

Troops kill over 250 Afghan civilians this yr

AFP, Kabul

Foreign and Afghan troops have killed nearly 250 civilians in Afghanistan this year and squandered goodwill towards the international military presence, non-government groups charged yesterday.

The Agency Coordinating Body For Afghan Relief (ACBAR), which groups nearly 100 foreign and Afghan NGOs, accused troops fighting Taliban and other insurgents of "excessive use of force and abusive raids."

It also said they acted on false or inaccurate information.

The criticism came after seven children were killed in an air strike by US-led coalition war planes on a suspected Al-Qaeda compound in

eastern Afghanistan late Sunday.

The strike, for which the coalition apologised saying it had no idea children were there, was the latest in a series of incidents in which troops have killed civilians.

"NGO reports and data indicate that since the beginning of 2007 international and Afghan government forces have been responsible for the deaths of a minimum of 230 civilians including at least 60 women and children," it said.

"Over the same period a further 14 civilians have been killed for simply driving or walking too close to international military personnel or vehicles."

The foreign forces warn civilians who come to close to keep away but the warnings are sometimes not understood or heeded.

"Initial goodwill towards the international military presence in 2002 has substantially diminished in many parts of the country," said ACBAR, which has been in Afghanistan for nearly 20 years.

It said cases of civilian casualties must be properly investigated and "timely and appropriate compensation" should be paid and apologies made when necessary.

Accurate figures of civilian casualties should be compiled and published, and the military forces here -- including all US units -- should agree on common standards of operation, it said.

Human Rights Watch says around 1,000 civilians were killed in insurgency-linked violence in Afghanistan last year, about 230 of them in military action.

Thailand to nominate former FM as ASEAN chief

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand will nominate a former foreign minister as the new secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional body, a government spokesman said.

Thailand will nominate Surin Pitsuwan as secretary general of ASEAN for five years beginning January 1, 2008," Yongyuth Mayalarp told reporters.

Yongyuth said Thailand would propose Surin's name at an ASEAN meeting in the Philippines next month.

Surin, 57, gained a PhD from Harvard University in 1982, and has also studied Arabic and Islamic philosophy at the American University in Cairo.

He is an expert on foreign affairs and was named Thailand's deputy foreign minister in 1992 and became foreign minister in a Democrat Party-led coalition from November 1997 to February 2001.

STEELTECH OFFER 2nd round raffle draw held

The second round raffle draw of 'Steeltech Shining Offer', part of a three-month promotional programme by Steeltech Industries Ltd., took place at the head office of the company recently, says a press release.

The winners are Md Akhter, Sonargaon, Dhaka; Md Shahjada, Khalishpur, Khulna; Saiful Hossein, Agrabad, Chittagong; and Sumon Ahmed Shimu of Jherjheri Para, Sylhet.

Earlier, four persons among the customers who bought the brand's stainless steel pipe became winners of the first round draw. They are Md Serajul Islam of Dhaka, Mahmud Ali Sajuj of Comilla, Jubayer Ahmed of Sylhet, and Monir Chowdhury of Chittagong.

Four more persons will be selected in the third and final round to make it a group of 12 who will get the opportunity to fly to Nepal and stay in a five star hotel.

The third round is due to take place later this month.

China surpasses US in 2006 carbon-dioxide emissions Dutch data shows

AFP, The Hague

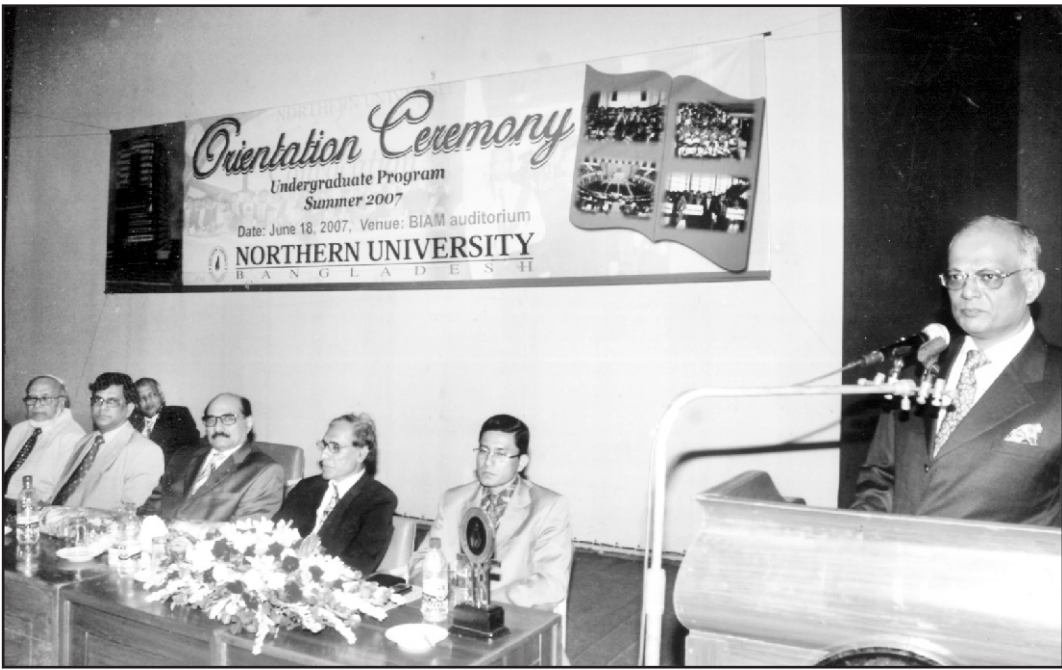
China for the first time spewed out more carbon-dioxide emissions last year than the United States, a Dutch government research body said yesterday.

"China's 2006 carbon dioxide emissions surpassed those of the USA by 8.0 percent," the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency (MNP) said.

In 2005 US emissions were up 2.0 percent compared to China. The MNP said the figures were based on its own preliminary estimates derived from recent energy and cement production data.

Industrial processes and the burning of fossil fuels -- oil, gas and coal -- are the main causes of carbon-dioxide emissions. Of the industrial processes, cement production is one of the principal sources of greenhouse gas, the MNP said. In 2006 China had a 44 percent share in global cement production, it added.

According to the MNP figures, China's emissions increased by 9.0 percent in 2006 compared to its 2005 output. In the United States emissions rose 1.4 percent from 2005 to 2006.



Attorney General Barrister Fida M Kamal speaks at the orientation programme of Summer Semester 2007 of Northern University Bangladesh (NUB) at Biam auditorium in the city yesterday.

China slave labour scandal widens amid rampant labour abuses

AFP, Beijing

China's slavery scandal widened yesterday with the state-run press reporting that young girls had been forced into prostitution at a brickyard work camp where abuse and beatings were routine.

The latest reports come as the slavery ring that was initially reported only in Shanxi and Henan provinces in north and central China had in fact been operating elsewhere around the country for as long as a decade.

According to the government, police have so far rescued up to 570 enslaved workers, some of them children, and detained nearly 170 people suspected of trafficking, beating and enslaving workers in Shanxi and Henan.

Tens of thousands of police have descended on thousands of brickyard kilns, small mines and metal-works factories in the two provinces, after the scandal made national headlines last week with the first arrests.

As authorities focused on ending

the slavery, a report in the Communist Party magazine "Democracy and Law" said some female slaves had been forced into prostitution.

Two girls aged 17 and 16 had been forced into prostitution at the Wangjiang brick factory in Hebei province, immediately to the north of Henan, in 2004, according to the report that was picked up by the Xinhua news agency.

The girls were lured from their village in Shaanxi province with the promises of high wages and good jobs at a tile factory in early 2004, but soon discovered they had been tricked.

At first the girls worked alongside other labourers 16 hours a day, receiving regular beatings for not working hard enough, it said.

But soon the brickyard boss began prostituting the girls to the workers, many of whom were handicapped or mentally ill, deducting portions of their meagre salaries each time they took one of the girls, it said.

Meanwhile, the China Daily

newspaper said factories had been operating as far south as Guangdong province where workers had received tiny salaries but complained of routine beatings and unsanitary and prison-like work conditions.

Xinhua said in an earlier report that one man lost a toe from frostbite after running barefoot to escape a labour camp in China's far northeast Heilongjiang province.

During a press conference Tuesday, the police ministry vowed to crackdown on violations of labour rights and addressed accusations that local police in Henan and Shanxi had previously refused to investigate the brickyards despite desperate pleas by the parents of missing children.

"The attitude of the Public Security Ministry is clear, if we find any instances of dereliction of duty in the police force we will investigate and severely deal with it," ministry spokesman Wu Heping said.

Skilled human resources must to survive Says Attorney General

Skilled manpower is imperative for survival in the competitive world of the twenty-first century, said Attorney General Barrister Fida M Kamal yesterday.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the orientation programme of Summer Semester 2007 of Northern University Bangladesh (NUB) at Biam auditorium in the city, says a press release.

NUB Vice Chancellor Professor Dr M Shamsul Haque presided over the ceremony while Chairman of Executive Committee of Bangladesh Bar Council Md Yusuf Hossain Humayun and Managing Director of Lanka Bangla Finance Ltd Mafizuddin Sarker were present as special guests.

Barrister Fida M Kamal urged the freshers to be knowledgeable in order play a vital role in creating the nation.

JCD attack on JU SCF activists condemned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different organisations yesterday condemned the attack on the agitating activists of Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) of Jahangirnagar University (JU) by the cadres of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of BNP, over the increase of dining charge.

They also demanded immediate arrest and trial of the attackers and realisation of the demands.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front Central Committee President Khalequzzaman Lipon and General Secretary Nasim Uddin Prince in a statement said the university authorities illogically increased the dining charge and when the students were protesting the move in a peaceful manner they unleashed the JCD cadres.

They demanded expulsion of the attackers from the dormitories and the authorities provide treatment to the injured students.

Kendriya Pragatisheel Chhatra Jote leaders and Shikkha Andolon Mancha also condemned the attack in separate statements.

15 killed in China storms

AFP, Beijing

Torrential rains in southwest China have triggered flash floods and landslides, leaving 15 people dead and two missing, the government reported Tuesday.

Of the 15 dead in Sichuan province, 10 were killed in Dazhou city since rains began Saturday, the civil affairs ministry said on its website.

The continuous downpours blocked roads and cut off telecommunications and electricity, it said.

About 127,000 people have

been relocated in the region, as floods and landslides caused up to 326 million yuan (42 million dollars) in direct economic losses, it added.

Despite the damage, the state flood control headquarters said the heavy rains had actually greatly alleviated drought conditions that have plagued the area since early last year.

On Saturday, the flood headquarters said that 128 people had died due to torrential rains, floods and landslides in China this year, with another 24 listed as missing.

The flooding has inflicted 8.92 billion yuan in direct economic damages, it said.

Most of the damages occurred in the first two weeks of June, when southern China was drenched in rainstorms.

Last year, China witnessed some of the worst flooding in years, when nearly 3,000 people were reported killed or went missing in the annual deluges that strike the nation's rural areas.

Global warming brings early spring to Arctic: Study

AFP, Chicago

In the upper reaches of Greenland, the Arctic spring comes several weeks earlier than it did a decade ago, according to a study released Monday that underscores the far-reaching impact of global warming on the northern polar region.

Researchers discovered that plant, insect and bird life native to the High Arctic had made dramatic seasonal cycle adjustments to the region's earlier snow melt in the space of just 10 years.

On average, the insects, plants and birds such as the Sanderling and the Ruddy Turnstone had moved their springtime rituals -- budding, emerging from the ground, hatching times -- forward two weeks in the period between 1996 and 2005.

In some cases, flowers were emerging from buds and chicks were hatching a full 30 days sooner in 2005 than they would have in 1996 in response to sharply increased temperatures that burned off the winter's snow layer.

"Our study confirms what many people already think, that the seasons are changing and it is not just one or two warm years but a strong trend seen over a decade," said Toke Hoyer, a researcher with the National Environmental Research Institute at the University of Aarhus in Denmark.

The trend can be traced to the region's earlier spring snow melt, which occurs about a fortnight earlier than it did a decade ago.

This should serve as an early warning system to the rest of the planet of the scale and pace of

climate-related change, the researchers said.

While not unexpected, the rate of change is surprising, even though Arctic temperatures are increasing at twice the global average.

Similar studies have noted much more modest changes with respect to plants in Europe (an advancement of 2.5 days per decade) and globally (5.1 days per decade).

"We were particularly surprised to see that the trends were so strong when considering that the entire summer is very short in the High Arctic -- with just three to four months from snowmelt to freeze up at our Zackenberg study site in northeast Greenland," said Hoyer, a co-author of the study.

PDB top management

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changed PDB's chairman eight times.

Side by side, a section of power ministry bureaucrats under the leadership of ex-power secretary ANH Akhtar, now in jail as he is a graft suspect, had been dictating PDB's decisions that would benefit them personally, sources said.

As a result, the PDB in essence did not lead the power sector during the alliance government rule.

"But after the caretaker government took over, we were hoping that the PDB will finally function in the way it was designed to do. But till date, the ministry remains ubiquitous in PDB's affairs," quips a mid-ranking official.

An official of the power ministry said in recent times the promotions were being held back because the establishment ministry has referred to a recent notice of the ACC that demanded that all promotions and postings would be subject to the clearance of the ACC.

"The PDB argues that it is an autonomous body and its employees are not directly appointed by the government. But the establishment ministry says that it applies to the PDB as well," the official said.

An ACC high official said PDB officials also need the ACC clearance for promotion, because they are on the government payroll.

"The ACC may have around 1,000 files of government officials awaiting clearance. Due to lack of manpower in the ACC, it is taking time," he said.

Grievances are also high in the PDB because the ministry has become too powerful in its affairs. Though the ministry is not even empowered to promote anyone in the PDB, from early 2006 the ministry assigned a deputy secretary in the promotion committee of the PDB--who virtually decides who gets promoted.

Besides, the ministry also removed the PDB chairman from chairing its two companies. Whereas the PDB chairman used to head the boards of the Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB) and West Zone Power Distribution Company, for the last one year the ministry secretary is heading them.

"Though the government talks about decentralising power, in recent years we see concentration of power in the ministry. That such concentration cannot bring any benefit is proven through the fact that we are severely lacking in power generation," said a senior official.

"If the ministry thinks that the PDB is unnecessary and they are smart enough to run the power sector themselves they can abolish PDB and run the show," he said expressing frustration.

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