

London seminar critical of Hasina's arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar in London on the human rights situation in Bangladesh yesterday criticised in general the use of emergency powers, saying that the practice undermines the rule of law.

Expressing concern at custodial tortures, they said some detainees were wrongfully arrested and subjected to ill treatment by law enforcers.

International Bangladesh Foundation organised the seminar at the Houses of Lords with Lord Avebury in the chair. Members of the British Parliament (MP) and the European Parliament (MEP), peers of the House of Lords, and representatives of Commonwealth

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Mass hysteria affects 28 in 4 districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-eight more students across the country fainted with convulsion during school hours, raising the number of 'mass hysteria' victims to 207 in last two weeks.

In the cases reported from Narayanganj, Sherpur, Pabna and Dhaka, the victims of 'mass psychogenic illness' are adolescent female students who felt headache, nausea, convulsion, pain in the chest and abdomen and difficulty in breathing.

Seventeen students of Amgaon Dabiruddin Bhuiyan High School went unconscious on Tuesday and Wednesday, our Narayanganj correspondent reports.

A medical team from Sonargaon Health Complex visited the school to treat the affected children who were later admitted to different hospitals.

In Sherpur Government Girls' High School, a student of class nine started feeling dizzy at about 8:00am yesterday.

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MADHYAPARA GRANITE MINING Company at mercy of rock trading syndicate

KONGKON KARMAKER, Dinajpur

The Madhyapara Granite Mining Company Ltd (MGML) is undergoing a severe financial crisis as around 1,00,000 tonnes of granite worth Tk 11.9 crore remain unsold at the mine due to lack of buyers.

According to mining officials concerned, the 1,00,000 tonnes of rock remain unsold as a rock trading syndicate, with government officials' connivance, prefer to import rocks, buying them at hefty \$34 per tonne, since it leaves room for corruption. Illegal rock extraction in Panchagarh and Lalmonirhat are also affecting MGML's sale, they said.

They said the mine has been extracting around 800 to 1000 tonnes of rock every day since its

crisis. Considering the severe financial predicament, the authorities of the mine sought Tk 20 crore loan from the government early January to resume rock extraction but the government granted only Tk 5 crore.

MGML officials said Bangladesh has an annual demand for 40.5 to 60.5 lakh tonnes of rock. Bangladesh Roads and Highways, Water Development Board (WDB), Bangladesh Railway, Local Government, Bangladesh Public Works Department and engineering departments have a collective demand that is 60 percent of the national demand.

Unplanned and illegal extraction of rocks like in Panchagarh and Lalmonirhat, posing a great ecological threat to the areas, meet 15

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Taliban kill Korean hostage

Set final deadline for meeting their demands

AFP, undated

Taliban militants in Afghanistan killed one of their 23 South Korean hostages yesterday and set a "final deadline" for the government to meet their demands for a prisoner swap.

The Islamist rebels said they executed the captive because talks with the Afghan authorities aimed at securing the release of the Christian aid workers in exchange for eight jailed insurgents had stalled.

The Taliban meanwhile freed a German journalist -- the third German to be kidnapped in a week in war-torn Afghanistan -- and his Afghan translator hours after abducting them in the east of the country, officials said.

"We killed one of the Koreans

today because the government is not being honest in talks," Taliban spokesman Youssuf Ahmadi told AFP by telephone from an unknown location.

The head of the Afghan government delegation negotiating the release of the Koreans, Waheedullah Mujahadi, confirmed that the militant group had killed one of the South Korean hostages.

The Taliban also opened fire at him in a buffer zone between Taliban- and government-controlled areas, Mujahadi said. "I managed to escape the attack. They were trying to kidnap me as well or kill me," he said.

The militants -- who were ousted from power in Afghanistan by US-led forces in late 2001 -- set a deadline of 2030 GMT Wednesday for their demands for the release of

eight jailed Taliban fighters to be met.

"We call on the South Korean government, parliament and its people to pressure the Afghan government to accept our demands or we'll kill more hostages after the deadline passes," Ahmadi said.

The government was unable to confirm a report by South Korea's Yonhap news agency, quoting an unidentified government official in Seoul, that eight of the hostages were freed Wednesday.

The hostages were to be moved to a safe zone and then flown back to South Korea after a medical check-up, Yonhap said. It later quoted a source as saying they were being taken to a US military base in Ghazni province.

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Myanmar minister arrives today to ink road deal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar Construction Minister Maj Gen Saw Tun arrives in Dhaka today to seal the deal on constructing the 25-km road connecting Bangladesh and Myanmar.

He is expected to sign the agreement with communications adviser Maj Gen (retd) MAMatin tomorrow.

The road will stretch from 2 kilometres inside Bangladesh at Gundhrom and will extend 23 kilometres inside Myanmar to Tongor. Bangladesh will provide

Tk 141 crore for construction of the road.

The road-link is expected to pave the way for Bangladesh to subsequently link up with Asian Highway through Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore.

Tk 10cr fund allocated for rehabilitated floating people

UNB, Dhaka

The government has allocated Tk 10 crore as revolving fund for floating people rehabilitated under the land ministry's Adarsha Gram Project-2 for financing income-generating schemes for them.

An official announcement yesterday said the money will be disbursed among the poor people through Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB) as micro-credit.

The decision was disclosed at a meeting arranged for review of progress of the projects being implemented under the Annual Development Programme (ADP) of the fiscal year 2006-2007.

Land, Information and Law Adviser Mainul Hosein presided over the meeting, which noted that a total of Tk 25.68 crore was allocated for seven ADP projects.

Out of the total, Tk 23.02 crore was released until June 2007 and Tk 20.73 crore of the released money has been spent. The progress rate of the projects is 81 percent.

The Adviser directed the officials concerned to complete the projects within the timeline.



PHOTO: STAR

A minor boy helps his employer in welding work with a gas cylinder on a road in Tejgaon in the capital, exposing themselves as well as pedestrians to accident risk.



PHOTO: STAR

Trolleys for carrying serious patients inside Dhaka Medical College Hospital, are also used to dispose of garbage from there, thanks to the authorities' hygiene management.

Jakarta keen to import RMG, medicines

First JEC meeting ends in Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and Indonesia concluded their first Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting yesterday, where Indonesia showed interest in importing pharmaceuticals and ready made garments, among other goods, to improve bilateral trade with Bangladesh, which currently stands at a paltry Tk 509 crore per year.

The JEC, meeting three years after its inception in 2004, decided to recover the lost ground by expediting the implementation of the 1998 Agreement on Promotion and Protection of Investment, and agreed on joint ventures in fertiliser and textile sectors.

The JEC meeting shows an effort to revive the government's 'look east' policy, which has been flagging since the initial pronounce-

ments made by the immediate past government, foreign ministry sources said. The next JEC meeting is scheduled to be held in Jakarta in 2008.

"We have agreed upon some commitments for cooperation. Since Indonesia also produces pharmaceuticals, we would like to explore joint ventures in textile and fertiliser sectors," said the head of the Indonesian delegation also a foreign ministry official, Prima Alui Joelianto, after he had called on Bangladesh Foreign Adviser Iftekhar A Chowdhury.

Iftekhar said the JEC meeting is a testament to Bangladesh's effort to strengthen political ties with Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country with around 230 million people.

He added that there is a demand in Indonesia for 'halal' meat in

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Iran ready for higher-level talks with US over Iraq

AFP, Tehran

Iran yesterday said it was prepared to consider higher-level talks with the United States over Iraq, a day after their ambassadors to Baghdad held a landmark second meeting on Iraqi security.

Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said Tehran would be willing to consider talking to Washington, its arch-foe for almost three decades, at the level of deputy foreign minister.

"The talks between Iran and the United States over Iraq at the level of deputy foreign minister can be studied," Mottaki said after a cabinet meeting, the state-run IRNA agency reported.

"If America makes an official request in this regard it can be examined," he added.

US Ambassador to Iraq Ryan

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Storm kills 1, damages hundreds of houses

STAR REPORT

Violent storms ripped into six districts of the country yesterday, killing a baby and injuring some 100 people.

Besides, several hundred thatched houses were also damaged and thousands of trees uprooted by the storms.

Many people in Noakhali, Brahmanbaria, Jamalpur, Comilla, Chandpur and Laxmipur left homeless by the tornados were forced to live under open sky in utter distress, reports received in Dhaka said.

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Manikpur, Islampur, Muriel, Badarkati and Memra villages of the upazila at about 3:00am.

A correspondent from Comilla said that more than 50 people, including women and children, were injured and 200 thatched houses and several schools and mosques were damaged by the storm in the district. Besides, hundreds of trees were uprooted.

The storm swept Sholapukuria, Mochagara, Jatrapur and Bhabanipur villages of Muradnagar upazila at 7:00am damaging over 150 houses and injuring 30 people, the report further said. The building of Mochagara High School in the upazila was damaged seriously.

The storm at the villages of Manohorganj left over 30 thatched houses damaged and 15 people injured, while it damaged 25 houses and left 6 people injured at Daudkandi.

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Rocket attack kills eight in Pakistan

AFP, Miranshah

Islamic militants fired a barrage of rockets into a city in northwest Pakistan early yesterday, killing at least eight civilians and injuring 41 amid a wave of violence sweeping the country.

The attack close to the Afghan border was the latest in Pakistan since the army stormed a pro-Taliban mosque in the capital Islamabad earlier this month, and came a day after a top Taliban militant blew himself up.

Four houses were destroyed in the rocket attack on Bannu, a town on the fringes of restive North Waziristan tribal zone, where the United States says Osama Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network has set up safe havens.

"The dead included one woman and seven other civilians," local police officer Mohammad Ghulam told AFP, adding that seven policemen were among the injured.

Five rockets landed within 30

Bangladeshi cops not falling behind

Play major role in rebuilding Ivory Coast

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK, back from Ivory Coast

Apart from the defence contingent, Bangladesh Police forces have also made long-standing contributions to the United Nations peacekeeping missions around the globe.

Bangladesh Army stepped into the family of "Blue Helmet" by participating in the UNHMOG (Iran-Iraq) in 1988 with 15 military observers. Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Air Force joined in the UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) in 1993. Bangladesh Police followed the armed forces in 1989.

Since then, the police have been taking part in the UN peacekeeping missions in different countries including Namibia, Angola, Haiti, former Yugoslavia, Eastern

Slovenia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, Cambodia, East Timor, Liberia, Sudan, Congo and Ivory Coast.

Current strength of police in different missions is 779. Among them, 250 police personnel are now working in Ivory Coast in two Formed Police Units (FPU).

The Formed Police Unit (FPU) is a comparatively new concept in the field of peacekeeping that was first introduced in Kosovo in 1999. It means a force in between military and civilian police component to meet the complex security challenges of the post-conflict societies.

After the successful experiment in Kosovo the demand for FPU in different peacekeeping missions is increasing day by day. The peacekeeping contributing countries

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Bangladeshi policemen conduct rescue operation during a fire incident at Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast. Engaged in voluntary humanitarian work in addition to their assigned duties, the UN peacekeepers in the war-torn West African country has won the heart of locals.

Pedestrian, cop injured in cracker blasts

UNB, Dhaka

Unidentified miscreants hurled two crackers at a police check post near Abu's Hotel at Rampura Road in the city's Malibagh area yesterday evening, injuring one policeman and a pedestrian.

Police said the crackers were thrown from a running taxicab at about 7:00pm. Constable Ali Hassan, 22, injured with splinters, was taken to Rajarbagh Police Hospital. Identity of the injured pedestrian could not be known.

No one was arrested in connection with the blasts.

Prayer Timing

| July 26 | Azan | Jamaat |
|---------|-------|--------|
| Fajr | 4-20 | 4-55 |
| Zohr | 12-45 | 1-15 |
| Asr | 5-00 | 5-15 |
| Maghrib | 6-50 | 6-55 |
| Esha | 8-15 | 8-45 |

Source: Islamic Foundation