

# Saarc countries should synchronise dev plans to have same goals

Foreign Affairs adviser tells The Daily Star

ASHFAQ WALES KHAN, New Delhi

Saarc countries should synchronise their development plans to have same basic goals, said Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury in an interview with The Daily Star on Sunday.

"The whole idea is to synchronise the development plans in a way that we all have basically more or less the same goals, just as we have in the case of the UN Millennium Development Goals," said the adviser at his hotel in New Delhi on the eve of the 14th Saarc summit, which starts today.

He said Bangladesh is heading into the summit to mainstream the Saarc Development Goals into national policies by establishing "total political understanding" among the member countries.

The adviser said, "There are 22 Saarc Development Goals and we like these goals to be in the mainstream of regional and national policies of the member states."

"We have traditionally been conservative about aims and goals of Saarc. Because we have not looked to achieve major objectives,

but we have sought to approach our aspirations gradually," he said.

Iftekhar said the development aspects of Bangladesh include poverty alleviation, spread of education, women's empowerment, food security and health issues.

He said it is imperative that Saarc nations find an 'equilibrium' between the differences and the similarities they have within themselves.

Iftekhar, attending his first Saarc summit, said Dhaka aims to press Saarc for the benefit of the 'common men and women' of South Asia, because, "That was really the main goal in the first place when Saarc was envisaged. It is going to be the people's Saarc."

"Some may argue that enough has not been achieved," he said, adding it is time to consolidate whatever has been achieved and to do that, "You have to do it incrementally, you should achieve small things, consolidate them and move ahead."

To materialise the aspirations of Saarc he said, "It is essential to have total understanding in the political arena of the member countries. It will be Bangladesh's endeavor not only to

develop its own good relations with member states, but also to assist in the development of such relationship among the other countries."

"Saarc comprises countries for whom it is an intellectual challenge whether to emphasise the commonalities or to emphasise the distinctiveness," he said, adding that an equilibrium between the two is the essence of Saarc.

Asked how Saarc can be made more beneficial to Bangladesh through removing non-tariff and para-tariff barriers, he said, "India and Pakistan are bigger in terms of size, population and resources. As they grow, it is only natural for us to grow with them."

"It is now possible within the Saarc framework," he asserted.

Giving the example of India's cumulative trade gap with Bangladesh he said the removal of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers would establish the positive public mode to help achieve other multilateral aspirations.

When asked if Saarc can circumvent the India-Pakistan political deadlock to become more effective, Iftekhar said, "Diplomacy

does not reap quick benefits," adding that the relationship among the Saarc countries needs to 'evolve' and gather strength.

"Look at Germany and France, they have come from animosity half a century ago, to having friendly relations and building the EU together," he said, adding, "There is absolutely no reason why the same should not be the case among the bigger powers in Saarc."

On the issue of counter-terror cooperation during the summit, Iftekhar said, if action is required multilaterally, "Bangladesh will certainly support any initiatives in this regard."

Regarding connectivity, which has been at the forefront of India's proposals in pre-summit meetings, Iftekhar said, "This is an area in which we must approach in a way that will benefit simultaneously all the constituents of Saarc."

He said although there are "different but not necessarily contradictory ideas" about how this might be achieved, but "We all agree at the end that it is important to be connected."

## ANANNYA SHIRSHA DASH 10 outstanding women honoured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a function yesterday stressed the need for a strong and supportive women policy in order to ensure development and empowerment of women in the society.

They also suggested for cancellation of the national women development policy 2004 that impedes progress of women.

They were speaking at an award giving ceremony titled 'Anannya Shirsha Dash (top ten) 2006' organised by Anannya, a fortnightly magazine for issues of women, at the Sufia Kamal auditorium in the National Museum in the city.

Ten outstanding women of the country were awarded with crests for their outstanding contribution in the liberation war, health, social welfare, business, art, culture and challenging profession.

The awardees are: Dr Halida Hanum Akhter, director general of Family Planning Association of Bangladesh (FPAB), freedom fighter Khurshid Jahan Begum, Rubaba Dowla Motin, head of marketing of Grameenphone, social worker Shefalika Tripura and actress Rokeya Rafiq Baby.

Salma Khan, the first woman train operator of the country, was awarded as the pioneer of a new profession for women. Agriculturist Dr Nazira Quraishi, media personality Hena Kabir, German-expatriate Bangladeshi painter Mursiha Arzoo Alpona and young reciter Jharna Sarker were also awarded.

Adviser for Women and Children Affairs Geeti Ara Safiya Chowdhury gave away the awards to the winners.

Speaking as special guest, Prof Dr Sadeka Halim said although Bangladesh signed almost all the international conventions relating to human and women rights, it did not take any initiative to implement them.

Addressing as chief guest Geeti Ara said the mother of a family initiates the gender discrimination process.

Male members of the family should come forward to help change the mentality, she added.

Referring to demand of cancellation of women development policy 2004, the adviser said the advisory council does not have the right to repeal any policy that is passed in the parliament.

She, however, assured that the advisory council has decided not to pass any new law in support of the policy.

## Container train derails at Tongi Rail Station

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A compartment of a Dhaka-bound container train derailed at the outdoor signal at Tongi Rail Station yesterday, disrupting train service at Tongi for one and a half hours.

The accident occurred when four wheels of a bogie veered off the track at around 1:50pm, Tongi railway sources said.

The train service resumed at 3:40pm after a rescue train from Dhaka reached the spot.

Abdul Bari, stationmaster of Tongi station, said the reason behind the derailment could not be known immediately.



President Iajuddin Ahmed speaks at the regional conference of International Political Science Association on 'Rethinking Political Development: Security and Democracy' in the city yesterday.

## Seminar on peptic ulcer disease held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health and Family Welfare Adviser Major General (retd) Dr ASM Matir Rahaman has said gastrointestinal diseases are very common in the country.

Speaking as chief guest at a seminar yesterday, he said specialisation in these diseases has developed very lately and only six medical colleges of the country have gastroenterology department.

The health adviser stressed the need for uniformity in all medical colleges with an oblique reference to their poor conditions and lack of research initiatives.

He said equal resources should be distributed to bring harmony among the medical colleges.

The health adviser said need-based analysis is essential to know the number of gastroenterologists that the country requires.

The seminar titled 'An Update on Peptic Ulcer Disease' was organised by Bangladesh Gastroenterology Society at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city. It was sponsored by Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd.

Eskayef has been producing Loscet capsules since last 12 years for the people suffering from acid-pepsin (stomach enzyme that digests protein) disease.

Prof Dr Niklaus Eugen Gyr of internal medicine department at University of Basel, Switzerland presented the keynote paper where he highlighted the causes of peptic ulcer, its prevalence, and differences between gastric and duodenal ulcers.

He also talked about when to refer a patient with peptic ulcer to physicians and what should be avoided if a person is diagnosed with this ulcer.

He also talked about Helicobacter Pylori, which is the main cause of peptic ulcer.

Prof Dr AK Azad Khan, honorary president of Bangladesh Gastroenterology Society, said though massive changes have been brought in country's treatment method, yet there is no recent countrywide statistics on how many people are affected with this ulcer that was found 12 percent among the adults in 80s.

Prof Dr Mahmud Hasan, president of Bangladesh Gastroenterology Society, and AM Faruque, managing director of Eskayef Bangladesh Ltd, also spoke.

None was available for interrogation after the incident.

## City road caves in as pilings collapse

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Titas gas authorities cut off the gas supply to the area to halt emission of gas leakage through cracks in the gas pipeline.

Manusher Jonno emerges as independent organisation

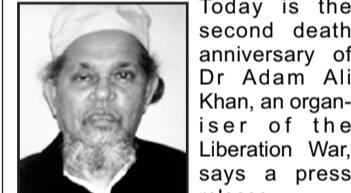
The Manusher Jonno Project of CARE Bangladesh started to function as an independent organisation styled 'Manusher Jonno Foundation', from April 1 with the mandate to promote human rights and good governance, says a press release.

On this occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at his residence after Asr prayers. Also, Qurankhawani will be held and fateha will be offered at his grave at Banani.

BSS adds: Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed yesterday paid tribute to the memory of Justice Mursheed on the occasion of his death anniversary.

In a message, the chief adviser said, "Justice Syed Mahbub Mursheed was a bright personality in the field of country's law and justice. His contribution to establishing truth and justice with courage, talent and wisdom will inspire us all."

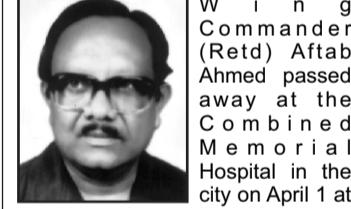
Dr Adam Ali Khan



Today is the second death anniversary of Dr Adam Ali Khan, an organiser of the Liberation War, says a press release.

A doa mahfil will be held at his village home and at a mosque at Mathbaria in Pirojpur on April 6.

## Obituary



Wing Commander (Retd) Aftab Ahmed passed away at the Combined Memorial Hospital in the city on April 1 at the age of 72, says a press release. He is survived by his wife and two daughters.

His quirkhawani will be held at Mohakhal DOHS mosque after Asr prayers on April 5.



Managing Director of Eskayef Bangladesh AM Faruque hands over a crest to Health and Family Welfare Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Dr ASM Matir Rahaman at an international scientific seminar on 'An update on peptic ulcer disease' at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the city yesterday. Bangladesh Gastroenterology Society organised the seminar.

## BTTB loses revenue as int'l trunk exchange not installed

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buried in a deep bureaucratic tangle created by the telecom ministry.

Between 2000 and 2006, a powerful circle involving top decision-makers to high officials in the ministry and the BTTB had prevented the government from legalising VoIP or taking action against illegal VoIP operators, and also from expanding the BTTB's international call handling capability.

This nexus helped illegal VoIP operators bag more than Tk 1,200 crore every year, and drastically cut the BTTB's international call revenue. "In fact, if the BTTB had an ITX big enough to handle all foreign calls, people would not even know what VoIP stands for. VoIP emerged as an alternative way for foreign calls which the BTTB was failing to provide," pointed out a telecom expert.

The BTTB floated tender for setting up the ITX under the 10 lakh T&T Mobile Phone Project in May last year in which Swedish company Ericsson AB and Chinese Huawei Technologies submitted bids.

Being technically qualified Ericsson in August won the bid with a price offer of Tk 7.3 crore, while Huawei's bid, cheaper by Tk 2.2 crore, was disqualified for serious technical and other flaws.

A seven-member Tender Evaluation Committee (TEC) found Huawei's offer as "substantially non-responsive" for serious design limitation and failing to provide performance certificate. As required, Huawei's design did not accommodate hard disc drive as the primary backup with duplicated configuration, and also duplicated secondary backup drives.

Moreover, the TEC report also mentioned that Huawei had earlier bagged contracts for projects by lying about the same flaws in their offers to BTTB's tenders and have already installed exchanges which do not meet these mandatory technical criteria. The report also observed that it will not be possible for Huawei to rectify these

major flaws due to their design constraints.

As Huawei was technically disqualified, its price offer was not comparable with that of Ericsson as per the procurement guidelines of the government, sources mentioned.

In October, the BTTB issued a letter of intent (LOI) to Ericsson for installation of the ITX, and on November 1, Ericsson gave performance bond. This binds the bidder and the authorities into a contract. Regulation 36 of the PPR 2003 says: Notification of award and signing of contract. The notification of award establishes a contract between the procuring entity and the successful bidder.

"This implies that an arbitrary suspension of that by the ministry is illegal," notes a PPR expert.

Sources said a top official of the telecom ministry, who had taken benefits from Huawei, became angry at this development. But since the tender was flawless, he decided to teach the BTTB a lesson. And he fed a newspaper a story saying that the BTTB tender evaluation committee has done wrong by awarding the project contract to Ericsson, instead of Huawei.

"Following the publication of the report in that paper on November 6, the ministry did not even wait for a BTTB clarification on the matter and went for suspension of the project on November 11," one source said.

Right at that time, the secretary concerned, under the financial sponsorship of Huawei, was attending a programme abroad, official documents show.

Earlier on March 27 last year, in dealing with a complaint for review filed by a bidder, the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the planning ministry gave its verdict that if members of a tender evaluation committee (TEC) go on a foreign trip funded by a bidder, that becomes under the purview of

Conflict of Interest (COI) as per the Public Procurement Regulation 2003. As per the PPR regulation 15 (2), in such a case the tender of that bidder will be cancelled.

This complaint concerned the telecom secretary Mahmud Mansur and another member of the TEC who went on a foreign trip in February, sponsored by Huawei, a bidder of an optical fibre cable project.

Huawei, which was represented by now arrested BNP leader Naser Rahman and his brother, also sent two members of another TEC on a trip in October 2005.

The CPTU recommended that the government take action as per Regulation 15, which includes blacklisting Huawei for corrupt practices.

Though such a verdict has banned foreign trips for secretary or members of a TEC with the finances of a bidder, the secretary repeated the past mistake.

"Again, Huawei influenced the telecom ministry's action by sponsoring visits of secretary Mia Mishtak Ahmed and another official to China and Australia from November 6 to 12. The secretary has thus violated the planning ministry's earlier restriction," one source mentioned.

Suspension of the ITX project was followed by a series of time-killing actions. On November 27, the ministry formed a two-member investigation committee with a joint secretary and member (finance) of the BTTB without naming the incumbents. The then member (finance) Jamil Osman and joint secretary Nuruzzaman Khan interviewed two members of the 7-member TEC including the BTTB chairman in early December.

But in late December, Jamil Osman was transferred to another ministry. This created a fresh loophole as the unfinished investigation report was then left with joint secretary M Nuruzzaman Khan, who was due to retire on January 22 this year.

On December 20, the BTTB with all details asked the CPTU to verify if

"Using this pretext, the ministry has refrained from lifting the suspension of the project, which is helping none but illegal VoIP terminators" notes one source.



## Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty/squally wind is likely at a few places over Sylhet division and at one or two places over Dhaka and Rajshahi and the regions of Jessor, Kushtia, Comilla, Noakhali and Barisal in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Weather may remain nearly unchanged over the country. Met Office said and predicted that mild to moderate heat wave, sweeping over Khulna division and the regions of Faridpur, Rajshahi, Ishwardi and Bogra, may continue.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 40.0 degree Celsius was recorded at Iswardi and the lowest of 21.4 degree at Teknaf.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:15pm today and rises at 5:48am tomorrow.