

SOUTH ASIAN FREE MEDIA ASSOC CONFCE ENDS Call for restoration of full-fledged democracy, media freedom

UNB, Colombo

A two-day conference of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) ended here yesterday with a resolve to bring into focus rampant poverty in the region and support pro-poor, poor-centred strategies of eradicating poverty at grassroots level by breaking anti-people power nexuses.

"The poverty is the most serious issue that has to be handled both at national and regional level. The South Asian region has all the resources. Economies are growing, but poverty is also worsening," noted SAFMA, a Saarc-affiliated body of journalists.

Its observations came in the Colombo Declaration adopted at the conclusion of the conference on Media, Peace and Poverty Alleviation in South Asia.

The declaration also extended support to democratic aspirations and ongoing struggles of the people

in those countries of the region where fundamental rights and democratic values are either under attack or are yet to be introduced or restored.

"We demand restoration of full-fledged democracy, independence of the judiciary, the rule of law and media freedom," the declaration of the conference says.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake inaugurated the conference on Saturday while Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus delivered keynote speech as the guest of honour. Nearly 250 senior journalists from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka attended the meet.

The declaration identified increasing defence budgets and heavy debts as two major contributing factors to the phenomenon of worsening poverty despite economic growth.

"Therefore, we demand an early

resolution of all conflicts and a considerable moratorium by the lending agencies and countries for the repayments of the debts," the declaration said.

It observed that globalisation has increased social vulnerability in South Asia and has seen deterioration of conditions on job market and food security.

The Colombo Declaration called upon Saarc member-countries to ultimately move towards South Asian Human Security by placing people, their wellbeing and rights to peaceful life and development at the centre of the security concerns rather than intensifying the arms race.

It urged the governments in South Asia to take concrete steps to implement the Saarc Social Charter and give priority to poverty eradication.

The declaration called on the Saarc countries to work for peace and stability in Afghanistan and Sri

Lanka and collectively fight against terrorism and religious extremism or ethnic chauvinism.

The meet condemned the punitive and prohibitive measures taken by both state and non-state factors against the media and demand undiluted media freedom, right to know and freedom of expression in all countries in the region.

On Environment, the declaration said the South Asian region is under high environmental stress brought about by both natural and manmade causes. Intra-state and inter-State conflicts are a major contributor to environmental destruction.

The conference suggested the countries should act together on vast range of environmental issues in the region, which is witnessing phenomenal weather conditions like calamitous floods, earthquakes or tsunami and droughts by turns.



Chairman of The City Bank Limited Aziz Al Kaiser hands over a cheque for Tk 50 lakh to Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at his office in the city recently for the flood victims.



Students of Vigarunnisa Noon School and College distribute relief materials at Keraniganj in the city yesterday.



Khondoker Rashed Maqsood, director and head of Global Transaction Services of Citibank, hands over a cheque for US\$25,000 to Fazle Hasan Abed, chairperson of Brac, in the city on Saturday to support the Brac's countrywide relief efforts.



Managing Director of the Prime Bank M Shahjahan Bhuiyan hands over a pay order for Tk 20 lakh to Major General Md Ashab Uddin, General Officer Commanding 9 Infantry Division and Area Commander, Savar Area, at his office recently for relief activities for the flood victims.



Outgoing Dutch Ambassador Kees Beemsterboer pays a farewell call on Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed at the latter's office in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh a bright example of communal harmony

President tells World Hindu Federation

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed has called upon all irrespective of caste and creed to work together to build a prosperous Bangladesh maintaining the tradition of unimpeachable communal harmony.

"Bangladesh is a bright example of communal harmony in the world. People from all religions live here in great harmony," he said when a delegation of the World Hindu Federation made a courtesy call on him at Bangabhaban yesterday.

The delegation, led by Federation's Bangladesh chapter President Shib Shankar Chakravarty, apprised the President of the activities of their organisation and their contribution to the socio-economic development of the country.

They submitted a memorandum of their demands to the President who gave them a patient hearing and assured them of his "all-out cooperation" in the conduct of their activities.

The delegation members were Priyobroto Brahmachari, Rabindra Nath Tribedi, Advocate Bandhu Gopal Das, Satya Ranjan Baroi and Biswanath Chowdhury.

President's Secretary M Sirajul Islam and his Press Secretary Abdul Awal Hawlader were present on the occasion.



Ramakrishna Mission officials distribute relief materials among flood victims at Nonagaon in Sonargaon, Narayanganj, recently.



Volunteers prepare breads for flood victims at Shanir Akhara in the city. Water-Electricity Action Committee has organised the relief activities.

Charge framed against BNP leader Ariful in extortion case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A court in Sylhet yesterday framed charge against city BNP Chief Ariful Haque Chowdhury, also a ward commissioner of Sylhet City Corporation (SCC), in a case of extortion worth Tk 15 lakh.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Mahfuzar Rahman fixed August 22 for recording the deposition of witnesses.

Contractor Haji Dilar Ahmed, son of Haji Mujibur Rahman of Shahjalal Upashahar, filed the case with Sylhet Kotwali Police Station on June 19.

In his case, Dilar alleged that Ariful Haque Chowdhury called him to his (Arif's) house at Kumarpura area and asked him to pay Tk 15 lakh in toll on March 30 in 2006.

Otherwise, the work order for a road expansion project would be cancelled and his firm would be blacklisted, Arif threatened.

"Later, I was compelled to pay the amount through six cheques of Sonali Bank, SCC Branch," Dilar mentioned in his complaint.

Sub-Inspector Iqbal Hossain submitted the charge sheet on July 17.

2 lighter vessels yet to be salvaged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The two lighter vessels, one capsized near the Karnaphuli estuary and the other stranded at Sandwip channel on Saturday, could not be salvaged till yesterday afternoon.

The spot, where the lighter vessel MV Feroze Farzana capsized, could not be located due to rough weather and strong current in the sea, Port Radio Control sources said.

At a meeting with the owners of the vessels, the port authority directed them to retrieve the vessels as soon as possible, said CPA Secretary Syed Farhad Uddin Ahmad.

"It is not our responsibility to salvage the vessels as the accidents occurred outside our territory and the port channel is free for movement," he added.

Feroze Farzana with 700 tonnes of cement clinker sank in the Karnaphuli estuary near outer anchorage of the port due to stormy wind in the early hours of Saturday.

Lighter vessel Saima-3 with 1100 tonnes of crude oil remained stranded at a nearby riverbed in the offshore of Sandwip Channel.

High Speed Navigation, owner of the vessel, hired two private rescue boats for salvaging the vessels but failed due to stormy

wind. Mostafizur Rahman, operational executive of the firm, told The Daily Star over phone that they hired an empty oil tanker for unloading the oil from the stranded vessel.

One gets death for killing wife for dowry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday sentenced a man to death for killing his wife.

The convict is Abdul Mosobbir, son of Zobed Ali of village Ushayura under Dakshin Surma Police Station in Sylhet district.

Judge of the Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression AKM Nasir Uddin Mahmud pronounced the judgment in a crowded courtroom in the afternoon.

According to the prosecution, convict Abdul Mosobbir stabbed his wife Khairunnesa in the night following April 19 in 2005 as her parents declined to pay him more dowry.

Earlier, they gave Mosobbir Tk 4 lakh 5 thousand in two installments.

Rab nabs 10, seize firearm, smuggled goods in Rajshahi

BSS, Rajshahi

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in different drives seized a firearm, a statue, 356 bottles of phensidyl and smuggled goods and arrested 10 people from different places of the region in the last two days.

Acting on a tip-off, the Rab members recovered the phensidyl bottles and arrested five people in separate drives at different parts of Dinajpur, Rangpur and Joyruphat districts.

The arrestees were identified as Tazul Islam, 27, Anwar Hossain, 30, and Hassan Ali, 22, of Joyruphat and Abdul Mannan, 27, of Dinajpur and Abul Mian, 45, of Rangpur.

The Rab members also arrested three alleged muggers from different places in Rangpur. They were Syed Shamsuddin, 35, Solaiman, 30, and Joynal Abedeem, 32, and recovered a revolver, a cellphone and other lethal weapons from their possession.

They also seized huge Indian smuggled goods worth about Tk 3 lakh from Kuthipara area under Charghat upazila in Rajshahi district and a statue that weighs 50 kg from the possession of one Abdur Rahim, 35.

In another drive, the Rab members arrested two persons, facing criminal cases, from Gopinathpur village under Akkelpur upazila in Joyruphat district. They were Babu Sarder, 33, and Johurul Islam Shukur, 37.

No historian to correct Liberation War history

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Instead, noted historians alleged that the two committees are trying to strike a balance between the two versions of the history of 1971 written during the rule of the last Awami League and BNP-led four-party governments, rather than investigating the faults and writing the 'real history'.

They said the present caretaker government would have to carry the same blame for history distortion like the previous political government if education ministry and NCTB fail to write the correct history of the Liberation War in the textbooks.

Prof Mamtazuddin Patwari, writer of a book on 'Distortion of Facts in the Textbooks on the Liberation War of Bangladesh', said present committees have prepared the drafts aiming to highlight Mujib and Zia, two leaders of two major political parties, which is a kind of balancing technique.

Professor of history of Dhaka University Dr Syed Anwar Husain said corrections regarding the history of the Liberation War do not mean correction as to who declared independence first; it involves many other corrections of politically motivated distortions of information about the Liberation War.

"This type of correction can only be acceptable when done by professional historians free from political bias. Administratively done, corrections will not be acceptable to the nation," he told The Daily Star.

The NCTB's two committees are not acceptable on more than one ground, he said, adding that the committees comprising non-historians and administrative persons who may not have research background.

Two separate committees were formed to make the draft of the correct history, which would be included in primary and secondary textbooks for 2008 academic session.

A five-member committee has prepared the draft of the corrected history for secondary textbooks. Dr Hasne Hena leads the committee comprising NCTB officials Monowara Sultana, Abdul Mannan, Feriwal Azad and Tahmina Rahman.

A group of education ministry top officials who were accused of several controversial initiatives like much-talked uni-track education system, are now allegedly trying to thwart the caretaker government's initiative to present the 'real history' in textbooks, education ministry sources said.

The attempt to introduce so-called uni-track education system without consulting experts of the relevant field, however, failed in the face of widespread criticism by academics, intellectuals and students.

NCTB Chairman Prof Yusuf Feroq refused to provide this correspondent a photocopy of the drafts of corrected Liberation War history in the textbooks.

"I cannot provide you any copy of the draft as I did not give it to any newsman. You will find the corrected history after printing of the textbooks," he said.

He also said that the history of war will be inserted in textbooks as described in the 'Documents of the Bangladesh War of Independence' edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman and published in 1982.

"There is no need of historian or expert for preparing the draft of the corrected history or checking the draft. I think our NCTB officials are the right persons to correct the history for the textbooks," said Yusuf Feroq when asked why no experts are incorporated into the two committees.

Surprisingly enough, a member of the committee for correction of history in the secondary-level textbooks said they did not get the book edited by Hasan Hafizur Rahman.

"The committee is like a 'puppet committee' where the members have no right to correct or change any of the written text inside the books without direction from the top officials of education ministry. As a government officer, I can't tell you who mainly deals with it," the committee member added.

Education ministry Joint Secretary Nazrul Islam Khan was first given the charge of supervising the activities of two NCTB committees but later Education Secretary M Mamtazul Islam, another Joint Secretary of the ministry Humayun Khalid and Senior Assistant Secretary M Abbas Uddin supervised the two committees as Nazrul was on a 43-day leave, sources of education ministry and NCTB said.

"I cannot tell you anything about changes proposed for the textbooks and have not much knowledge about the two NCTB committees," Joint Secretary Humayun Khalid told The Daily Star.

Renowned academicians, historians and experts in the field suggested that unbiased experts be incorporated into the committees for preparing drafts and another committee be formed for checking the drafts.

"Real history of the Liberation War cannot be written in the textbooks if corrections are made through maintaining a balance for all political groups. Real history, which might be so much difficult, should be written in the textbooks for informing the nation of the correct history. Otherwise there will be another type of distortion of history," said renowned academician Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury.



ACNielsen official arrives today

Ma Asuncion G Sunico, chief human resources officer, ACNielsen Asia Pacific, arrives in Dhaka today to review and develop the ACNielsen's human resources issues and business in Bangladesh, says a press release.

She is accompanying by Oi Ling Tsang, executive director, Human Resources, Asia Pacific.

Sunico oversees Human Resources for ACNielsen's Asia Pacific region. In addition to her human resources role, she is a co-chair on ACNielsen's Qualitative Council.

Sunico is based in ACNielsen's regional headquarters in Hong Kong, China.

WEATHER TODAY

Temperature may rise

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at many places over Barisal, Chittagong and Khulna divisions and at a few places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy rainfall is also likely at places, Met Office said, predicting slight rise in day temperature over the country during the period.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 34.5 degree Celsius was recorded at Sylhet and the lowest of 24.1 degrees at Cox's Bazar.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:28pm today and rises at 5:36am tomorrow.

The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	32.3	26.2	66	67
Chittagong	31.1	25.0	74	87
Rajshahi	33.0	26.9	83	87
Khulna	29.6	26.3	88	90
Barisal	30.0	26.2	--	87
Sylhet	34.5	26.0	66	87
Cox's Bazar	31.8	24.1	76	87

DHAKA TODAY

Tribute

Bangladesh Rodsi Kristisangsar organises a programme to pay tribute to poet Shamsur Rahman and Birseshta Matir Rahman. Venue: Bishwa Sahitya Kendra. Time: 6:00pm.

Seminar

Popular Pharmaceuticals Limited organises a seminar on 'The use of antibiotics in epidemics and our duties'. Venue: Radisson Water Garden Hotel. Time: 1:00pm.

Award giving ceremony

The Sir Salimullah Award will be given away to mark the inauguration of Krishnachura Samajik O Sanskritik Unnayan Sangstha. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 3:30pm.

View exchange meeting

Research and Development Collective (RDC) and ActionAid Bangladesh jointly organise a view exchange meeting on constitutional recognition of the indigenous people. Venue: Spectra Convention Centre. Time: 10:00am.

Talk

Department of Economic, University of Dhaka and Unnayan Onneshan jointly organise a talk on 'Whither agrarian development under neo-liberalism' by Prof Utsa Patnaik of Jawaharlal Nehru University, Venue: Ahad Lecture Hall of Economics department. Time: 4:00pm.

BWDB Seminar

Bangladesh Water development Board (BWDB) in collaboration with Institute of Water Management (IWM) organises a seminar on 'Flood forecasting in Bangladesh with focus on 2007 flood'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 3:00pm.