



Chief Adviser to the caretaker government Fakhruddin Ahmed exchanges views with high government officials at a meeting at Khulna Circuit House yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Int'l Mother Language Day observed in China

UNB, Dhaka

A daylong seminar on International Mother Language Day was held in Beijing recently to pay homage to the language martyrs of Bangladesh.

China Education Association for International Exchange (ICEAIE), Chinese National Commission for Unesco and Unesco Office in Beijing jointly held the seminar on March 9 at Beijing Language and Culture University, for the second time in China, said a message yesterday.

The theme of the seminar was "Promoting multi-culture, building harmonious society".

In his opening address, Liu Bin, president of ICEAIE, said that China has been making great efforts to create a harmonious environment around the globe, which is also a

precondition for the development of the language of the world.

Secretary General of Chinese National Commission for Unesco Tian Xiaogang said that mother language is the soul of a nation, and preservation of mother language is a basic human right.

He felicitated the government and people of Bangladesh for their unique contribution to promoting International Mother Language Day and paid homage to the language martyrs of Bangladesh.

Dr Yasuyuki Aoshima, director and representative of Unesco office Beijing, announced more seminars will be held in Beijing to generate awareness about mother tongue and multilingualism with focus on education.

He said similar events would be organised in outer parts of China,

especially in the provinces with high concentration of different ethnic groups.

Bangladesh Ambassador to China Ashfaqur Rahman thanked the organisers for recognising the importance and relevance of the International Mother Language Day.

He requested the Chinese government to take the initiative to develop a website documenting all the more than 6,000 languages in the world.

The ambassador also said since Mandarin was the most widely spoken language in the world, it was the prerogative and responsibility of the Chinese government to develop a comprehensive and accessible repository of the living language of the world.

EU can be green model for US, India: Merkel

REUTERS, Berlin

The European Union's adoption of measures to fight climate change this week could set an example for the United States, China and India, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said on Saturday.

Under Germany's presidency, EU leaders set a binding target on Friday for renewable sources to make up 20 percent of EU energy consumption by 2020 and agreed to cut greenhouse gas emissions by the same amount in the same period.

"We think that Europe could set an example for others to implement more attractive and better climate protection goals," Merkel said in her in weekly video "podcast" available for download on her Internet site.

"By this I mean, for example, the United States and developing countries India and China. We want to discuss this at the G8 summit in

Heiligendamm in June."

In addition to its six-month EU presidency which runs until July, Germany is president of the Group of Eight (G8) club of industrialised nations for the entire year. Merkel has focused on climate change in both presidencies.

The new EU targets will form the basis of the 27-nation bloc's negotiating position for an international agreement to extend the Kyoto Protocol on climate change and emissions reduction targets past 2012.

The EU produces about 14 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, while the United States, the world's largest polluter, produces some 25 percent.

US President George W. Bush pulled the United States out of the Kyoto Protocol in 2001.

After 3 decades, Indian POW families have some hope

REUTERS, New Delhi

For more than three decades, Damayanti Vijay Tambay has been longing, and perhaps dreading, to undertake this journey from India.

At the end of her planned trip to Pakistan next month, she hopes to find her husband, Flight Lieutenant Vjay Vasant Tambay - dead or alive.

Tambay went missing in December 1971 after he took off on a fighter aircraft at the height of a war between India and Pakistan.

India says 54 soldiers and officers are believed missing from that war. Pakistan denies it has any prisoners of war.

Magazine pictures, newspaper reports, eyewitnesses and names of missing Indians scrawled on cell walls have all contributed to a sense among many families that the missing soldiers may still be held in Pakistani jails, forgotten to much of the outside world.

While some families believe their missing men may still be alive, others want closure -- to know what happened to soldiers that some people presume must have died.

After years of tossing between hope and despair, the "POW families" saw a ray of hope this year when Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf invited them to visit Pakistani jails to look for their men.

Musharraf made the offer during a meeting with Indian Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee in Islamabad in January.

This was followed up by talks between Mukherjee and his Pakistani counterpart Khursheed Mehmood Kasuri in February where he handed over a list of relatives who want to visit Pakistan.

"We see hope in this offer," said Tambay, who works as the sports director at the Delhi-based Jawaharlal Nehru University.

"I am sure they are there. There is so much evidence to prove that they are there," she said.

The relatives have started meeting Indian officials to prepare for the visit. They have asked Pakistan to send pictures of Indian-born people over 55-years-old in its jails and asylums.

"We are aware of the grim possibility (of them being dead) but we want a very convincing and

fruitful closure to our case," Tambay said. "Tell us if Pakistan eventually shot them or they were killed trying to escape or they died of disease. But tell us what happened."

"What happened to Major Suri who wrote letters from the prison to his family? What happened to Major Ghosh whose picture appeared in a magazine after his arrest? What happened to my husband who was seen in a jail?" she added.

EVIDENCE

Tambay clearly remembers the day she last saw her husband.

"I may return, I may not return", he told me," she said.

"I said, 'Vijay, V for victory. Carry on. The entire nation is behind you'."

She was then 23.

A day later, she heard her husband's plane had been shot down and he was missing. A few days later, a Pakistani newspaper published news that five Indian pilots had been captured. One of them was named Tambay.

A few years later, a Bangladeshi

prisoner who had been in a Pakistani jail said after he had been released that he had seen a man in a cell next to his, writing the word "Tambay" on the prison walls.

Thus began Damayanti's long ordeal and over the years, she has become a sort of rallying point for other families.

"In the early years, I used to wait for the doorbell to ring and expect him to walk in or wait for a call from the government to say he has been found," Tambay said. "But slowly we realised it's not going to be that easy."

In the early 80s, Pakistan allowed the POW families to come and meet Indian prisoners who were brought to one prison but there were no military personnel among them, Tambay said.

"It's likely they have become mentally unstable or they gave false names when they were captured as is common in wars and therefore, their names don't figure in prison rolls?" she said.

THE PRICE OF A HISTORICAL RIVALRY

Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan

have fought three wars since the subcontinent was freed from colonial rule in 1947.

Apart from the wars, mutual mistrust has grown over the years with India accusing Pakistan of aiding an anti-India insurgency in disputed Kashmir.

Civilians have paid a heavy price for the years of hostility. Fishermen accidentally straying into each other's territorial waters are caught and herded in overcrowded prisons, sometimes for years. Others, who mistakenly cross the land border are often accused of being spies.

Improving relations since the launch of a peace process in 2004 have led to some easing of tensions with both countries swapping hundreds of prisoners.

"Many Indians, like me, believe the evidence that they are there cannot be wished away," said G Parthasarathy, former high commissioner (ambassador) to Islamabad.

"It certainly is a humanitarian issue which can make the hearts meet," he added.

Russia regional vote to confirm Kremlin's power

REUTERS, Moscow

Up to 31 million Russians voted yesterday in regional elections expected to reinforce the dominance of two big pro-Kremlin parties ahead of nationwide parliamentary polls in December.

Liberal opponents of President Vladimir Putin, ignored by state-controlled media and trailing in polls, have been struck off the ballot in St Petersburg and three other regions for alleged electoral violations, prompting complaints of foul play.

Voting was generally calm in the 14 regions holding polls. But police arrested at least three protesters from a fringe group who threw a smoke grenade into a polling station in the suburb of Odintsovo on the western fringes of Moscow.

The National Bolshevik Party protesters resisted arrest and shouted "This election is a farce!" and "We do not want elections without choice" as they were dragged away.

Police also detained three photographers, including a Reuters cameraman, who were filming the arrests.

"The National Bolshevik Party will not tolerate the arbitrary rule by the authorities," the leader of the protest Vladimir Zinkovich told reporters.

Political leaders view Sunday's vote as a dress rehearsal for elections to the Duma (lower house of parliament) in December, closely followed by presidential elections in March 2008, when a successor to Putin will be chosen.

Want a better memory? Stop and smell roses

REUTERS, Washington

People who want to learn things might do better by simply stopping to smell the roses, researchers said.

German researchers found they could use odours to re-activate new memories in the brains of people while they slept -- and the volunteers remembered better later.

Writing in the journal Science, they said their study showed that memories are indeed consolidated during sleep, and show that smells and perhaps other stimuli can reinforce brain learning pathways.

Jan Born of the University of Lubeck in Germany and colleagues had 74 volunteers learn to play games similar to the game of "Concentration" in which they must find matched pairs of objects or cards by turning only one over at a time.

While doing this task, some of the volunteers inhaled the scent of roses. The volunteers then agreed to sleep inside an MRI tube. Functional magnetic resonance imaging was used to "watch" their brains while they slept.

At various stages during sleep, Born's team wafted in the same scent of roses.

The volunteers were tested again the next day on what they had learned. "After the odour night, participants remembered 97.2 percent of the card pairs they had learned before sleep," the researchers wrote.

But they only remembered 86 percent of the pairs if they did not get the rose smell while sleeping.

And the stage of sleep was important too, the researchers said in a finding that will add to the debate over whether people "learn" in their sleep the way some animals have been shown to.

Research has shown, for example, that rats learning a new maze will rehearse their movements during sleep, and that songbirds rehearse their songs.

Born's team said the scent improved learning when it was administered during slow-wave sleep, but had no effect during rapid eye movement or REM sleep.

Egyptian boy tests positive for bird flu

REUTERS, Cairo

A four-year-old Egyptian boy has contracted the deadly bird flu virus, bringing to 24 the number of Egyptians who have tested positive for the disease, health ministry and World Health Organisation officials said yesterday.

A health ministry official said the boy had contracted the H5N1 bird flu virus after coming into contact with infected household birds. He was in "good condition," the official said.

Egypt has the largest bird flu cluster outside Asia, with 13 deaths out of the 24 reported human cases.

Exhibit considers Nazis' deadly medicine

AP, Pittsburgh

Adolf Hitler used the theory of eugenics in his quest to create a master race, legitimising the murder of thousands deemed unfit for the German race and culminating in the genocide of six million Jews.

But the idea behind eugenics -- improving a population's health through genetics -- was hardly unique to Germany, as shown by a travelling exhibit developed by the United States Holocaust Memorial

Museum in Washington DC and on display at The Andy Warhol Museum.

"Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race" uses 200 photographs, videotaped survivor stories and several dozen artefacts to trace eugenics' development as a perversion of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to its Nazi justification for genocide.

The exhibit also looks at eugenics in other countries, including Norway, Spain, Brazil, Japan and

the United States, where nearly 300 "eugenic sterilisations" were done at Mendocino State Hospital between 1909 and 1935.

Perhaps most chilling is how seemingly easy this noble-sounding goal was twisted. After all, who could argue against improving health? It was Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, who coined the term eugenics from Greek, meaning "good birth," in 1883.

Eugenic "ideas took on a different cast depending on the particular political and social culture in which they were expressed and that changes over time and over place," said Susan Bachrach, curator of special exhibitions for the Holocaust museum. "In Nazi Germany, it was a very explosive combination of ultranational, racist ideas with eugenics."

"Anti-Semitism and anti-Jewish policies and politics had their own role that they played in Nazi Germany, but what this exhibit tried to show is that Nazi policies had a much more overarching basis that really is linked to eugenic ideas," Bachrach said.

"This exhibit has such a broad appeal because so many people, even if they are not Jewish, have someone who would be covered in some way."

Warhol director Tom Sokolowski said the museum hosted the exhibit for its historical importance and "to make the point that it's not simply something that died in 1945 when the war was won."

"We need to be aware that the view of perfection, whether in humanity or in art, can under the aegis of someone with a twisted or very focused agenda lead to the

kind of negative and horrific actions that took place during the late '30s and '40s," Sokolowski said.

At first, the use of eugenics in Germany avoided anti-Semitism until the Great Depression, when the Nazis began to hold up the "Nordic race" as the ideal.

When Hitler came to power in 1933, state-backed eugenics led to increased sterilization and marriage laws. Between 1934 and 1945, following passage of a law to prevent genetically diseased offspring, an estimated 400,000 people were surgically sterilised. While eugenics encouraged purging the unfit, it also encouraged fit Germans to marry, and bearing children became a national responsibility. The Nazis also created an office to combat homosexuality and abortion, which were blamed in part for declining birth rates.

A display of the "10 Commandments for Choosing a Mate" advises people to "Remember that you are a German" and admonishes "everything you are is not of your own but through your nation."

It goes on to suggest picking a Nordic mate, advises against picking the "one good person" in a "bad family" -- "No medical art can change ruined medical material" -- and tells couples to wish for as many children as possible.

One display shows swastika-emblazoned honor crosses of German motherhood: bronze to mothers of four or five children; silver for six or seven children; gold for eight or more children. Another shows a photo of a smiling mother wearing one such cross and pushing a stroller.

Another display shows a picture

of a man forced to wear a sign declaring himself a "Rassenschande" or race-defiler, apparently for engaging in a forbidden marriage.

Beginning in 1939, the Nazis began euthanizing infants and children with physical and mental defects. More than 5,000 were killed between 1939 and 1945 through overdose, starvation and gassing. Between 1940 and 1941, some 70,000 institutionalised adults, largely non-Jewish Germans, were killed.

The exhibit winds up with the Nazi's plan to eradicate Jews in death camps and ends with a section on postwar activities of Nazi Germany doctors, most of whom faced little or no punishment. Some even continued their careers after the war.

Bachrach said it's important that people understand the history of eugenics, given advancements in science and ethical questions they raise. For example, she said people can draw a distinction between killing, sterilization and abortion in cases such as birth defects or genetic disease.

"Where do you stop? And that's a question for today," she said.

The exhibit ends March 18 at the Warhol and will move to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta from April 30 to August 10 and then on to The Science Museum of Minnesota next year.

The show can also be viewed in an online version at the Holocaust Memorial Museum's Web site.