

Mistrusts, doubts slow down progress of Saarc

Says Iftekhar

UNB, Colombo

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday said if the South Asian leadership has political will, Saarc could be immensely beneficial for the people of the region.

"So far, unfortunately, our people believe that they are not sufficiently benefited from Saarc. Bangladesh is conceiver of the forum. Our wishes are to create some kind of people's Saarc whereby they derive benefit," he said in an interview with the news agency on board the flight to Colombo.

Iftekhar, who leads the Bangladesh delegation to the Saarc Council of Ministers meeting here tomorrow, said a fifth of the global population lives in this region which is bestowed with huge intellectual and vast economic resources to improve the living standard of the South Asians.

The foreign adviser admitted that doubts and mistrusts among some member-states slowed down the desired progress of Saarc, launched in Dhaka in 1985 with a vision to bring about socio-economic changes for the people of this region.

"It is true because of the nature of politics of our part of the world," he said, "because while we are stressing commonalities, we are also stressing distinctiveness from each other."

Iftekhar, however, hastened to add that this is only natural in the

evolving of a regional organisation.

Citing the teething pains of other regional organisations like Asean, he said there were disputes between Cambodia and Thailand. If people of Saarc believe in cooperation than confrontation, this organisation must achieve its goal.

The foreign adviser said if the people in South Asia "believe that cooperation will give them better benefit than confrontation, it is the duty of the leadership to give the people that kind of cooperation".

In reply to a question, Iftekhar said the Colombo summit will focus on four core issues—food security, trade, energy, and climate change.

As umpteen people across the globe go hungry against the backdrop of recent setbacks on the agricultural front, he noted that food security is important for Saarc member-states. Bangladesh, he said, achieved near self-sufficiency by producing 30 million tonnes of food this year.

"We think there should be a Saarc strategic reserve from where the member-states can draw food when necessary," he said.

The adviser said Bangladesh is going to sign South Asian Development Fund (SADF) Agreement at the Colombo summit. He pointed out huge trade imbalances between some Saarc countries.

Citing the trade deficit of nearly \$2 billion between Bangladesh and India, Iftekhar said, "We believe Indian Prime Minister Manmohan

Singh intellectually accepts that India is like a senior partner in Saarc, and in that position, India has a disproportionate responsibility towards other smaller Saarc countries."

He said, "We believe that it should be possible for us to create greater market access to India without reciprocity so that trade imbalance (against Bangladesh) can be reduced."

On the question of energy, the foreign adviser said it needs a more definite survey to determine the actual quantum of energy resources in the region and devise a way in which energy could be used for the maximum benefit of the member-states.

On ways of combating the adverse effects of climate change, Iftekhar said it is not enough to control the emission of greenhouse gases and "in the given reality of the world it is difficult to control the emission the way we desire".

He said adaptation to climate change is the key, but the adaptation is expensive business. LDCs like Bangladesh will be required to pull in huge resources to adapt themselves to the changing climate—a phenomenon that causes sea-level rise and brings catastrophic floods, droughts and storms.

Iftekhar said Bangladesh has a great success in mitigation of natural disasters and the disaster management policy was praised at the recently held Asean Regional Forum (ARF) meeting.

CA leaves for Colombo tomorrow to attend Saarc summit

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed leaves for Colombo tomorrow to attend the 15th Saarc Summit in the Sri Lankan capital on August 2-3 where some major deals are going to be signed, including the charter of Saarc Development Fund (SDF).

After assuming office on January 12, 2007 as Chief Adviser Fakhruddin is going to attend the summit meet of the forum for the second time as head of government, after attending the 14th Summit in New Delhi in April 2007.

At the Colombo meet, the SDF Charter, agreement on establishment of South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO), Protocol on Accession of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA), and Saarc Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters are likely to be signed.

Principal Secretary to the Chief Adviser Ali Imam Majumder and CA's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim are accompanying the Chief Adviser as members of the delegation.

The CA is scheduled to return to Dhaka on August 4.

BURIGANGA BRIDGE RHD files GD against leaseholder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) filed a general diary with Shyampur Police Station on Monday seeking legal action against the leaseholder of Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge-1 (Buriganga bridge) for collecting tolls illegally from CNG-run auto-rickshaws.

In the GD filed by Sub-Divisional Engineer KM Noor-e-Alam mentioned that the lessee, Messers Alim Miah and Sons, has been collecting Tk 10 from each auto-rickshaw without any money receipt in violation of the lease agreement.

Noor-e-Alam also said the leaseholder is still collecting tolls from auto-rickshaws illegally, although he was given an official letter asking him to stop such practice.

Even the lessee has given the RHD a letter falsely saying that it has not been collecting toll from the auto-rickshaws, Alam said in the GD.

On Saturday, The Daily Star carried a report mentioning that the lessee is collecting over Tk 1 lakh from auto-rickshaws a day.

The auto-rickshaw drivers and owners also said that they have informed the Shyampur police that the lessee has been collecting tolls from them illegally and without money receipt, but the police did not take any action.

Officer-in-Charge of Shyampur Police Station Alamgir Hossain, however, told The Daily Star last night that the leaseholder is not collecting any toll without money receipt.

Traders won't supply jute to BJMC if dues not paid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Small Jute Traders and Farmers Association (BSJTEA) at an emergency meeting yesterday decided not to supply jute to the government-owned jute mills if they are not paid their dues of Tk 140 crore.

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) owes the huge amount of money to the farmers and traders.

Presided over by BSJTEA President Mohammad Yunus Mia, the meeting was held at its central office at Arambagh in the city. The meeting expressed solidarity with the decision of the Chittagong and Khulna regional committees of the association of not providing jute.

The leaders said the association contributes a lot to the country's jute sector, but no effective steps were taken to pay their dues.

They said the BJMC bought jute of Tk 140 crore but it did not paid to the farmers and traders, adding that they are living in inhuman conditions, as they were not paid the dues.

The association will observe a token hunger strike on August 6 from 10:00am to 4:00pm at its central office to press home their demands. BSJTEA General Secretary Harun-or-Rashid, Organising Secretary Abdul Aziz and Treasurer Hasan Ali spoke at the meeting.



Asia News Network (ANN) and Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) GmbH, signed an agreement on distribution of news and articles at a hotel in Bangkok recently. (Clockwise) Ravindra Kumar, editor of The Statesman (India) (7th from left); Dr Michael-Johannes Banzhaf, charge d'affaires, German Embassy; Werner Vom Busch, director, Media Programme Asia of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung; Ong Yen Cheng, first secretary, Singapore Embassy; Pana Janviro, executive director, ANN; Michael Segbers, managing director of DPA; Vijaya Latha Reddy, Indian ambassador to Thailand; Felix Soh, deputy editor of The Straits Times; and Suthichai Yoon, group editor-in-chief of The Nation (Thailand) attended the signing ceremony.

US PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

'Democrat or Republican victory won't shift policy towards S Asia'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Democrat or Republican victory in the upcoming US presidential election would not significantly shift US policy towards South Asia, said a visiting US political scientist yesterday.

But a 'likely' victory for Democratic presidential candidate Senator Barack Obama might favour India, given his emphasis on reducing Al-Qaeda and Taliban power in Pakistan, he added.

Eric M Uslaner, a professor of University of Maryland, made the remarks during a presentation titled 'Outlook for the 2008 Election in the United States' organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in the city.

Prof Uslaner said Senator Obama and Republican presidential candidate Senator John McCain differ on policies relating to Iraq, Afghanistan and Cuba, but both are committed to combating climate change and consulting with other global leaders.

But Obama victory is likely, given historical trends, current poll numbers and Obama's edge in key political drivers, he said.

Obama is ahead of McCain in the top three indicators of the election, Uslaner said, adding that the US economy, the Iraq war and party identification all are favouring the freshman senator from Illinois.

Even dominant perceptions that Obama's race might become an insurmountable obstacle come November are incorrect, as surveys

suggest that although 12 percent of Americans are uncomfortable with an African-American President, 39 percent are uncomfortable with a 72-year-old starting his first term in the White House, he said.

According to surveys, no other election has stirred greater excitement than the November Presidential polls, he added.

Prof Uslaner also said that some in the US Muslim community have expressed their concern at Obama's failure to visit a mosque, but they are still likely to vote Democratic in November.

Although 46 percent voted for George W Bush in the 2000 election and over 38 percent for Al Gore, the Iraq war had pushed 80 percent of US Muslim voters to vote for Democrat John Kerry in 2004, he said.

Indigenous people deprived of right to land in name of projects

Speakers tell seminar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The indigenous people in Mymensingh are being deprived of the right to their lands since those are being occupied in the name of different government projects like eco-park, social afforestation, recreation centre and training centre for air forces, speakers at a seminar said yesterday.

They suggested the caretaker government form an independent land commission led by ethnic representatives and conduct land mapping for solving the issue permanently.

Mass-Line Media Centre (MMC) and Caritas jointly organised the seminar on 'Land Problem of Indigenous People: Greater Mymensingh Perspective' at LGED Bhaban in the city.

While presenting the keynote paper, Sanjeev Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said the culture and heritage of the indigenous people won't survive if their rights to land and forest are not established.

Pramod Mankin, a former Awami League lawmaker who is also a member of the indigenous community, said the government always intends to conduct their development work on the land of

the indigenous people. Prof Mesbah Kamal of Dhaka University said forest department always files cases against the indigenous people so that they can be easily evicted.

"The Department of Forests has to bring in a total change in their attitude," said Raja Devasish Roy, special assistant to the chief adviser.

Prof Dalim Chandra Deb Barman and Caritas Executive Director Benedict Alo D' Rozario also spoke on the occasion.

MMC Executive Director Kamrul Hasan Manju conducted the seminar where many indigenous leaders also took part.

Flood situation deteriorates further

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the water of the Padma is swelling continuously, the flood situation of different areas, including Faridpur, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur and Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka, deteriorated further yesterday.

The situation on the other hand in many other areas has started to improve, as the rivers Brahmaputra and Jamuna have started to fall.

Around 2000 hectares of land of fresh areas in Faridpur inundated yesterday, including four unions of Sadar upazila, two unions of Charvadrason and one in Sadarpur, due to continuous increase of water of the Padma.

Moreover, many fresh areas of Charnasirpur and Diara Narikebaria unions of Sadarpur upazila have gone under water, Faridpur Water Development Board (FWDB) source said.

According to the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC), the Brahmaputra-Jamuna has started falling at a lower rate and is expected to continue the trend for the next three to four days while the Ganges sustained going up with a slower rate.

The confluence of both the rivers -- the Padma at Goalanda and Bhagyakul -- is likely to stop rising and hopefully will start falling at a lower rate for the next three to four days, the FFWC bulletin said.

Flood situation in the district of Munshiganj, Manikganj, Faridpur, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Dohar and Nawabganj of Dhaka is likely not to get worse further from tomorrow, the bulletin added.

Water level of Padma have been

flowing above 44 centimetres of danger level at Goalanda and 49 cm at Bhagyakul point while Kobadak is flowing above four centimetres of danger level at Jhikargachha point.

A correspondent from Faridpur reports: Flood situation in Faridpur is going to be deteriorated due to gradual increasing of water level in Padma. Water was flowing above 44 cm of danger level at Goalanda point of the Padma which were 39 cm on Monday.

Trader shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A trader succumbed to his bullet injuries yesterday after fighting for life for two days at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Nahid Hasan Palash, 30, a Jhut (garment wastage cloth) trader, was shot in his chest and back on Sunday night near the Mirpur swimming pool for refusing to pay toll of Tk 2 lakh to the local criminals.

He was rushed to DMCH with bullet injuries and died at the Intensive Care Unit of the hospital

yesterday afternoon. Victim's father Zakir Hossain told The Daily Star that for the past two months local criminals Mantu, Raihan and Yusuf were pressuring his son for giving Tk 2 lakh as toll or leaving the business.

"On Sunday they proposed my son over mobile phone to do business together and asked him to meet them in the swimming pool area. They shot my son as he reached there," said Zakir.

Family members said Nahid's father Zakir is the joint secretary of Pallabi unit Mujib Sena Prishad.

15 hurt, 60 arrested in Kuwait

FROM PAGE 1

into hiding to avoid their colleagues' wrath.

The representatives had reportedly gone to inform the workers that the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour had accepted their demands and that they should call off their strike.

"Some workers taunted them saying they had been bribed by the company to misguide them and this led to heated exchanges before a large number of cleaners turned their fury on them," said a worker.

According to the cleaners, many of their colleagues are in no mood to relent and want the ministry officials to visit every single camp and give them in writing that all their demands will be fulfilled. An official of Bangladesh Embassy in Kuwait said only workers of four companies were involved in the unrest and that

cleaners of some companies had returned to work after the ministry resolved their grievances on Sunday.

Workers were promised of 40 Kuwaiti Dinar (KD) a month but were paid only KD18. The companies also used to deduct health and residency fees from that salary and did not allow weekly holiday or two-yearly vacations. The working conditions were also precarious, he said quoting the workers.

There are some 2,40,000 Bangladeshis in Kuwait. Criticising the government's lack of control over the cleaning companies, several Kuwaiti MPs said instead of looking for solutions to end the strikes, the government has started looking at possibilities of recruiting labourers from other Asian countries, except Bangladeshis or Pakistanis as they are known to have records of

resorting to violence. MP Saleh Ashoor held the government entirely responsible for the violence that sparked through the recent labour unrest. He said it is the government that is in charge of executing contracts and granting tenders to companies and hence should have exercised effective supervisory control over their functioning.

Ashoor said demands put forth by the striking labourers were completely legal and entirely humane. He also slammed the employers' inhumane practice of retaining the employees' bankcards and paying them far less than what they were contracted for.

MP Ali Al-Amair expressed unhappiness with the current status of Asian workers in Kuwait, saying they have more than once demanded less than their full rights.

MIG-29 CASE Hearing adjourned until July 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The hearing on charge framing in the MIG-29 warplane purchase case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and six others has been adjourned until July 31.

Judge Golam Mortuza Majumder of the Special Judge's Court, Dhaka division, set up on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises, fixed the next date for hearing that continued for the sixth day yesterday.

As the court sat at around 10:00am yesterday, defence counsels filed a petition for adjournment saying hearing on a writ petition for quashing the case is awaiting with the High Court.

The prosecution lawyers opposed it. The judge turned down the petition and asked the defence to start hearing.

The defence counsels have completed the hearing for quashing all charges against co-accused former BAF chief Jamaluddin Ahmed and air commodore (ret'd) Mirza Akhter Maruf.

The hearing for quashing charges against five accused, including Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, former army chief general (ret'd) Mustafizur Rahman and former defence secretary Syed Yusuf Hossain, had so far been completed.

The court fixed July 31 for hearing for quashing charges against the accused -- former joint secretary Mohammad Hossain Serniabat and Unique Group Managing Director Nur Ali.

Advocate Sahara Khatun stood for Hasina who was earlier excused from the obligation to be in courts in person during proceedings of the case.

Gen Mustafiz was represented by his lawyer as he was also exempted from appearing personally at trial proceedings in the court.

The now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed the case against Hasina and four others with Tejgaon Police Station on December 11, 2001, accusing them of causing a loss of Tk 700 crore to the state exchequer by purchasing eight MiG-29 jet fighters when Hasina was in power.

The names of Brig Gen (ret'd) Iftekhar-Ul-Bashar and former deputy secretary Hasan Mahmood Delwar were dropped from the case due to poor evidence regarding their culpability, while former army chief Mustafizur Rahman, air commodore (ret'd) Mirza Akhter Maruf, former joint secretary Hossain Serniabat and businessman Nur Ali were implicated after investigators had found their involvement in the alleged scam.

Bac Inspector Abdullah Al Zahid submitted a charge sheet to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court on December 11, 2001, showing 40 people as prosecution witnesses.

JP number one factor in next polls: Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad at a party meeting yesterday said better days await for his party, as JP will be the number one factor in the next election to form government.

Termining the caretaker government as non-elected, the former president said it is only the political parties that can mitigate suffering of the people as they are committed to them.

"JP will be the main political power in the coming days and we will form the next government," JP Chairman Ershad said while addressing a meeting at the party's

Refrain from extrajudicial killings

Workers Party urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers Party of Bangladesh (BWP) yesterday urged the government to refrain from extrajudicial killings in the form of 'crossfire' and demanded investigation into newspaper reports on misuse of 'crossfire'.

President of the party Rashed Khan Menon and acting General Secretary Nurul Hasan said this in a statement.

Pointing the killing of Purbo Banglar Communist Party leader Dr Tutul they said the militants and big criminals were sent to court for trial after being arrested but difference in case of Dr Tutul indicate special aspect of the operation.

The leaders said the BWP has always opposed armed activities giving identification of leftist and 18 leaders of the party in the south-western region had to sacrifice their life for that.



Light rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at many places over all the six divisions in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderately heavy rainfalls are also likely at places during the period, Met Office said, predicting nearly unchanged day temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 33.1 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 24.6 degrees Celsius at Sandwip.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:42pm today and rises at 5:27am tomorrow.

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	31.8	27.2	78	71
Chittagong	31.8	25.6	73	78
Rajshahi	32.2	26.0	80	84
Khulna	32.6	26.1	88	77
Barisal	31.4	25.8	92	96
Sylhet	33.1	26.0	69	69
Cox's Bazar	32.6	25.0	73	77

ANN, DPA sign agreement on news distribution

ANN, Bangkok

Asia News Network (ANN), the largest alliance of newspapers in Asia, and Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) GmbH, a German-based international news wire agency, have signed an agreement under which DPA will distribute news and articles published in member newspapers of ANN throughout the world.

Pana Janviro, executive director of ANN, and Michael Segbers, managing director of DPA, inked the pact in Bangkok on July 26. "This is a landmark agreement," said Pana, who is also the CEO of The Nation (Thailand).

ANN, which until now was exchanging news, articles and photos among its member newspapers, will now go global with the support from DPA. This will serve the growing interest in Asian news and information around the world.

As per the agreement, ANN's headquarters in Bangkok will send selected number of news and business articles, opinion and op-ed pieces, feature stories and photos to DPA every evening. Clients of DPA in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas then can publish and broadcast these stories.

Speaking during the signing ceremony, Segbers of DPA said: "I am convinced that the media all over the world will require the Asian views of international events even more in the future. This can only be done by high quality journalism. The ANN would be the best partner to cover these needs."

He also spoke of DPA's plan to enlarge the office in Bangkok to cater to the growing demand for Asian news stories and make Bangkok the third hub for DPA's English news service along with Berlin and Washington.

"DPA, as an international media player, was proud to extend its role in this dynamic region with the partnership with ANN," he added.

ANN was established in 1998 to provide avenue for cooperation among Asian press. Today it is the world's most active newspaper alliance with the membership base of 19 newspapers, including China Daily, Yomiuri Shinbun and Daily Yomiuri (Japan), The Island (Sri Lanka), The Korea Herald, The Straits Times (Singapore), The Nation (Thailand), Vietnam News, The Philippine Daily Inquirer, The Jakarta Post (Indonesia), The Star and Sin Chew Daily (Malaysia), The Statesman (India), The Kathmandu Post (Nepal), Vientiane Times (Laos), Rasmei Kampuchea (Cambodia), Brunei Times and The Nation (Pakistan).

The combined circulation of these newspapers is 14 million copies per day. At the initial stage, 17 ANN members from 16 countries will join the DPA global distribution network.

Death anniversary

METRO DESK



Today is the third death anniversary of Blaise Patrick Rebeiro, former divisional engineer of the Bangladesh telecommunication department and proprietor of Holy Family Tutorial School in Chittagong, says a press release.

On the occasion, special prayer session will be held at his residence in the city.

DHAKA TODAY

Workshop
ILO office in Bangladesh organises a workshop on 'green jobs initiatives in Bangladesh'. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 9:00am.

Seminar
Department of Political Science of Dhaka University organises a seminar on 'US election 2008'. Venue: RC Majumder Auditorium. Time: 11:00am.

Workshop
The closing ceremony of the national training workshop on use of ICT in entrenching values of dialogue and human rights in the minds and acts of leadership. Venue: BANBEIS Bhaban. Time: 4:00pm.