

Dalits lack access to housing Seminar told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Although housing is one of the basic rights, members of the Dalit community find it extremely difficult to rent a house because of the prevailing social discriminations against them, speakers at a seminar said yesterday.

House owners refuse to rent out rooms to Dalits, once they come to know about their identity, Mazharul Islam, a researcher, said while presenting the keynote paper.

In the capital, more than one Dalit family live in each house earmarked for them, accommodating people of different generations ranging

from children to elderly people, he said.

The government has spent a huge amount in the housing sector but did not make any allocations for the accommodation of 55 lakh Dalits living in the country in such a humiliating condition, he added.

Bangladesh Dalit and Excluded Rights Movement, Bangladesh Dalit Human Rights and Nagarik Uddyog jointly organised the seminar titled 'Accommodation problem of Dalit and upcoming national budget' at the National Press Club in the city where the speakers placed a seven-point demand.

The demands include

setting up Dalit cells at Dhaka City Corporation and housing and public works department, allocating khas land to Dalits, providing house building loans for them, ensuring all facilities in their colonies, and immediate end to eviction of Dalits from their accommodations.

Dalits live in government colonies and their rooms measuring 9 by 11 feet are too small to accommodate people from at least three generations, members of the Dalit community said.

There are 27 colonies for Dalits in the capital. Nine of them were constructed by Dhaka City Corporation, Mazharul Islam said in his

paper.

Those who do not have a government job cannot manage facilities like water and sanitation, they added.

The colonies even do not have facilities like water and sanitation, they added.

They also criticised the eviction of Dalits in the name of rehabilitation, urbanisation and modernisation.

Prof Arefin Siddiqui, executive director of Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Shamsul Huda and Zakir Hossain of Nagarik Uddyog also spoke at the seminar.



BNP's Singapore unit leaders present a bouquet to BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia at her Gulshan office in the city yesterday.

Trader killed as roof of city market collapses

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A trader was killed when a portion of roof of a six-storey market collapsed in the city's Rampura area yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Shah Imran, a supplier of rice and edible oil in Rampura Bazar.

Ehsar Latif Rupam, a relative of the deceased, said a portion of roof of Al-Amin Market came crashing down on Imran around 4:30pm, leaving him critically injured.

Locals rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he succumbed to his injuries at about 5:30pm.

Khilaigon police said they visited the spot.

Separate pay structure for teachers soon: Nahid

BSS, Dhaka

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid yesterday said the government would introduce a separate pay structure for the teachers and constitute a commission for their appointment to ensure technology-based quality education in the country.

Nahid said besides the financial support, the teachers will be given proper state honour and the government is working to this end. He urged the teachers to discharge their duties properly.

The minister was addressing as the chief guest of the inaugural ceremony of annual general meeting (AGM) of BCS General Education Association at Dhaka College auditorium.

The AGM coincided with the installation ceremony of the association's newly

elected committee and reception to the newly appointed lecturers.

President of the association Prof Fahima Khatun chaired the function. State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Advocate M Kamrul Islam attended the programme at special guest while National University Vice Chancellor Prof Dr Kazi Shahidullah, director general of Department of Secondary and Higher Education Prof Dr Liaqat Ali Khan and secretary general of the association M Masum-e-Rabbani Khan spoke.

The education minister said there is no alternative to quality education to developing a hunger-free and poverty-free prosperous Bangladesh. Sensing this, the Awami League made pledges in its election manifesto and these

will be implemented now, he added.

Nahid hoped that the members of BCS education cadre would make the government programmes successful by ensuring time-befitting and quality education.

The minister said the 'Sonar Bangla', as dreamt by Bangabandhu would be materialised through turning the new generation into human resources by imparting them modern education.

Laying stress on raising allocation for education sector, he said only 2.3 percent of the country's GDP is spent for education as compared to at least 5 percent in other countries of the world.

Kamrul Islam said the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would undertake every possible step to build technology-based digital Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi killed in bldg site accident in S Arabia

STAR REPORT

A Bangladeshi worker was killed as a pile of earth collapsed on him while he was working in a construction ditch at Makkah in Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

The identity of the worker could not be known.

Local Civil Defence spokesman Lt Col Ali Al-Muntashiri said the worker was in a five-metre-deep ditch and attempts to dig him out in time were unsuccessful, according to the Arab News, a Saudi English newspaper.

Later, the body was sent to a nearby hospital.

The spokesman denied any foul play or criminal suspicion in the death of the worker, but said the police summoned the contractor responsible for the digging to check if there were any violations involved.

Vietnam, China agree to hotline

AFP, Hanoi

Vietnam and China have officially agreed to set up a hotline between leaders of the two countries, which fought a war in 1979, Vietnam's Foreign Ministry said yesterday.

The agreement was signed after a meeting between visiting Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo and Vietnam's Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem in Hanoi on Thursday, officials said.

A top Vietnamese communist party member reached agreement to establish the hotline last June during a tour of China.

Both sides also agreed to focus on solving sea border issues and to "work closely to overcome difficulties" during the global economic slowdown, the ministry said Friday.

They "agreed to further focus their talks on sea issues to maintain peace and stability...aiming for basic, sustainable and acceptable solutions," it said.

Despite the demarcation late December of their long-disputed land border, territorial tensions remain, particularly over the sovereignty of the Spratly and Parcel archipelagos in the South China Sea, claimed by both sides.

On Tuesday Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesman Le Dung said his country "was closely monitoring" a Chinese fishing ship in the area.

One week ago Hanoi complained about an authorisation given by China for a tourism firm to begin tours to an island in the

Parcel.

Vietnam's Foreign Ministry said two-way trade with China hit a record high of more than 20 billion dollars last year despite the global economic crisis. Both sides will strive to raise that figure to 25 billion by 2010 while gradually balancing two-way trade, it said.

Vietnam also said China would grant it 300 million dollars in loans at preferential conditions.

The two nations plan to celebrate "Friendship Year" in 2010, but Vietnam's population remains distrustful of its big neighbour's territorial ambitions.

The politics of Beijing in the South China Sea regularly inflames blogs and private conversations in Vietnam, and even gave rise to rare demonstrations in Hanoi and southern Ho Chi Minh City in late 2007 and early 2008.

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Road crashes kill 4

METRO DESK

Four people were killed in separate road accidents in the city and Narsingdi yesterday.

Staff Correspondent reports: Three people were killed in two separate road accidents at Khilkhet and Dhanmondi in the city yesterday.

They died were identified as Saiful Islam Sabuj, 35, Fazlul Bari Khokon, 38 and Siddiqur Rahman, 45.

Khilkhet police said Saiful Islam Sabuj and Khokon were killed when a private car hit their motorbike at Progati Sarani intersection at around 2:00am. Sabuj and Khokon were returning to their residence at Mohakhali riding a motorbike. Police detained the private car but its driver managed to escape the scene.

Siddiqur Rahman was run over by an unidentified vehicle while he was crossing Mirpur road at Dhanmondi at around 3:00pm.

The bodies were taken to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

BSS in Narsingdi adds: A minor schoolgirl was killed as a passenger bus ran over her on Dhaka-Sylhet highway near Bashil flyover at DC Road under Narsingdi upazila yesterday.

The victim was identified as Nasnath Akhtar Ria, 8, daughter of Shafique Miah of Toroya village under Narsingdi municipality and a student of class II of Abdul Baten Memorial Kindergarten.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred when she was crossing the road at around 9:00am.

The body was sent to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Enraged people put barricade on the road and obstructed vehicles. After half an hour police appeared the scene and cleared the road.



Language Movement veteran Abdul Matin teaches a child how to write Bangla alphabets at a 'Hatey Khori' programme on the Central Shaheed Minar premises in the city yesterday. On his left is Pranesh Samadder. Karak Natya Goshthi organised the event.

Protest against mosque committee for irregularities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred locals staged a demonstration against the committee of a mosque at Suritola in the city yesterday protesting its gross irregularities.

Kotwali Police arrested two people on charges of gunshots during the demonstration.

Moments after the Juma prayers, devotees in Suritola Jame Mosque asked mutawalli Abdul Zabbar, who donated land to the mosque, about the fund of the mosque which enraged him, they added.

Some people of Zabbar beat up several devotees that resulted in the one-hour demonstration at 3:00pm in front of the mosque, police said.

At one stage, the mutawalli came out with his licensed pistol from his residence in the area and fired five rounds of blank shots in front of the mosque, causing panic in the area.

One devotee Shafiullah Liton filed a case with Kotwali Police Station, accusing Zabbar and his son Rahat. Police arrested the accused.



Golden Bangladesh brings out a colourful procession in front of Institute of Fine Arts in the city yesterday to encourage people to vote for the Sundarbans and Cox's Bazar.

Indian Kashmir leader wants hated security laws to go

AFP, Srinagar

Indian Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah called yesterday for the repeal of strict security laws giving sweeping powers to Indian troops battling a waning separatist insurgency in the region.

Militant violence has dropped sharply in Kashmir since India and Pakistan, which each hold the region in part but claim in full, started a peace process in 2004.

New Delhi put the peace process on hold after deadly militant attacks on Mumbai that left 165 dead and were blamed on Pakistan-based guerrillas opposed to India's rule in Kashmir.

But there has been no upsurge in rebel violence since the talks were suspended and Abdullah said abolishing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which gives authorities wide powers to shoot, arrest and search and is widely detested by Kashmiris, was "realistic."

The special powers were granted to the army under an extremely unusual situation which arose in 1989-90," he told NDTV, referring to the years when Muslim militants launched the revolt against Indian rule.

"As that situation heads towards normalising, I think it (repealing of the law) is something that we definitely can look at."

Abdullah's comments came a day after Kashmir witnessed a massive protest over the killing

of a carpenter by federal police placed in the region under the Armed Forces Special Powers Act.

Police said the carpenter died in cross-fire during a clash between rebels and police. But his family said he was killed after he argued with police who raided his house and there were no rebels in the area at the time of his death.

Last month, troops were accused of killing two civilians near their camp, and the 39-year-old chief minister said such killings were "simply unacceptable."

The unrest has so far left more than 47,000 people dead by official count. Human rights groups say some 70,000 people are dead or missing as a result of the insurgency.

Nizami pays homage to FFs

BSS, Dhaka

Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh Ameer Moulana Motiur Rahman Nizami yesterday paid tributes to the freedom fighters and prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls of the Liberation War martyrs.

In a message on the occasion of the Independence and National Day, he said the significance of the day is immense in the national life.

Nizami said Bangladesh came into being through the War of Liberation for a separate identity of the people of this country.

"I pray to almighty Allah to bless the martyrs with heaven, and I recall with respect the contribution of the freedom fighters," he added.

Nizami said it is the demand of the time to build "our motherland" as a developed country and to make it economically self-reliant through ensuring optimum use of the country's manpower and resources.

To this end, the Jamaat Ameer called for working together on the basis of a national unity.

UZ bill to be passed soon: Land minister

BSS, Jamalpur

Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira yesterday said all activities of the upazilas will be run through the elected representatives soon with passing of the Upazila bill by the parliament.

The minister said this while addressing a coordination meeting of the government officials in Jamalpur Sadar Upazila Parishad auditorium yesterday afternoon.

The minister urged the officials to discharge their duties with sincerity. He said everyone has to perform his official responsibility properly in compliance with the laws of the land and also in a spirit of cooperation.

Upazila Chairman Bizon Kumar Chandra presided over the meeting. Upazila vice-chairmen, UNO and officials of different departments also spoke on the occasion.

NEW 7 WONDERS OF NATURE Vote for Cox's Bazar, Sundarbans

GM Quader urges people

UNB, Dhaka

Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister GM Quader yesterday urged the people to increase country's image abroad as a country of natural beauty, voting for Cox's Bazar and the Sundarbans to be named one of the 'New 7 Wonders of Nature'.

He said the foreigners know Bangladesh as a country of natural disaster or political turmoil despite its tremendous natural beauty and the foreign tourists do not feel encouraged to visit Bangladesh for lack of proper campaign projecting the country's natural beauties.

Quader made the remarks while inaugurating a rally organised by Golden Bangladesh, a social organisation, as part of a campaign to encourage people to vote for Cox's Bazar and the Sundarbans.

He said the government would launch a campaign to encourage people to vote for Cox's Bazar and the Sundarbans as New Wonders of Nature.

"Simultaneously, the tourist spots would be preserved so that the tourists can enjoy the beauty of nature."

The rally, with the participants carrying colourful banners, festoons and posters inscribed with slogans "Vote for Cox's Bazar", "Vote for Sundarbans", started from in front of the Fine Arts Institute of Dhaka University at 11:30 and ended at the Jatiya Press Club in the city.

The 'New 7 Wonders of Nature' will be selected through online voting.

Online voters across the globe can choose from 77 official nominees for the new seven wonders of nature, an initiative of 'The New 7 Wonders Foundation'.

JCD demands congenial atmosphere at DU

DU CORRESPONDENT

Leaders and activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) demonstrated on Dhaka University (DU) campus on Thursday demanding peaceful coexistence at the university halls.

To press home their demands, several hundred JCD men brought out a protest procession from Madhu's Canteen at around 12:30pm that paraded different streets on the campus and ended in front of the vice chancellor's office.

The JCD men then staged a two-hour sit-in at the entrance of the VC's office. Leaders from the sit-in urged the DU authorities to take immediate steps to allocate rooms at the halls for JCD activists who are out of the campus since the Awami League-led grand alliance formed the government.

JCD DU unit's General Secretary Saiful Islam told The Daily Star that they would declare a one-day student-strike on March 29 if their demands go unheeded.

They also demanded security to the JCD leaders and activists on the campus and punishment to Bangladesh Chhatra League cadres who had beaten up JCD men on the campus following the ninth parliamentary elections.

JCD men who had enjoyed supreme control at DU during the regime of the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government left the dormitories on the polling night of the ninth parliamentary elections.

JCD President Azizul Bari Helal, General Secretary Saiful Bari Babu, Organising Secretary Abdul Kader Bhuiyan Jewel, DU unit President Hasan Mamun and Organising Secretary Obaidul Haq Nasir were present at the demonstrations.



Textile Engrs' Forum executives

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The new executive committee of Textile Engineers' Forum, Bangladesh was formed with Engr Mahiuddin Ahmed, executive director of FM Yarn Dying Ltd, and MD Enayet Hossain, managing director of Knit Empire Ltd, as its president and secretary general respectively at the second council of the forum at a restaurant at Gulshan in the city yesterday, says a press release.

Other office bearers are: senior vice-president -- Engr ATM Shamsuddin Khan; vice-presidents -- Engr Dewan Saiful Alam Masud, Syed Sayeed Munir, Golam Kabir Saygal, Shah Md Saber Hossain, Mahub Alam Chowdhury Milton, and SM Ismael; organising secretary -- ASM Hafizur Rahman; treasurer -- KM Nazrul Islam; joint secretary generals -- AKM Mahmudunnabi, Nazrul Islam, AKM Mahsin Ahmed, Samuyel Md Mallik, and SM Mizanur Rahman.

WEATHER TODAY

Thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at one or two places over Dhaka division and the regions of Jessore and Chittagong. Met Office said predicting nearly unchanged day temperature over the country.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:10pm today and rises at 6:01am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 35.8 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 15.6 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

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	33.9	22.2	79	45
Chittagong	31.0	20.0	75	78
Rajshahi	35.8	19.8	85	59
Khulna	33.8	22.5	86	58
Barisal	32.6	22.0	88	67
Sylhet	34.2	19.9	46	54
Cox's Bazar	32.8	20.2	72	75