

South Asian march against child trafficking arrives in New Delhi

AFP, 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.

Townspeople 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

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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 no 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

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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.

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With regards to Meghnaghata-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. Meghnaghata Power Project, c. Sonargaon Hotel Renovation project etc.

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

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 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.

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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 Zahirul 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 Daily Star had been reporting on the irregularities of the Meghnaghata 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 contact was through his son Salman Karim in late 2006 over phone, when a positive report on this power project became vital for Orion to get international financing.

Reports also revealed that the 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.

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 as they launched a peace process in 2004.

Ex-BNP MP

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Our Narayanganj correspondent adds: Rab arrested top criminal on the police list and Jubo Dal leader Rakibuddin Sumon at a private clinic near the Narayanganj Press Club at Chasara 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

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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.

He said his discussion with Matin also focused on which procedures to be given priority during the investigation to sustain the cases.

Asked who is preparing the list of the corruption suspects, Mashhud did not mention any specific authority but said it is being done through a "coordinated effort".

ACC Commissioner Mannan said a three-member committee comprising a deputy director and two assistant directors has been formed to look into the corruption allegations submitted to the ACC.

"To make the ACC more vibrant, more manpower is required and the organogram should be changed. Another 10-15 persons are needed to get this done," he added.

He said there was a lack of management in the ACC, but "we are trying to rectify this problem to establish the commission as an institution".

"We will not run after people only when a case is filed, but we want to stop corruption by building awareness and establish accountability everywhere," Mannan said.

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

Somali govt names Qaeda leader as fighting rages

REUTERS, Mogadishu

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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 far from finished.

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 Ramadhan neighborhood, witnesses said. And a huge explosion was heard in the government

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

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.

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 Bajau Agency, the coalition said in statement.

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

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