Selina, whose untimely demise has created a vacuum in our cultural and education arenas, could have contributed immensely for the country if she were alive today," said Prof Anisuzzaman, chairman of the Parishad.

Prof Serajul Islam Chowdhury delivered a memorial lecture.

Mobasshara Khanam read out a brief biography of Selina Bahar, also a well-known Nazrul and Tagore poetry reciter.

Later, renowned economist Prof Anisur Rahman, Nasreen Shams and Adeb Shams rendered Tagore songs.

Talk out differences in a spirit of compromise

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"There is a deep sense of worry that the current political disagreements are harming the economy, increasing tensions and threatening the chances for a credible elections. Bangladesh's hard earned democratic advances and even its great international reputation could be affected if the current crisis continues," the envoy said.

Asked whether Bangladesh's international reputation and UN peacekeeping would be affected if the army steps in as speculated by many, the envoy said, "Anything that is seen backward in important development of democracy might negatively affect the country's reputation and have various implications."

He said the UN is prepared to provide additional support to the electoral process in the country as Bangladesh is important to UN and plays a very important role in the UN peacekeeping operation.

Jenness, who was involved in many elections as Head of the UN Electoral Assistance Division, said, "Each is different, but there are a number of aspects that are essential to every democratic election -- a level playing field, a peaceful environment, a trusted election commission which is trusted by the electorate and all parties, assurances that all eligible voters can cast their ballots freely and an honest and impartial voting, counting and tabulation process."

lution process."

All of these points are crucial to ensuring public confidence in an election, he said, adding, "If elections do not meet these concerns, they run the risk of not being considered credible, either inside or outside the country."

"I believe all political parties would participate in the upcoming elections," Jenness said when asked whether the results would be acceptable to the international community if all parties could not participate in the elections.

He, however, said it is important that the people should be given fair chance to vote for parties of their choice and at the same time the environment should be such that all political parties have trust and confidence in the election process.

Replying to a question, the UN envoy said more work needs to be done for holding free and credible elections and the caretaker government, the Election Commission and the political parties have great responsibility to create the environment for such credible polls.

Asked if he has any formula to overcome the crisis, he said, "I am not here as a mediator but I am convinced that there are lot of rooms for cooperation in resolving the issues through dialogue."

The envoy said he has encouraged the political parties he met during his stay to resolve their

differences through dialogue.

Asked whether he is convinced about fair elections in the prevailing circumstances, he said, "One has to be hopeful because Bangladesh is hopeful...everyone I spoke to wants free and fair election."

Referring to his discussion with the president, advisers, government officials, political parties and others concerned, he said, "I found general agreement on the need for peaceful, credible and transparent elections and the importance of avoiding violence at all costs."

It was widely expressed that whoever wins the election should govern in the best interests of all and that whoever does not win should accept the results and the very important place reserved in all democracies for the opposition, he added.

Jenness said the UN itself will not send election observers but coordinate international election observers from EU, Commonwealth and USA that would send both long and short term missions to monitor the elections.

Approximately, 320 foreign observers would be coming to Bangladesh to observe the elections, UNDP country representative Reneta Lok Dessallien said.