

## HOURS AFTER RELEASE OF HASINA



(Clockwise from bottom left) A vehicle carrying Awami League President Sheikh Hasina crosses Mirpur Road on her way to Bangabandhu Bhaban from the sub-jail located on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex yesterday. After her arrival at Bangabandhu Bhaban, Hasina places wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. From the balcony of Sudha Sadan, Hasina makes a gesture at the supporters gathering outside the building. An overwhelmed Hasina wipes her tears at Sudha Sadan. Supporters gather outside the Sudha Sadan to greet their leader.

## Visa-free movement, food security to dominate People's Saarc

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi representatives, now preparing to attend the Peoples' Saarc-2008 starting on July 18 in Sri Lanka, will raise their voices for visa-free movement of people of this region, food security and right to natural resources.

This was declared at a national consultation on the "Peoples' Saarc 2008" organised by the National Organising Committee (NOC) at WVA auditorium in the city yesterday.

NGO officials, trade union leaders and civil society members exchanged their views on the issues to be highlighted in the forum from July 18 to

July 20 where such groups from all the South Asian nations will share common concerns of people that are often ignored by the states. Peoples' Saarc is an occasion held on the sideline of the Saarc summit.

Nari Pragati Sangha Executive Director Rokeya Kabir, who is also coordinator of the NOC of Peoples' Saarc-2008, said, "We want a visa-free regime in South Asia to make sure that every person of this region gets employed and enjoys every rights they are entitled to."

There should be a food bank and no restrictions of food import or export among Saarc countries, she added.

Speakers at the consultation observed that Saarc, which could help develop the region tremendously by regional cooperation on economic and social issues, has been very slow in its progress.

While millions of people of the region suffer from malnutrition, poverty and insecurity of life, multinational companies have been reigning in the region. The states have not been paying much heed to these issues putting peoples' lives at risk, they added.

Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra President Nurul Islam said, "We should concentrate more on regional cooperation in the unipolar world."

"Peace is crucial for development. Therefore, we should move against terrorism. For a free society, we should establish accountable democracy," he said, adding that these are the common issues that could be taken up in the Peoples' Saarc.

Other issues to be highlighted in the forum include denuclearisation, democracy, environmental and social justice, women rights and right to natural resources.

Human rights activist Dr Hameeda Hossain, Ubiniq Executive Director Farida Akhter, Dhaka University Prof Rashed Titumir and Mohiuddin Ahmed of Community Development Library also spoke.

## Call to take effective steps to eliminate child labour

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation, a specialised labour organisation, yesterday called on the government to take effective steps to eliminate child labour in the country.

It also placed 11-point recommendations to this end, which include immediate finalisation of national child labour policy, expansion of government activities to stop worst forms of child labour and raise social awareness, strict enforcement of labour act and ensuring education for all children up to 14 years in the light of ILO convention.

It is possible to eliminate child labour if the government takes comprehensive measures, said Foundation Executive director AR Chowdhury Ripon at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity auditorium.

The Foundation organised the press conference on the occasion of the World Day Against Child Labour to be observed today with the theme 'Education is the Right Response to Child Labour'.

The speakers revealed that according to the International Labor Organisation (ILO), about 74.20 lakh children aged between 5 and 17 are involved in various types of economic activities in the country. Of them, 13 lakh children are involved in hazardous work.

Foundation Vice Chairman SM Morshed, labour leader Farida Akhter and two former child labourers Shilpi Akter, 9, and Sharif Hossain, 12, also spoke.

## Fertiliser price hike protested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Krishak Samity (BKS), a platform of farmers, yesterday condemned the government for increasing the price of fertiliser.

In a press release BKS President Maulana Ahmedur Rahman and General Secretary Morshed also called for reducing the price of fertiliser.

They said the farmers would be discouraged to grow more crops if the price of fertiliser is increased.

They also demanded distribution of agricultural inputs through Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation.



Labour and Employment Secretary Dr Mahfuzul Haque speaks at a seminar at the Biam auditorium in the city yesterday. On his left is Shaheen Akter Dolly and on his right are Wahida Banu and Dr Mahmudul Kabir.

## Nat'l policy on elimination of child labour within month

Labour secretary tells seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will finalise the national policy on elimination of child labour within a month, said Labour and Employment Secretary Dr Mahfuzul Haque at a seminar yesterday.

"We have nearly completed the works to finalise the national policy on elimination of child labour. It would have been better if we could announce the policy on June 12, the international day to prevent child labour, but we will do this within one month," he added.

The national seminar titled 'Elimination of the worst form of child labour: Role of the government and civil society' was organised by Bangladesh Shishu Adhikar Forum (BSAF) at the Biam auditorium in the city.

Speaking as chief guest, the secretary said the policy would be a guideline on eliminating child labour, and it would be modified phase by phase after holding talks with the stakeholders.

He called for series of talks between the government and the NGOs working on the issue and other stakeholders in eliminating child labour and formulating an action plan for it.

He said the government along

with the Dhaka City Corporation has undertaken a project to eliminate hazardous child labour.

The secretary said following allegations from the West, the labour ministry was monitoring the shrimp farming sector and found that child labour was minimum in the region now.

Prof Ridwanul Hoque of Dhaka University in his keynote paper said Bangladesh has some obligations to take steps on eliminating the worst form of child labour as it had ratified the ILO Convention 182 that says children should be removed from the worst form of child labour.

According to ILO Convention, jobs that are likely to harm health, safety and morals are considered as the worst form of child labour.

Prof Ridwanul said around 6.5 million children of the country are engaged in work and of them about 20 percent are engaged in hazardous work.

The children's workforce represents 16.6 percent of the total workforce in the country, he added.

Speaking as special guest Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation Shaheen Anam said, "We must change our mindset about the children and develop a sympathetic attitudes towards them."

She stressed the need for creating a child-friendly environment in the family, society as well as at the policy making level.

"Child labour in our society is so much accepted that we do not even feel its existence," she added.

About the domestic helps, Shaheen Anam said the social welfare ministry could visit different houses to see their working environments and provide them with ID cards.

"We must pledge that we should protect the rights of the children, nurture them with care and let them flourish in life," she added.

She also called for proper rehabilitation of child labourers before removing them from their jobs as they contribute to their family income.

The speakers urged the authorities to set a specific definition of the worst form of child labour and work on the issues that directly force the children to undertake hazardous jobs.

Executive Director of Uddipon Mohammad Emranul Haque and UST Chairperson spoke as panel discussants.

Dr Mahmudul Kabir spoke as special guest at the seminar presided over by BSAF Chairperson Wahida Banu.

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