

# Boycotts overshadow start of racism conference

Europeans walk out as Iranian president speaks on Israel

AFP, Geneva

Western nations boycotted a UN-organised racism conference yesterday over fears it would become a forum for anti-semitism as Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad prepared to deliver a keynote address.

United Nations chief Ban Ki-moon decried the Western boycotts as the list of absentees lengthened and other European nations threatened to walk out.

The diplomatic fallout meanwhile spread as Israel recalled its ambassador in protest at the Swiss president's decision to meet Ahmadinejad -- the Iranian's first formal meeting with a Western head of state since taking office in 2005.

"Some nations, who by rights should be helping to forge a path to a better future, are not here," Ban said as he

opened the meeting in Geneva, telling delegates he was "profoundly disappointed."

"I deeply regret that some have chosen to stand aside," he added before holding his own meeting with Ahmadinejad.

Poland became the latest nation to boycott the meeting after the United States, Israel, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

France decided to attend the event but warned that Europeans would walk out if Ahmadinejad made "anti-Semitic accusations" during the event.

Delegates from several European states attending the UN conference on racism walked out as Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad spoke about Israel on Monday.

Ahmadinejad was about 10 minutes

into his speech when several diplomats, including the French ambassador and at least half a dozen other people exited as he referred to a "racist" government, in a clear reference to Israel.

At least three protesters in multicoloured wigs chanting "racist, racist" in French were bundled out of the conference hall earlier as Ahmadinejad began his speech, including one who approached the podium.

The Iranian president's speech was marked by more catcalls from the non-governmental organisation, as well as some applause, but the response was more muted among about 100 countries attending.

Ahmadinejad has caused outrage both within Israel and other Western nations over his previous comments that the Nazi Holocaust was a "myth" and the Jewish state should be "wiped off the map".



PHOTO AFP

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (L) and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay (C) watch a show presented by South African dancers at the opening of a five-day UN review conference on racism yesterday at the UN Offices in Geneva.

CIA waterboarded 9/11 mastermind 183 times

AFP, Washington

CIA interrogators waterboarded al-Qaeda's September 11 attack mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed 183 times and another terror suspect, Abu Zubaydah, 83 times, The New York Times reported yesterday.

Citing a 2005 Justice Department legal memorandum, the newspaper said the agency used the simulated drowning technique on the two al-Qaeda operatives far more than had been previously reported.

The report recalls that in 2007, former CIA officer John Kiriakou told media organisations that Abu Zubaydah had undergone waterboarding for only 35 seconds before agreeing to tell everything he knew.

## N Korea could restart nuke plants, says UN

AP, Seoul

North Korea could restart its nuclear facilities within months, the chief of the UN nuclear watchdog warned yesterday, but added he was optimistic that negotiations on halting Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions could be revived.

North Korea kicked out all international monitors of its nuclear facilities last week after vowing to quit six-nation disarmament talks and restart its atomic programme in anger over the UN Security Council's criticism of its April 5 rocket launch.

Pyeongyang says the UN

rebuke is unfair because the liftoff was a satellite launch under its peaceful space programme. But the US and others say nothing entered orbit and that the launch was really a test of long-range missile technology in violation of a UN resolution banning the North from any ballistic activity.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Mohamed El-Baradei said in Beijing on Monday "it could be a question of months" when asked how soon North Korea could restart its nuclear facilities -- a move that could yield weapons-grade plutonium.

However, El-Baradei also said he was hopeful that openness shown by the United States under the administration of President Barack Obama would help resume international talks with North Korea.

"While I am distressed because, of course, what has happened in North Korea is a setback, I am optimistic about the new environment," El-Baradei said, and pointed to Washington's new openness to dialogue with countries such as North Korea and Iran nations whose nuclear ambitions have alarmed the international community.

## Big budget on cards

FROM PAGE 1

Development expenditure in the next budget might be Tk 30,500 crore which is Tk 25,600 crore in the current budget.

Finance ministry sources said in the next budget the new pay scale, about to be recommended by the pay commission, will be implemented in phases. Budgetary allocation for salaries and allowances of government staff will increase substantially.

Due to the global economic recession there is a plan to keep more stimulus packages in the next year's budget than this year's. The stimulus package in the current fiscal is

Tk 3,424 crore, which might go up to Tk 5,000 crore to Tk 6,000 crore in the next budget, depending on the local fallout of the global recession.

Government expenditure for poverty elimination and social safety nets will also increase. The finance minister said on Sunday that allocation for Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) will increase from 2.25 lakh metric ton to 5.54 lakh metric ton in the next budget. Test Relief (TR) will be raised from 2 lakh metric ton to 3.66 lakh metric ton.

And 100-day Employment Generation Programme will also be implemented in a larger scale resulting in more allocation for it too.

Usually 60 percent of the revenue expenditure goes to meet the pay and allowances of government staff, interest payments, and salaries and allowances of the staff of non-government educational institutions, despite an increase in allocations for subsidies and social safety nets.

Those expenditures are also likely to see an increase in the next budget due to a probable increase in government borrowing and a probable hike in salaries and allowances in general.

Finance and planning adviser to a former caretaker government and a former chairman of the Public Expenditure Review Commission M Hafizuddin Khan said, "Our budget is passed year after year in a traditional way, and the spending is also done in the same fashion." The parliamentary discussions on budgets also lack any constructive discourse, he added.

Khan said, however big a budget might be, to get a good result from it, basic changes are necessary in the process of its formulation and implementation.

He said parliamentary standing committees should discuss in detail the budgetary allocations for ministries, and allocations for projects should be determined on the basis of the discussions, to ensure quality.

Moreover, the parliament should discuss expenditures by the ministries and the problems in implementing the projects in detail every three months, he added saying, under the medium term budgetary framework several ministries have been given separate budgets over the last few years, but no good result from those ministries is visible.

He also said the government should review the rec-

ommendations of the Public Expenditure Review Commission and see whether those could be implemented.

Research Director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Zaid Bakht said, "The size of our budget is usually 15 percent of the GDP, only the last fiscal year's budget was 17 percent. In many neighbouring countries the budgets are 20 percent of their GDPs."

"Taking that into consideration it does not seem to me that the next fiscal year's budget is big. There is a need for public investment in the country now. But the questions are whether it will be possible to mobilise the resources for the bigger expenditure, and whether the quality of the expenditure will be maintained," he added.

Bakht said if resources cannot be gathered to meet the expenditure, government borrowing from banks will increase, and excessive borrowing might send inflation upwards, and a credit crunch for the private sector might also be inevitable.

He said with a large-scale development expenditure the possibility of resource wastage also increases. Taking many projects and giving small allocations usually result in only 30 to 35 percent of the development expenditure budget being spent in the first 8 months of a fiscal year. As a result in the remaining four months the remaining amount is usually spent in a hurry and wastage occurs, he cautioned.

## Gen Moeen

FROM PAGE 1

sports' top governing body follows the controversy over Bangladesh Football Federation's sponsorship deal with Bashundhara Group.

The general came in for criticism for his presence in the last week's deal signing ceremony between BFF President Kazi Salahuddin and Bashundhara Group Chairman Ahmed Akbar Sobhan, who was convicted of corruption in absentia during the caretaker government rule.

Moeen took the sports council's helm following a presidential order on July 8, 2007.

Now that an elected government is in power, his leaving the post was not much unexpected as the NSC chairmanship is a constitutional prerogative of the sports minister.

In his reaction, State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar yesterday said, "He [Gen Moeen] assumed the responsibility when the nation was going through a critical juncture, and tried his best for the betterment of sports."

Sarkar, who will take over automatically unless a presidential order states otherwise, however noted, "To strengthen democracy, sports leadership should be at the hands of politicians."

During his nearly two years' stint at the NSC, Gen Moeen held elections to all sports federations including BFF and Bangladesh Cricket Board. He also had 20 banks to support 19 cash-starved federations.

## HC issues rule on govt

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during the hearing of the rule.

The HC bench of Justice ABM Khairul Haque and Justice Md Momtaz Uddin Ahmed came up with the orders upon a writ petition filed by Dr MA Salam, a freedom fighter and a private practitioner.

Eight high government officials including the secretaries of the cabinet division, the president's secretariat and the office of the prime minister have been made respondents in the rule.

Dr Salam filed the writ petition as public interest litigation (PIL) on April 19.

He stated in the petition that the set of books--History

of Bangladesh War of Liberation--published in November 1982 had stated that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman made declaration of independence on March 26, 1971. In addition, it was said in the petition that it was recognised in the Proclamation on Independence published on April 10, 1971.

Subsequently the volume was reprinted in December 2003 and was published in June 2004 by the then BNP-led four-party alliance government to say that Major Ziaur Rahman made the declaration of independence on March 26, 1971.

During the hearing of the

petition on April 19, petitioner's counsel Advocate Manzil Mursid told the court that those responsible for distorting the national history had committed offence against the state and violated the Constitution.

The court assigned senior lawyer M Amir-Ul-Islam who was involved in drafting the Proclamation of Independence, and Additional Attorney General M Enayetur Rahim as amicus curiae (friend of court) to make submissions on the issue.

They told the court the Proclamation of Independence, which has been protected by Article 150, is part of the constitution and it cannot be changed.

## High-rise buildings

FROM PAGE 16

building's owning company, said, "We have not put any fire fighting mechanisms yet, as the building is under construction."

All the floors of Jabbar Tower are built and a number of signboards have been hung to rent out space.

During a visit to the 20-story Silver Tower Silver Line Group near Gulshan intersection-1, a female employee of its corporate office said that fire fighting system in this building means hydrant points and a couple of extinguishers cylinders.

"But none of us know how to operate them or what to do in the event of a fire," she said.

An office boy of a private company on the tower's 14th floor said, "I do not know whether the hydrant points work at all, because we have never done any fire exercise in last six years."

Silver Line's executive director MI Chowdhury could not be

contacted despite repeated attempts, as the receptionist at the group's corporate office refused to provide any contact. She instead kept The Daily Star's phone numbers to convey the message to Chowdhury. A day after, she asked for an 'offer letter'. Asked what it meant, she hung up the phone.

Eminent structural engineer and BNBC expert Prof. Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said that workable measures and regular drill are must for fire safety.

AKM Nasrum Minallah, assistant vice-president of Pragati Insurance Limited at the company's 16-storied building in Karwan Bazar, said though they have hydrant boxes and extinguishers they are not in a good condition.

"We have never so far arranged any fire drill of the users at the building commissioned in 2001," he said.

The narrow emergency exit at

this building is without fireproof doors and sealed at the top. The building has had fire incidents at the electric sub-station and at kitchen on the 15th floor.

Electrical engineer of Metro Group Hossainuzzaman at the 21-storied Uday Tower in Gulshan said the building has hydrant points, extinguishers, fire detectors and eight trained fire fighters.

A security guard of a garments accessories company on the 17th floor said, "I do not know exactly what to do and how to operate the hosepipe in the event of a fire."

Hossainuzzaman said, "We arranged a fire drill around two years back."

The Fire Prevention and Dousing Act, 2003 required the existing multi-storied buildings to file a report on fire safety measures within six months since the law came into force on March 6, 2003.

## Faridpur 'Al Badr leader'

FROM PAGE 16

Council, hosts an Islamic programme 'Apar Jigyasa' on private TV channel ntv.

Magistrate Motaharat Akhter Bhuiyan received the case and directed the officer-in-charge of Saltha Police Station to investigate it.

According to the case statement, both Kalam and Mohammad Kazi, who joined hands with Pakistani occupation forces, were engaged in killings, looting, rape and arson during the liberation war in 1971.

They also formed peace committees in various areas in the district.

The accused along with 10 to 12 armed men entered Ranjan's house and Kalam

shot dead Ranjan's father on the first day of Bangla month of Jaistha in 1971. Kalam also killed Gyanendra Biswas, son of Rajendri Biswas, at his house the same day, alleged the plaintiff.

They set the nearby house of Montu Bakshi on fire with gunpowder and also killed Ohab Sardar, Md Tuku Molla, Kanchu Fakir, Abdul Molla of Kumar Kanda village, Hachen Mia, Baru Khatun of Alampur village, Abdul Omed Molla of Keshabdia village, alleged the complainant.

Kalam also fired shots at Lal Mia of Alampur village, who survived the attack and is still alive, said the plaintiff.

Earlier, another case had

been filed under the Collaborators' Act against Kalam alias Bachchu with the Boalmari Police Station on March 23, 1972. He had been on the run for long after the liberation war.

Faridpur Muktiyoddha Sangsad Unit Commander Abul Fayaz Shah Newaz told The Daily Star that Kalam alias Bachchu, who had been involved in killings, looting and arson in Nagarkanda, Saltha and Boalmari in 1971, should be arrested and tried.

Faridpur Sadar upazila Chairman advocate Samsul Haque told The Daily Star that Kalam is a 'known war criminal' and must be brought to justice.

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বাংলাদেশে ২০ এপ্রিল ২০০৯ থেকে শুরু হওয়া সপ্তাহটি উদযাপন উপলক্ষে গৃহীত বিভিন্ন কর্মসূচির মধ্যে উল্লেখযোগ্য হচ্ছে 'বৃহৎ পঠন' (The Big Read)। শিক্ষা বিষয়ে সচেতনতা বাড়াতে এবং সাক্ষর হওয়ার জন্য উদ্বুদ্ধ করতে ২২ এপ্রিল ২০০৯ বুধবার এই 'বৃহৎ পঠন' কর্মসূচিতে অংশগ্রহণ করবেন দেশের প্রতিথযশা ব্যক্তিবর্গ। কেন্দ্রীয় শহীদ মিনারসহ দেশের বিভিন্ন গুরুত্বপূর্ণ স্থানে উদযাপিত হবে এই পঠন কর্মসূচি। এ ছাড়া অন্যান্য কর্মসূচির মধ্যে রয়েছে সংবাদ সম্মেলন, গ্লোবাল মনিটরিং রিপোর্ট বিষয়ে আলোচনা, শিক্ষামেলা, সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান, সাক্ষর সংগ্রহ অভিযান, জাতীয় পরামর্শ সভা, পোস্টার, স্টিকার ও লিফলেট বিতরণ প্রভৃতি।

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