

5 shot dead in Thai south

AFP, Yala, Thailand

Five people, including two teenage girls, were shot dead in Thailand's Muslim-majority south, police said yesterday, as the region endured another bout of violence.

The slaying of two Buddhist girls and three Muslim men followed a gun fight between army rangers and separatist insurgents in Narathiwat province on Friday, which left eight militants dead.

The girls, aged 16 and 17, were shot dead early yesterday in a drive-by shooting in Narathiwat, one of three southern provinces in the grip of a separatist insurgency which has killed nearly 2,000 people in three years.

Also yesterday morning, a 53-year-old Muslim man was shot and killed in Pattani province, while in nearby Yala province a 43-year-old Muslim man was shot dead at his rubber plantation.

Late Friday, a 53-year-old Muslim man was shot dead in his pickup truck in Narathiwat province.

Violence has recently escalated in the provinces bordering Malaysia, which were once an independent sultanate, despite a raft of peace-building measures proposed by the new government, installed after a coup last year.

A series of coordinated attacks across the region on February 18 killed nine and injured 44, leaving many people questioning whether the new government would be capable of curbing the shadowy insurgency.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addresses the Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office in the city yesterday. On her right are party presidium members Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed and Motia Chowdhury.

China parliament to focus on pollution, wealth gap

AFP, Beijing

China yesterday began its annual parliamentary session with calls to address a widening wealth gap, environmental degradation and other ills attending its economic growth.

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC),

a rubber-stamp advisory body, opened its 12-day session yesterday at the Great Hall of the People in the capital.

The opening of the merely ceremonial 2,267-member body is a prelude to the kick-off on Monday of the upper house and main legislative body, the 3,000-member National People's Congress (NPC). But in a keynote speech, CPPCC Chairman Jia Qinglin set the expected tone for the NPC gathering by calling for a renewed effort to blunt the harsher aspects of China's economic boom.

"The CPPCC should fully play its role to promote the harmonious relations between different parties, nationalities, religions, social classes, and compatriots from both home and overseas," Jia said.

China's leaders have been struggling to maintain what they call a "harmonious" society amid an economic boom that has brought income disparities, corruption and severe pollution affecting the health of millions.

Though little debate actually occurs in the parliament, the state-run Xinhua news agency on Saturday ran a series of stories pointing out problems that need to be addressed, including a lack of safe drinking water for millions of people, inadequate health care and scarce jobs.

Although neither legislative body has ever opposed a single Communist Party or government-backed proposal since the People's Republic was founded in 1949, the annual session provides a forum for the government to lay out its aims for the following year.

The NPC will approve a work report by Premier Wen Jiabao that underlines the "harmony" drive.

"All government departments must be highly attentive to the problems concerning the people's daily lives," the state-run press cited Wen as saying last month as he prepared the report.

"The government must improve social welfare work and ensure the basic necessities for people in poverty."

The parliament is expected to pass a long-awaited property law offering extra protection for the private sector and another that will raise tax rates on foreign enterprises, bringing them in line with domestic firms at a unified 25 percent rate.

Wen is also expected to set an economic growth target for this year of about eight percent.

Similar targets have been exceeded in the past but the government officials have said Wen would outline more forceful measures including possible structural reforms this year to rein in growth.

Lawmakers are also expected to discuss ways to make China's legal system more fair.

Create alternative jobs for sex workers before eviction

Speakers demand at discussion

Bss, Dhaka

Speakers at a discussion yesterday emphasised the need for creating alternative jobs for sex workers before evicting them from their homes.

They said it would be tantamount to violation of human rights if the sex workers are evicted without creating any alternative job opportunity through which they could be able to earn a decent living.

They also demanded steps for stopping criminal activities conducted by the vested quarters in and around the brothels across the country.

The discussion was organised by the Sex Workers Network of Bangladesh at the conference room of Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) auditorium marking the International Sex Workers Day.

The discussion was participated by academics, NGO activists, journalists and representatives of the sex workers.

Prof HSK Arefeen of Anthropology department of Dhaka University said sex workers are nabbed frequently under Public Nuisance Act which should be amended to protect the interest of the sex workers.

Referring to a number of case studies, he said the recognition of sex workers is a demand of the time.

"I think they are more transparent in their personal life as they do not show any hypocrisy to earn their living like others in the society," he



PHOTO: STAR

Sex workers' leader Momtaj speaks at a discussion at Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) in the city yesterday. On her right is Advocate Ruhi Samad Ara Jhumu.

pointed out.

"We sell sex in exchange of money. If we are called sex workers then what about them who sleep with us?" questioned sex worker Shahnaz.

Other sex workers also echoed the same and demanded legal recognition of their profession.

They urged the law enforcement agencies to stop repression on sex workers and their children at broth-

els across the country.

There are 3,816 registered sex workers at five brothels in Khulna and eight brothels in Dhaka and Barisal, said the organisers.

Rashida Akhter, Advocate Ruhi Samad Ara Jhumu, Akhter Jahan Shilpi, Sami Afreen Nilu and Kazi Abu Shahed also spoke on the occasion.



PHOTO: STAR

Helen Sharrock, head of The Red Brick School, speaks at the concluding session of a three-day Pre-world Schools Debating Championship 2007 at The Red Brick School at Uttara in the city yesterday. On her left are participants from International School Dhaka and on her right are participants from Manarat International School.

Saudi beheaded for murdering compatriot

AFP, Riyadh

A Saudi national was beheaded by the sword yesterday in the Red Sea town of al-Lith after being convicted of shooting dead a compatriot, the interior ministry said.

Muftah bin Hilal bin Abdullah al-Fahmi shot dead Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Kheir al-Fahmi with a pistol after a fist fight, the ministry said in a statement carried by the official news agency SPA.

Pope names new archbishop of Warsaw

AFP, Warsaw

Pope Benedict XVI has named Kazimierz Nycz, a bishop in northern Poland, to succeed Cardinal Jozef Glemp as archbishop of Warsaw, the Vatican announced yesterday.

A scandal erupted over the first cleric named to succeed Glemp, Stanislaw Wielgus, who was forced to resign after admitting he collaborated with the communist-era secret police.

Glemp, who reached the traditional retirement age of 75 in 2004, had returned to his old job following Wielgus' shock resignation on the day of his enthronement.

"The Holy Father has named Kazimierz Nycz as Archbishop of Warsaw, until now the bishop of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg," a Vatican statement said.

Nycz, 57, was ordained in the southern city of Krakow in 1973, where he served as an assistant bishop from 1988 before becoming bishop of Koszalin-Kolobrzeg in 2004.

Wielgus announced in January, at what was to have been his formal investiture at Warsaw Cathedral, that he was resigning as archbishop of the Polish capital because of the accusations about his alleged collaborator past.

According to documents published in the Polish media late last year after Wielgus was named Warsaw archbishop by the Vatican, the cleric actively collaborated with the secret police from 1967 to 1987.

Pakistan arrests 12 Indian fishermen

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan said yesterday its coast guard has seized five Indian boats and arrested 12 fishermen for illegal fishing in the country's territorial waters in the Arabian Sea.

The Indian fishermen were caught late Friday when they advanced 38 kilometres (23 miles) inside Pakistani territorial waters, Maritime Security Agency official Atiqur Rehman said.

Pre-world Schools Debating Championship concludes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day Pre-world Schools Debating Championship 2007 ended at The Red Brick School at Uttara in the city yesterday.

More than 30 schools took part in the debating competition organised by Bangladesh Debating Council (BDC).

After eight rounds of preliminaries and semi-finals, two finalist teams have emerged: Manarat International School-A and International School Dhaka (ISD)-A. The two teams confronted each other at the Final held last night and battled for the ultimate championship.

Sohara Mehroze, Mehidi Bin Samad and M Hasanul Kaiser represented Manarat while ISD team comprises Shafkat Manir, Shabab Mirza and Virjen Afawar.

The motion for the final round debate was 'This house believes that we should enforce a Ministerial Code of Ethics'.

A total of five best debaters, including the three from the champion team, will represent Bangladesh in the World Schools Debating Championship (WSDC) 2007 to be held in South Korea in July, the organisers said.

The WSDC, a high profile annual debating tournament for high school-level teams representing different countries, is being held since 1988. This year, teams from more than 50 countries will take part in the competition.

A total of 60 adjudicators assessed the competing teams in the Pre-world Schools Debating Championship, the organisers added.

Australian Council on Education (ACE) was the co-sponsor of the championship while ACI Creative Communication was the media promoter.