

Malaysia immigration graft a 'national security problem'

AFP, Penang

Malaysia's anti-graft watchdog yesterday said rampant corruption at the immigration department was a national security problem following the arrest of seven people.

Among those detained was a top immigration official who allegedly issued visas to foreign workers in exchange for money, reports said.

Officials from the Anti-Corruption Agency (ACA) seized cash totaling more than 600,000 ringgit (185,759 dollars).

ACA director general Ahmad Said Hamdan said the watchdog

got wind of the scam two months ago following tip offs from the public.

"It goes right to the top. It involves the public, foreigners, government officers and also syndicates.

"This actually involves national security ... and the problem is throughout the country. We have arrested a number of people and we expect to pick up more soon," Ahmad told reporters in the northern state of Penang.

Malaysia is a magnet for immigrant workers who for decades have come to labour in manufac-

turing, construction and on oil palm plantations.

It's one of the largest importers of foreign labour in Asia. Foreign workers, both legal and illegal, number around 2.6 million of the country's 10.5 million workforce, officials say.

Due to bureaucracy delays, many resort to bribery to speed up visa applications.

ACA officials arrested immigration director general Wahid Mohamad Don and six others, including two businessmen, the Star newspaper said.

The seven, aged between 35 and

64, were arrested at various locations in the capital Kuala Lumpur during a three-day graft sweep which began yesterday.

Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi under pressure to quit had vowed to fight corruption in April and announced some reforms but opposition leaders say progress has been slow, with few meaningful reforms.

The opposition has been demanding that the ACA report to parliament and not to Abdullah and it has been criticised for failing to secure high-level politically sensitive convictions.

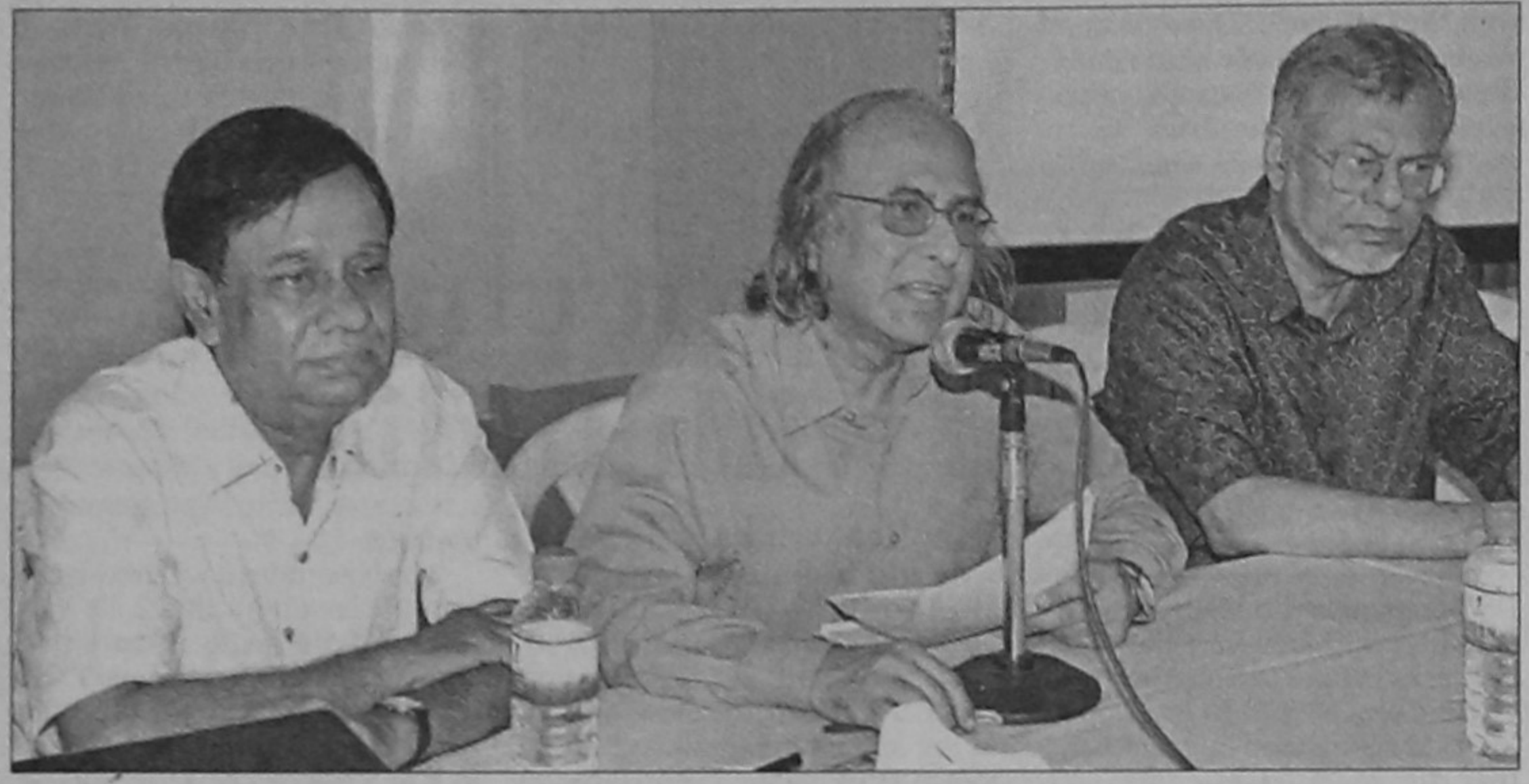


PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) President Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad speaks at a discussion on 'Collaborative management of common water resources is key to a better future for South Asia' at the BEA auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right is Tauhidul Anwar Khan and on his left is Kamrul Islam. Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad organised the event.

Two Germans kidnapped in Nigeria oil hub

AFP, Port-Harcourt

Kidnappers on Friday seized two Germans working in Nigeria's restive Niger Delta oil region, their employer said.

The two German nationals were taken on Friday morning from the oil hub of Port-Harcourt, said German civil engineering firm Julius Berger, although the full circumstances of the kidnapping were not yet known.

The delta has seen numerous kidnappings targeting foreign energy firms, claimed by militants who demand a greater share of oil wealth for the region's inhabitants.

Violence in the southern delta region has already reduced Nigeria's total oil production by a quarter since January 2006.

Reception to children at Shishu Academy

METRO DESK

A freshers' reception ceremony was held at Bangladesh Shishu Academy auditorium in the city on Friday, says a press release.

The programme was organised by Bangladesh Shishu Academy in association with Meril Baby Line, the popular range of baby products of Square Toiletries Ltd.

More than 3,000 students, who have been admitted to different departments of the academy, along with their parents were present at the ceremony.

Square Toiletries Ltd Director Md Mahmudul Hoque spoke at the reception programme where officials from Square Toiletries and the academy also took part.

It was informed that from next year onwards Meril Baby Line will award the children, who will secure positions between one and 10 in each department.

The freshers' reception ceremony was organised as part of the company's continuous support to the children's progress, the release added.



PHOTO: STAR
Chittagong Wasa started digging in the middle of busy Anderkilla-Bakshir Hat intersection in the port city in order to repair a Wasa pipeline yesterday, adding to the suffering of the commuters and pedestrians in the rainy season.

Torrential rain in China leaves five dead

AFP, Shanghai

Flooding and mudslides caused by two days of torrential rain have left at least five dead in a mountainous region of southwest China's Sichuan province, state media reported yesterday.

With the latest deaths, 14 people have died this month in landslides or floods triggered by continuous downpours in Sichuan, the Xinhua news agency cited local authorities as saying.

Officials said the death toll could rise as rescue efforts in landslide-hit areas continue.

A family of three were killed when a mudslide crushed their home on Friday outside the city of Yibing in the province's south, Xinhua reported.

A team of about 100 rescue workers tried to dig them out but there were no survivors, the report said.

Two other people were swept away in Liangshan prefecture, in southwest Sichuan, by fast-moving mountain torrents created when water levels surged after the rain began on Thursday, the report said.

Heavy downpours since the start of the month triggered landslides in worst-hit Zhaojue County, which has received 223.1 millimetres (8.8 inches) of rain, toppling a farmer's house and killing six people, the report said.

Three other people were killed in similar incidents, it said.

Flooding across southern China last month forced the evacuation of more than 1.6 million people, submerged large tracts of farmland and caused economic losses exceeding two billion dollars, according to the government.

Iran hangs four murderers in public

AFP, Tehran

Iran hanged four murderers in public in the southern city of Dashtestan, the latest in a growing number of executions in the Islamic republic, a press report said yesterday.

The four, who included an Afghan national, were hanged at 6.30 am (0200 GMT) on Thursday in a square in the city after they were convicted of murdering several people in the southern province of Bushehr, reformist daily Kargozaran reported without providing further details.

The latest hangings bring to at least 121 the number of executions carried out in Iran so far this year, according to an AFP count.

Amnesty International reported that in 2007 Iran applied the death penalty more often than any other country apart from China, executing 317 people during the year.

Capital offences in the Islamic republic include murder, rape, armed robbery, drug trafficking and adultery.

Human rights groups have accused Iran of making excessive use of the death penalty but Tehran insists it is an effective deterrent that is carried out only after an exhaustive judicial process.

US govt delays regulation of greenhouse gases

AFP, Washington

The US environmental protection agency (EPA) postponed on Friday any decision on regulating greenhouse gas emissions, citing "the complexity and magnitude" of the issue.

The decision follows last year's ruling by the US Supreme Court, which ordered the agency to devise ways to regulate greenhouse-gas emissions from motor vehicles under the Clean Air Act.

But the EPA said in a 588-page report released Friday that given "the complexity and magnitude of the question" there were doubts whether "greenhouse gases could be effectively controlled under the Clean Air Act."

EPA Administrator chief Stephen Johnson said that rather than attempt to forge a consensus "on matters of great complexity, controversy, and active legislative debate," he had decided to publish the views of other agencies and to seek comment on them during a 120-day review period.

The delay, observers indicate,

means that any substantive regulatory action will be almost certainly left to the next administration.

"One point is clear: the potential regulation of greenhouse gases under any portion of the Clean Air Act could result in unprecedented expansion of EPA authority that would have a profound effect on virtually every sector of the economy and touch every household in the land," Johnson wrote.

In a political blow to US President George W. Bush, the Supreme Court ruled in April 2007 that the EPA must consider greenhouse gases as pollutants and deal with them.

The ruling came in response to legal action undertaken by Massachusetts and a dozen other states and environmental groups that went to court to determine whether the agency had the authority to regulate greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide emissions.

The Bush administration has fiercely opposed any imposition of binding emissions limits on the nation's industry and has refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gas blamed for global

warming.

Environmentalists have alleged that since Bush came to office in 2001 his administration has ignored and tried to hide looming evidence of global warming and the key role of human activity in climate change.

At a hearing in November 2006, Massachusetts argued that it risked losing more than 4.5 meters (15 feet) of land all along its coastline if the sea level should rise by 30 centimeters (one foot).

But the Bush administration, backed by nine states and several auto manufacturers, urged the court not to intervene, arguing that if the situation was so dire it could not be solved by a simple legal decision.

It further argued that reducing emissions from new US motor vehicles would have only a minor effect on global climate change.

While the court's decision is unlikely to change US policy, it has ramifications on several other ongoing issues, such as the agency's refusal to regulate emissions from electricity plants which produce some 40 percent of US carbon dioxide emissions. Motor vehicles are responsible for just 20 percent.

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Bangladesh Shishu Academy organises a reception ceremony for its new students at the academy auditorium in the city on Friday.

7 die in Afghan violence

AFP, Kandahar

Seven people including a six-year-old boy were killed in Taliban-style bombings in Afghanistan yesterday, including a suicide attack in the insurgency-hit south, officials said.

In one attack, a suicide bomber detonated explosives strapped to his body near an Afghan military convoy in southern province of Helmand, killing two soldiers and a child, a police commander said.

The blast comes days after a suicide car bomb targeting the Indian embassy in Kabul killed more than 40 people including two Indian envoys.

"A suicide bomber on foot blew himself up near a joint convoy of police and army. Two soldiers and a six-year-old boy were killed," provincial police chief Mohammad Hussein Andial told AFP.

Four other people including a police officer were wounded in the blast in the province's restive Marja district, the police commander said. There was no immediate claim

of responsibility for the attack but similar acts have been blamed on the Taliban militant group which has led an insurgency since being ousted from power in 2001.

Four police officers were killed in two simultaneous bomb explosions in the neighbouring province of Zabul the same day, deputy provincial police chief Jallani Khan told AFP.

The devices placed under two bridges on the main road between Kabul and Kandahar were exploded remotely, the police official said, blaming the attack on Taliban militants.

Three other police officers were wounded in the blasts, he said, adding that "a big portion of the road was destroyed."

Another roadside bomb killed an Afghan civilian and injured another in the eastern province of Paktia on Friday, a provincial spokesman said.

The Islamic militants have stepped up their attacks in the past two years particularly using suicide blasts.

Brazil, Indonesia pledge biofuel cooperation

AFP, Jakarta

Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and his Indonesian counterpart pledged cooperation on biofuels during talks here yesterday in a bid to take advantage of surging oil prices.

Lula and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed off on an agreement to share knowledge on biofuel technology after meeting at Jakarta's presidential palace.

The Brazilian leader called spiralling global commodity prices a "great opportunity" for developing countries such as Indonesia and Brazil, both of which are major producers of biofuel.

"The developing countries that have the characteristics that Indonesia and Brazil have should not analyse this crisis as only a problem. We have to see this

moment as a great opportunity," Lula said.

"We have land, we have sunlight, we have water resources, we have technology and, thanks to God, the poor of the world have started to eat more, three meals a day, so they will demand more food production."

The two leaders signed memoranda of understanding that would see the countries exchange experts and students to share knowledge on biofuels.

Yudhoyono will also make an official visit to Brazil in November.

"In the energy sector, both countries are cooperating in the field of alternative energy. Brazil has succeeded in developing bioethanol and Indonesia can learn from Brazil to develop bioethanol," Yudhoyono said.

Yudhoyono also called for a broadening of countries represented on the United Nations

Security Council, throwing his backing behind permanent membership for the South American power.

"Brazil is included in those countries that have been mentioned as having the potential to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Some also say Indonesia should be a permanent member of the UN Security Council because it has the highest Muslim population," he said.

The biofuel cooperation agreement comes amid criticism of the role of biofuels -- which are mostly made from food crops -- in pushing up global food prices and promoting deforestation in both countries.

The leftist Lula used the announcement with Yudhoyono to criticise rich nations for unfairly laying the blame on developing countries for high commodity prices and environmental destruction.

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