

South Asian march against child trafficking arrives in New Delhi

AFF, New Delhi

A march against child trafficking along the border towns of India, Nepal and Bangladesh where the problem is rampant drew to a close in New Delhi on Thursday with a gathering of 2,000 children and their parents.

"Unless we reach out to ordinary people it is not possible to tackle problems like trafficking, which is a form of human slavery," Kailash Satyarthi, one of the march organisers, told AFP in the capital.

"We have covered almost the entire border so we have gone through practically all the major areas of trafficking in South Asia."

The band of 150 marchers, which included rescued children who had been trafficked, travelled thousands of kilometres (miles) through the remote border towns via which children are brought into India from Nepal and Bangladesh.

Satyarthi, founder of the India-based Bachpan Bachao Andolan (Save Childhood Association) which fights against child labour, said he found "a very serious lack of understanding about trafficking, a serious lack of awareness."

Villagers told Satyarthi that they believed the people who travelled frequently through their communities with kids in tow were family members of the children.

Townpeople pledged to pay more attention to such travellers and notify authorities, he said.

The march closed with a rally near India's parliament that drew

some 2,000 people from around the capital, a good portion of them children accompanied by their parents.

Satyarthi estimated that some three million of India's child workers had been trafficked, selling for as little as 200 to 500 rupees (11 dollars) a head.

Government figures say there are almost 13 million child workers under the age of 14 in the country.

In a sign of how deeply entrenched the problem is, some child labourers are born in bondage to those who were trafficked decades earlier.

Twelve-year-old Devli, from India's western Rajasthan state and among the marchers, described her experience in bonded labour in a statement from the anti-child labour group.

"My grandparents were trafficked to work in the stone quarries. My parents were born in the stone quarries. I did not know life beyond the stone quarry," she said.

"When I was rescued I was given a banana. I had never seen a banana in my life before and thought it was a kind of potato."

In the course of their work, the group has come across children as young as six being trafficked for domestic work.

Children in India are trafficked mainly for bonded labour, including in the sex trade, in brick kilns and stone quarries and as camel jockeys.

Factory owners

FROM PAGE 1
factory owners, he asked them to submit their work plan for setting up ETP on March 27.

They requested the advisor to extend the timeframe to one year—a plea that only hardened his stance. "After September 22, bulldozers will run as per law," he categorically said.

"It is enough time for the private entrepreneurs to set up ETP within six months," he told them.

About corruption on part of Department of Environment (DoE) officials, he said everyone is guilty and "I will not tolerate anymore callousness in this regard".

He directed the DoE officials to give clearance certificate within seven days of receiving application. "Otherwise you can inform me," he told the owners.

When the factory owners repeatedly requested him to reconsider the deadline, he said, "Ok, after three months you will preserve your own industrial wastes at your factory—you cannot discharge those into the canal or river. If you agree, you can take time as much as you want."

Talking at the meeting, the environment secretary asked the factory owners not to seek political opportunity. "If you think that this government will not last long, and after coming back of a political government you again do your business like the previous time, I want to ensure you this time around it will not work," he said.

The meeting over, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) Director MA Basat told reporters that they would come on March 27 with their work plan.

UN chief

FROM PAGE 20
Al-Maliki had just finished telling reporters that Ban's visit was a sign that Iraq was on the road to stability.

"We consider it (visit) a positive message to world in which you (Ban) confirm that Baghdad has returned to playing host to important world figures because it has made huge strides on the road toward stability," al-Maliki said in his opening remarks.

Ban and al-Maliki were speaking to reporters after meeting for about one hour in the heavily fortified Green Zone. Ban was to leave Baghdad later Thursday after the first visit by the top UN official in nearly a year and a half. His predecessor, Kofi Annan, was in the Iraqi capital in November 2005.

Annan pulled all UN international staff out of Iraq in October 2003, after two bombings at UN headquarters in Baghdad and a spate of attacks on humanitarian workers. The first bombing, on Aug. 19, 2003, killed the top UN envoy, Sergio Vieira de Mello, and 21 others.

In August 2004, the secretary-general allowed a small UN contingent to return to Baghdad and imposed a ceiling of 35 international staffers. The ceiling has steadily increased since then, but the total number has remained relatively low because of the security situation.

BTV, Betar

FROM PAGE 20
channels. Such diversity is absent in Bangladesh and this issue should be addressed immediately."

Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury, managing editor of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), said freedom, liberalisation of information, transparency and good governance are inextricably related.

Executive Director of Centre for Development Communication Muhammad Jahangir and editors of various media organisations including newspapers, radios, TV channels as well as representatives from the private sector took part in the discussion chaired by BEI President Farooq Sobhan.

Saarc Summit

FROM PAGE 1
since the Dhaka summit approved its membership.

The representatives of the observing countries will participate in most meetings, including the ministerial-level one where representatives can give a short speech with the permission of the meeting chairman, official sources said.

They will also be allowed to attend the closed session.

Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Aso and US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher will lead their national teams, officials said, adding that the foreign ministers of China and South Korea are also expected to represent their countries in the summit.

The New Delhi summit would focus on connecting the economic, political and social affairs of the member nations, a senior official of the foreign ministry said.

The Saarc Standing Committee and Council of Ministers at their meetings will discuss the implementation of the pending issues like Saarc Food Bank, Saarc Poverty Alleviation Fund and Saarc University.

Saarc Council of Ministers comprising the foreign ministers of the member countries will meet a day before the summit to decide on the agendas for the summit.

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 1

"All projects that have been referred to in your report were awarded through competitive bidding process and Orion Group or its companies had secured them by virtue of offering the lowest bids," it claimed.

"...vague remarks such as most of these deals were awarded through tender manipulation, rule violation and compromising national interest were also made. But no specific circumstance was quoted by your daily stating as to how the tenders were manipulated," it added.

Focussing on Orion's private projects like Jafflong Tea Estate, Fish Processing Plant, and GSA of two middle-eastern airlines, the rejoinder argued that the government did not award these, therefore the question of tender manipulation does not even arise.

The rejoinder claimed that Obaidul Karim never offered The Daily Star correspondent a trip to China. "BON Consortium is importing machinery from Europe and not from China for the project and such decisions have long been conveyed to the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB). Hence the proposal to visit China seems absurd, and hence it is clear that the statement made was baseless, false and motivated," the rejoinder said.

"Also our honourable chairman never mentioned anything concerning any speed money or bribe," the rejoinder said refuting the story's part that Karim had ever talked about the speed money going up to 15 percent of project cost in the last five years, from five percent of the past.

The rejoinder also claimed that during the January meeting with The Daily Star correspondent Karim did not talk about the flyover project of Dhaka City Corporation.

Orion's sister concern was awarded the Hotel Sonargaon refurbishment project valued at Tk 150 crore, and not the Tk 240 crore Hotel Sonargaon extension project.

It claimed that Kohinoor Chemical Company Ltd was incurring Tk 6 crore annual loss when Orion procured it by accepting Tk 30 crore accumulated loss.

With regards to Meghnaghat-2 power project, Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover, and Sonargaon Hotel refurbishment, all allegations have been termed false. "Till date, all contractual obligations have been fulfilled and not a single contractual obligation has been violated," it said.

Our reply
Firstly, the story is an overview of Orion group's business, where all the concerns of Orion were placed to give the readers an idea about how this group rapidly expanded after 2001.

The story did not elaborate on the nature of irregularities with different projects because each of these projects themselves demand separate stories. The Daily Star has already published very detailed stories on the irregularities of a. Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover, b. Meghnaghat Power Project, c. Sonargaon Hotel Renovation project.

Till 2001, Orion's business profile was basically limited within Orion Infusion and the Kohinoor Chemical Company Ltd. Orion procured Kohinoor Ltd in 1993—when BNP was in power. Orion's financial health was not good back in 1996-97 and it was evident through its share market scam as described in the news.

Then between 2001 and 2006 all of a sudden, Orion started developing dozens of large-scale enterprises—the level of which even the most reputed companies of the

country cannot reach.

Separate reports of The Daily Star on the flyover, power and Sonargaon Hotel renovation projects revealed how Orion was favoured in these large-scale projects. The January dialogue with Obaidul Karim was a first hand encounter and the correspondent stands by what he wrote.

The denial of what Karim told this correspondent only proves how the Orion Group resorts to blunt lies in all aspects of its business.

The Daily Star had been reporting on the irregularities of the Meghnaghat 2 power project from the beginning. Interestingly from 2005, Karim contacted the correspondent through third parties—instead of a direct contact. Karim deployed some journalists and finally even a central BNP leader to "discuss" the power project.

Indirect offers of bribe were made and these were all ignored. The first time Karim established a direct China. "BON Consortium is importing machinery from Europe and not from China for the project and such decisions have long been conveyed to the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB). Hence the proposal to visit China seems absurd, and hence it is clear that the statement made was baseless, false and motivated," the rejoinder said.

Rab recovered a luxury car of Harris Chowdhury, ex-political secretary to the prime minister—which was given by Obaidul Karim as a gift for getting the flyover project approved. This piece of information has been disclosed by investigating Rab officials. This is just one example of what kind of "transparent bidding process" was followed in awarding various contracts to Karim's ventures.

The BON Consortium was already served with a notice threatening contractual termination for violation of contract terms. The Sonargaon Hotel renovation project, which was supposed to end in January last, has so far progressed by only 10 percent. The flyover project remains stagnant and far from finished. Therefore, the claim that "no single contractual obligation has been violated" is a blatant lie.

Poll reforms

FROM PAGE 1
be invited as political parties to attend the dialogue.

In 2005, then chief election commissioner (CEC) Justice MA Aziz invited 116 political parties to attend a series of dialogues on the issue of voter list. The dialogue finally turned out to be a farce due to negative response from the then major opposition political parties while a huge number of parties that exist in name only participated in.

Since present CEC ATM Shamsul Huda took office on February 4, all major political parties paid courtesy calls at the EC to discuss election issues.

About the simultaneous preparation of voter list with photographs and national identity (ID) cards, the secretary said the EC is now preparing project documents for the task and later it would complete other formalities.

The secretary said the EC would use the expertise of Bangladesh Army in preparing the voter list and the national ID cards. "Of course, we will use their expertise for the job," he added.

The Bangladesh Army has already offered the caretaker government and the EC to prepare the voter list with ID cards or national ID cards. The army had said it would require 10 to 12 months and around Tk.300 crore for the job.

MODHUPUR KILLING

5 forest officials withdrawn

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Five forest department officials were withdrawn from Modhupur yesterday in connection with the death of indigenous leader Cholesh Risil in the custody of the law enforcers on March 18.

Sources in the forest department said Zahurul Huq, assistant forest conservator, Abdul Latif, range officer, Wadudur Rahman, forester and two forest guards of Modhupur National Garden were withdrawn on orders of the forest ministry.

The authorities took the action on the basis of allegation brought by indigenous leaders against the officials for confusing the law enforcement agencies giving wrong information after the death of Cholesh, said a source in Tangail forest office.

On March 19, wife of Cholesh, Sandhya Simsang filed an FIR with Modhupur Police Station against Zahurul Huq and Kamrul Mujahid, deputy ranger.

Pakistan

FROM PAGE 20

The missile was first tested in 2005. Since then, it's range has been enhanced to 700 km, from 500 km previously, the military said, although it did not say how.

President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had congratulated scientists and engineers involved and assured them of complete support in development plans of all strategic projects, the military said.

Pakistan's old rival India has cruise missiles that can be launched from a submarine.

The neighbours, who have fought three wars since 1947, both tested nuclear devices in 1998. Their relations have improved since they launched a peace process in 2004.

Ex-BNP MP

FROM PAGE 20

Our Narayanangj correspondent adds: Rab arrested top criminal on the police list and Jubo Dal leader Rakibuddin Sumon at a private clinic near the Narayanangj Press Club at Chasarcha in the district yesterday.

On Wednesday night, Sumon and his gang attacked Haider Enterprise at Masdier and looted Tk 1.25 breaking the cashbox as the owners of the business refused to pay Tk 2 lakh.

Local people caught Zahir, one of members of the gang, during the attack and handed him over to the Rab. Following information extracted from him, the law enforcers captured Sumon.

Tarique

FROM PAGE 1

Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury travelled to Dubai in March 2006 to secure a series of deals at a Dubai hotel to buy arms and ammunition in the lead up to the cancelled January 22 parliamentary elections.

The report said Tarique also purchased a palatial mansion worth \$60 million in Dubai.

The two also came to an understanding that Tarique would buy large swaths of land which would be locally managed by Ibrahim, the report claimed.

College girl

FROM PAGE 20

Hamidul Islam brought the girl in an unconscious state to the hospital.

As the doctors declared the girl dead, Jahid and Hamid ran away from the spot, but

DMCH guards managed to catch Raju while he was fleeing too.

Following Raju's statement, police contacted Suborna's father Saiful Islam who had earlier informed the law enforcers that his daughter had been kidnapped.

According to Suborna's family, her friend helped her to get a CNG around 2:00pm on Tuesday near Combined Military Hospital (CMH) to go home in Nikunja. Suborna had been missing since then.

Later the family came to know that Jahid, a distant relative of them, had kidnapped their daughter. He had been threatening Suborna for the last couple of months for refusing his marriage proposal, family sources said.

When the family contacted Jahid, he along with his accomplices came to Suborna's house on Wednesday and threatened to kill her in case the family informs the police, they added.

Raju told The Daily Star that Jahid brought Suborna in his workplace at Raj Lakkhi Shopping Complex in Uttara in a yellow taxi and said that Suborna has taken poison. He asked Raju to accompany him to the hospital, Raju added.

There were several marks of cigarette burns on the victim's hands and neck, DMCH sources said. They suspect that she might have been strangled to death.

Raju was taken to Shahbagh Police Station for his alleged involvement in the murder.

Somali govt names Qaeda leader as fighting rages

REUTERS, Mogadishu

The Somali government said yesterday that al Qaeda had made a young militant Islamist commander its leader in Mogadishu as fighting raged for a second day in the coastal capital.

Deputy Defense Minister Salad Ali Jelle told a news conference Aden Hashi Ayro -- an Afghanistan-trained commander in his 30s who runs the Islamists' feared Shabab, or military wing -- was personally directing a growing insurgency.

"The government is being targeted by those who used to work with terrorists, the so-called Islamic Courts," Jelle said. "And after they had a long consultation with al Qaeda, they named Aden Hashi Ayro as head of (al Qaeda) operations in Mogadishu."

The United States and the Somali government have long accused Ayro, and other Islamist leaders, of links to al Qaeda. But some critics say the government paints its political rivals as terrorists to secure more backing from Washington.

Thursday's accusation came as insurgents again battled Somali government forces and their Ethiopian military allies, forcing hundreds of families to flee.

After heavy clashes on Wednesday that killed at least 16 and saw soldiers' bodies dragged through the streets and burned, fighting reignited in the city when Ethiopian tanks guarding a Somali government base opened fire on unidentified attackers.

Witnesses said the cannons thundered repeatedly over a 10-minute period, followed by the clatter of machine guns around the base, situated in a former defense department headquarters.

ECHOES OF US MISSION

A separate gun battle also raged in the northern Ramadan neighborhood, witnesses said. And a huge explosion was heard in the govern-

ment-controlled Kilometer Four area mid-afternoon.

It was not clear if there were any fresh casualties from Thursday's clashes. But hundreds of residents -- mainly women and children -- fled the fighting with their belongings on donkey carts, minibuses and trucks.

"The fighting is still going on. It is the remnants of the Islamists and the government fighting," said a Ramadan resident who declined to be identified for fear of reprisal.

The defense department base has been a favorite target of gunmen who launch almost daily hit-and-run attacks on the government and its allies, including about 1,200 African Union (AU) peacekeepers from Uganda who arrived this month.

It and the Ramadan neighborhood were strongholds of the Islamist movement that ruled Mogadishu and its environs for the last half of 2006, until the government and Ethiopian soldiers defeated them and took the capital just before the New Year.

Wednesday was one of the bloodiest days in Mogadishu since the government took the city from the Islamists.

Judiciary

FROM PAGE 1

Barrister Sobhan said questioning integrity of the judges was tantamount to contempt of court. "If the newspaper doesn't face contempt charges, it will encourage the other journalists to write similar reports," he argued.

He also submitted that such report would give public an adverse impression about the higher judiciary. But the bench differed and said everyone has the right to write and it is necessary. The people will judge which is right and which is wrong, it added.

40 Taliban killed

FROM PAGE 20

Helmand has been the scene of fierce battles between Taliban fighters and government and Nato forces in the past months. Military officials admit parts of it are under rebel control.

An Italian journalist and two Afghans were abducted in the province on March 4. The correspondent was released after 15 days in captivity in exchange for Taliban prisoners, but his driver was beheaded. The translator is believed to still be with the Taliban.

US-led coalition and Afghan troops meanwhile Thursday captured eight suspected militants and men said to help fighters pass into Afghanistan from Pakistan, where US officials allege there are militant training camps.

Five were captured in the eastern province of Kunar in a raid on "extremist facilitators suspected of helping militant fighters" enter from Pakistan's tribally administered Bajaur Agency, the coalition said in statement.

Two more, said to be commanders, were arrested in Helmand's Gereskh in a strike on a compound where intelligence said there were militants involved in "anti-

government activity."

In the eastern province of Khost, troops arrested one person after uncovering a small weapons cache and other contraband items, another statement said.

The Taliban were forced from power in late 2001 in a US-led offensive.

There are about 50,000 foreign troops, with the coalition and the separate Nato force, supporting efforts by the undermanned and underequipped Afghan army and police to take on the militants and stabilise the country.

Murder case

FROM PAGE 1

District and Sessions Judge's Court rejected the bail petition of Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury accused of demanding Tk 2 lakh in toll from Rangunia UP member Mahmudur Rahman Chowdhury on March 15, 2006.

Joint forces arrested the BNP leader during the drive against suspected corrupt politicians following the present caretaker government took over on January 11. He was given detention for 30 days under the Special Powers Act.

Monju quits Politics

FROM PAGE 1

establish a state based on constitutional system. I have tried to contribute to the efforts over the last two decades. The countrymen and people in my constituency extended wholehearted support to me," Monju said in the statement sent by the JP office.

"I believe I have finished my task in politics," Monju told The Daily Star last night.

JP Secretary General Sheikh Shahidul Islam said Monju has contributed a lot to the country's politics. "Not only the Jatiya Party, the national politics will also feel the absence of his political wisdom," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The senior most leader in the party's chain of command will be acting as the chairman in accordance with party constitution," Shahidul added.

Awami League (AL) Presidium Member Kazi Zafarullah said to retire from politics is Monju's personal decision. "But he could specify why he chose to retire from politics at this moment. I respect his decision and I sincerely believe that there must be a specific reason behind his decision," he told The Daily Star.

Surprised by the announcement, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu said time to quit politics has not yet come for Monju.

"Anwar Hossain Monju has proved himself as an efficient administrator. Still, he has a lot to contribute to the present political situation," Inu, also a long-time close friend of Monju, told The Daily Star.

GM Quader, presidium member of the Ershad-led JP, said Monju took the decision to quit politics on

ACC files

FROM PAGE 1

first information report (FIR) said Wadud's wealth did not match his statement.

Wadud earlier said he has properties worth Tk 4.75 crore but the ACC investigation team found Tk 6.16 crore of wealth, which he amassed illegally. He also did not give any income tax for the money.

Meanwhile, ACC Deputy Director Shirin Parveen filed a case against Lotus Kamal and his wife Kashmiri Kamal with Gulshan Police Station for concealing information about wealth worth Tk 80 lakh in their statement submitted to the ACC.

ACC Assistant Director Abdul Latif filed a case against Pankaj Debnath with Dhamondhi Police Station yesterday for a discrepancy of over Tk 65.16 lakh in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

On Wednesday, the anti-graft body filed corruption cases against three former ministers and their family members and a former law-maker.

Star reporter

FROM PAGE 20

The journalists also urged immediate appointment of a district fertiliser dealer in Nilaphamari and demanded taking action against those responsible for creating anarchy in fertiliser distribution.