

Bangladesh dropped

FROM PAGE 1
China, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Vietnam

2. The Commission's Watch List: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Laos, Russian Federation, Somalia, Tajikistan, Turkey and Venezuela.

3. Additional Countries Closely Monitored: Bangladesh, Kazakhstan and Sri Lanka.

The USCIRF in its 2009 annual report released on May 1 observed that the Awami League is considered more favourably disposed towards minority rights protection, based in part on the fact that the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord and the Vested Property Return Act, both measures meant to safeguard minority rights, were taken under a previous Awami League administration.

It said the 2008 elections allowed minorities to exercise their voting rights and the country proceeded without the anti-minority violence, which was seen after the national elections in 2001.

The report said at that time the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP)-led government failed to investigate or prosecute acts of severe violence, including killings, rape, land seizures, arson, and extortion committed against religious minorities, particularly Hindus, who were perceived to be allied to the then-opposition Awami League.

Despite these improvements, USCIRF report said Bangladesh continues to have outstanding religious freedom issues and face threats from religious extremism.

The commission, therefore, urges the new Awami League administration to strengthen protections for all Bangladeshis to enjoy the right to freedom of religion or belief, and undertake efforts to improve conditions for minority religious communities.

The commission hopes that the government of Bangladesh will investigate and prosecute, to the fullest extent of the law, perpetrators of violent acts against members of minority religious communities, women, and non-governmental organisations in the past.

Reform of the judiciary and the police are also necessary to ensure that law enforcement and security services are equally protective of the rights of all, including Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Ahmadis, and other minorities.

Additional efforts are needed to counter societal and governmental discrimination in access to public services, the legal system, and government, military, and police employment, the report added.

According to the report, the BNP led by Khaleda Zia shared power with Islamist parties during 2001-06, when the country witnessed an unprecedented rise in religious intolerance.

After refusing to for long, the BNP-led alliance government, in the face of protests at home and an international outcry, banned four Islamist outfits.

The commission observed that the 1972 constitution guaranteed the freedom of religion, but subsequent military regimes added amendments affirming "absolute trust and faith in Allah" as "the basis for all [government] actions." Islam was made Bangladesh's state religion in 1988 under HM Ershad's military dictatorship.

Aided by the expansion of Islamic schools (madrasas) and charities, many of which receive foreign funding with varying degrees of government oversight, Islamist activists have gained significantly in political, economic, and social influence in recent years, the commission's report reads.

Members of Jamaat-e-Islami allegedly used their influence in the previous BNP-led government to deny funding to disadvantaged groups viewed as opposing Jamaat's Islamist political and social agenda, it said.

It said the caretaker government was widely criticised by international and local human rights agencies for serious human rights abuses, including suspected extrajudicial killings by security forces, arbitrary detentions, torture, curbs on press freedom, and violations of the right to due process.

During the 2007-2008 emergency period, the commission said Islamist groups rose in political prominence and public visibility. In September 2007, emergency restrictions on assembly were apparently waived to allow Jamaat and other Islamist supporters burn effigies and stage public protests against the publication of a newspaper cartoon they believed mocked an element of Bangladeshi Islamic culture.

Cartoonist Arifur Rahman was jailed without charge for six months. In March 2008,

restrictions on assembly were again ostensibly lifted to allow protests by Islamic groups against a policy proposed by a consortium of women's organisations to strengthen constitutional provision for the equal rights of women. In October 2008, federal agencies removed five sculptures of traditional Bengali musicians opposite Zia International Airport in Dhaka at the behest of Islamic leaders, who allegedly deemed the sculptures un-Islamic.

Turning to minorities situation, it said although the constitution provides protections for women and minorities, Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Ahmadis, and other minorities must regularly grapple with societal discrimination, as well as face prejudice that hinders their ability to access public services, the legal system, and government, military, and police employment.

The commission recommended that the US government encourage the new government of Bangladesh to take early actions on the following issues and ensure consistent implementation.

1. Investigate and prosecute perpetrators of the anti-minority violence that occurred in the wake of the 2001 national elections.

2. Repeal the Vested Property Act and commit to restoring or compensating owners for properties seized, including the heirs of original owners.

3. Rescind the 2004 order banning Ahmadia publications, and ensure adequate police response to attacks against Ahmadis.

4. Enforce all provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord and declare that members of Bangladesh's tribal communities are deserving of the full rights of Bangladeshi citizenship.

5. Create and support the promised National Human Rights Commission, which should be independent, adequately funded, inclusive of women and minorities, and defined by a broad mandate that includes freedom of religion or belief.

6. Include in all public and madrasa school curricula, textbooks, and teacher trainings information on tolerance and respect for freedom of religion or belief.

7. Ensure that members of minority communities have equal access to government services and public employment, including the judiciary and high-level government positions.

T20 WC squad

FROM PAGE 16
Council (ICC) in March.

Considering the condition in England, the selectors chose four specialist pacemen in Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain, Rubel Hossain and Syed Rasel. They also picked all-rounders like Shakib Al Hasan, Nayeem Islam and Mahmudullah Riyad.

Dashing left-hander Tamim Iqbal, Zunaed Siddiqui, Rokibul Hasan have been brought in as specialist batsmen along side captain Mohammad Ashraful.

The second version of the competition will be held in England from June 5.

The Tigers have been pitted in Group A with defending champions India and ICC associate members Ireland.

Mohammad Ashraful's men will face India on June 6 and Ireland on June 8 at Trent Bridge.

Ctg arms

FROM PAGE 1
senior ASP of Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

At the same time the court rejected two separate petitions moved by the defence lawyers-- one for the cancellation of remand prayer and another for bail.

Sahab Uddin was apprehended at a residence in the capital's Green Road early Sunday immediately after arrested NSI field officer Akbar Hossain Khan in a confessional statement on Sunday had disclosed his involvement in the illegal consignment of arms and ammunition.

He was brought to Chittagong Sunday evening and produced before the court around 3:15pm yesterday.

Sahab Uddin was directly taken to Dampara Police Lines CID headquarters for interrogation, said sources in CID.

In his confessional statement Akbar said the trucks and crane, which were supposed to carry the consignment, were hired on Sahab Uddin's instruction.

Sahab Uddin, a wing commander of Bangladesh Air Force who joined NSI on deputation, went into voluntary retirement in 2005.

His wife and two other relatives were present at the court during the remand hearing.

10 injured

FROM PAGE 1
pay the toll money that led to an altercation between the two groups.

Following the altercation, some 30 BNP cadres led by Shariful, Mainul, Reaz, Elias, Ujjal, Ekram, Mainul attacked the slum people with hockey sticks, sharp weapons and firearms at around 2:00 pm, leaving 10 people injured.

Injured Sufia Begum, Rawshan Ara, Bazlu, Rabbul, Taiyub, Malek and Haren were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

The hooligans swooped on the slum houses and vandalised over 30 rooms, 10 television sets and other furniture.

They also opened fire and assaulted women during the attack.

The slum people lodged a complaint with Rajpara police station.

Humayun Kabir, assistant police commissioner of Boalia zone, said police started investigation into the incident and arrested one person.

Perform

FROM PAGE 1
"You must know how many projects are there in your ministries and how many have been implemented. If necessary, put pressure on the officials to implement the projects," the prime minister was quoted as saying by a minister.

Hasina also asked the ministers to import edible oil, sugar and pulses to keep their prices low on the market and prevent the unscrupulous traders from creating any artificial crisis of the essentials.

The prime minister had earlier issued warnings on several occasions to bring pace in the activities of the ministries to fulfil her party's election pledges.

She also sent letters to the secretaries asking them to speed up administrative activities.

Criminal killed

FROM PAGE 1
Rab-4, led by Deputy Assistant Director (DAD) Shamsul Alam reached Kaliakoir mosque at Rajshahi in Savar at around 4:05 am. On their arrival a group of robbers who were hiding there opened fire on them triggering a gunfight between the group and Rab-4.

The gunfight lasted for around 15 minutes during which a Rab personnel sustained injury. At one stage of the fight, robbers fled the scene leaving a bullet-hit man behind.

Rab also recovered arms from the spot.

Col Col Ariful Islam, commander of Rab-4, told The Daily Star that the injured robber was taken to Savar Upazila Health Complex where on-duty doctors declared him dead.

Locals identified the bullet-hit man as Totamia, the main accused in the Bangladesh Bank deputy general manager (DGM) Hedalet Ullah killing case.

Totamia was also an accused and wanted in other murder, robbery and extortion cases, Rab sources said.

Kuet shut

FROM PAGE 16
The three injured journalists are senior staff reporter Kanak Rahman of Dainik Samakal, staff reporter Rana Kabir of Dainik Purbanchal and Haider Ali, photographer of Channel 1.

The angry students beat up the journalists confining them in classroom No-113 of the university. Police later rescued them.

According to witnesses, police hurled a large number of teargas canisters during the clashes that continued from 11:00am to 5:00pm.

Students of both groups vandalised several dormitories of the residential halls hurling brickbats and with sticks, hockey sticks and iron rods.

The entire campus at Mirerdanga under Khanjahan Ali Police Station of Khulna city turned into a battlefield as police swung into action to bring the situation under control.

Police had cordoned the university and all residential halls, as tension was intensifying due to students' protest against vacating dormitories and the closure of the university.

Despite several attempts Vice Chancellor Prof Md Nawsher Ali could not be contacted. The faculty, however, was in tight security during the mayhem.

Students of both the rival groups had been staging demonstrations on the campus till filing this report.

Killer pesticides

FROM PAGE 1
Director Dr Mahmudur Rahman told The Daily Star, "We are sure it was pesticide poisoning. And we think it's happening in other parts of the country as well."

During a visit to the villages yesterday, this correspondent found that the families did not yet know their kids had in fact died of toxic poisoning, not of any mysterious illness.

Abdus Samad, grandfather of Meem, a 32-month-old girl who died on April 2, told The Daily Star, "We had breakfast together that morning. We talked a lot and she did not show any symptoms of sickness. After some time, she went out, but came back seriously ill."

Asked what she thought was the cause of her daughter's death, Meem's mother Asma Begum said, "The doctors could not diagnose the disease."

During investigation, the IEDCR committee gathered that the farmers in the villages used furadan or carbofuran (recently banned in Kenya for being used in killing lions and other predators) on paddy fields.

Besides, some villagers were using organophosphate insecticides like cypermethrin, malathion and chlorpyrifos many times the recommended dose.

Local Agricultural Officer Khairul Alam said the farmers in Malancha and Naogaikhat spray pesticides in amounts way more than what is safe.

Halim, an aubergine grower in Malancha, has applied eight to 10 kilograms of furadan and 63 bottles (120 ml each) of liquid pesticide on his 75-acre land.

"Using that much pesticide is highly dangerous. We don't even recommend strong pesticides like furadan or eggplants. He should have used only 600 ml of liquid pesticide and that too in three phases," said Khairul.

The IEDCR's primary investigation found quite a few examples of overuse of

pesticides.

For instance, Khaleque treats his chilli on a small piece of land with 500 grams of furadan. Berek applies three kilograms of furadan for his 2.57-acre paddy, while Shukur treats the edge of his field with ratpoison.

Nizam of Malancha sprayed his mango trees with chlorpyrifos in the early morning of April 2. His daughter Meem plucked a mango from one of the trees at around 7:30am and died within an hour, the IEDCR report states.

Locals said most of the victims fell sick between April 2 and April 14. Each had a sudden onset of symptoms--reduced consciousness, frothy discharge, respiratory distress, constricted pupils and convulsions.

Before expiry, the dogs and calves were bellowing, jerking heads and off feeding, the IEDCR report reads.

"Initially, it was hard to detect what was wrong with the patients. But as symptoms emerged, we treated them for poisoning," said Dr Nitya Gopal Chowdhury, medical officer (disease control) of Dhamrai upazila health complex.

Asked why the children are more prone to pesticide poisoning, he said, "It's their weaker resistance to pesticides."

He said none of the affected children's breath however reeked of any chemicals, and it suggests they did not swallow pesticide grains.

Meanwhile, IEDCR has launched an awareness campaign against pesticides in those two villages.

It cautioned the villagers against letting their children go to the crop fields and using clay to make toys or ovens.

The IEDCR team has collected many biological and environmental samples including those of blood, urine, stool, cough and breast milk from villagers.

The samples have been sent abroad for further tests.

8 vehicles

FROM PAGE 1
"The burning fuel flowed through Satata Automobiles and Akbar Motors Workshop burning all the seven parked vehicles and other materials."

Fire Service Deputy Director Abdur Rashid suspects the fire might have been originated from burning cigarette end. He said, "If the lorry was not driven away from the reserved tank, a huge explosion might have occurred causing a severer catastrophe in the area."

The witnesses said the firefighters fought hard to douse the flames in high risk as the octane-laden lorry could have exploded anytime.

Fire service sources said they used fire-extinguishing foam so that the flames could not spread.

Four other refuelling stations and automobile centres in the area were shut down, while vehicular movement on the road from Mohakhali to Rainbow Crossing was halted completely.

As the road remained blocked, a severe traffic jam was created surrounding the roads till 7:00pm. Moreover, thousands of curious people thronged the area hindering the activities of the firefighters.

Several hundred personnel from Rab and police had to struggle hard to control the curious people.

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Pak peace

FROM PAGE 16
On Sunday, the army accused the insurgents of "gross violations" of the deal in Swat by looting and attacking infrastructure. At least three other security officials have been reported killed in recent days, and the Taliban have resumed armed patrols in the main city of Mingora.

Still, army spokesman Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas said the army would not launch an offensive in Swat unless the government formally abandoned the truce.

Swat is just one part of the Afghan border region where Pakistan is facing Islamist insurgents. However, it is of special importance because of its proximity to the capital and the fact that it is meant to fall fully under government control, unlike tribally ruled areas which have more autonomy.

The provincial government, whose ministers were coming under frequent insurgent attack, signed the deal with militants after security forces were unable to defeat them after two years of clashes that killed hundreds and displaced up to one-third of its 1.5 million residents.

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CHECKING TALIBAN Zardari faces US pressure to work with Sharif

ANI, Washington

President Asif Ali Zardari is expected to face some pressure during the upcoming talks with US President Barack Obama to work with PML-N chief Nawaz Sharif in an effort to strengthen his civilian government in combating the Taliban challenge.

No one here is publicly saying that the Obama Administration is trying to work out a power-sharing deal between Zardari and Nawaz Sharif, sources have said.

Official point out that both Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton have spoken with Nawaz Sharif by telephone in the past month, and have urged Zardari's "increasingly unpopular government" to work closely with Sharif.

Diplomatic observers said that during his meeting with Obama later this week, the controversial deal Pakistan made with the Taliban is also expected to come up, The Nation reports.

Zardari, who arrives on Monday evening from London for a week-long visit to the United States, is set to hold a series of meetings with the American leadership as well as attend the trilateral summit President Obama is hosting with his Pakistani and Afghan counterparts on Wednesday.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Zardari will also hold separate talks with Obama as well as a mini-summit, White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said on Friday.

"The president looks forward to discussing with these two democratically elected leaders how we can work together to enhance our cooperation in this important part of the world as the US implements a new strategy" for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said Gibbs.

Meanwhile, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates says he

wants Saudi Arabia to help forge a political consensus in Pakistan that it must deal with the threat from the Taliban, al-Qaeda and related militant groups.

The secretary spoke to reporters on his aircraft, while on his way to Cairo and Riyadh, telling them, "The Saudis, in particular, have considerable influence in Pakistan."

American officials have been working for months to convince Pakistani officials to shift their focus from the threat they perceive from India to what they see as the more immediate and dangerous threat from militants inside Pakistan. And, they say they have made some progress.

Still, as he began his trip to the Middle East late Sunday, Gates said he believes Saudi leaders can help move that process even further along.

Gates said he also wants to strengthen the US defence relationship with both Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

5 more BDR

FROM PAGE 1
statements under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Five metropolitan magistrates in Dhaka recorded their statements after the CID, which is tasked with the investigation into the mutiny, produced the five men before the court with prayers for recording their statements.

So far 59 BDR jawans, including yesterday's five, have made confessional statements before magistrates in connection with the mutiny case. The case was initially filed with Lalbagh police and later shifted to Newmarket police station.

CID sources 75 other jawans were interrogated but none were arrested, as their involvement in the carnage was not found.

Swine flu could back

FROM PAGE 16
indicating a global pandemic is imminent.

In an interview with Spain's El Pais newspaper, Chan said it was important to avoid a "wave of panic" if the alert level was raised to the maximum six, adding that such a move would not mean "the end of the world".

More countries are confirming cases every day with Italy and Colombia the latest to join the list, while France announced two new confirmed cases.

Japan tripled the number of quarantine officers at Tokyo's Narita airport to try to detect cases at the start of a holiday week.

In the United States, the only other country to have recorded a death from the virus, officials said 30 of the 50 states had now confirmed cases.

Swine flu is now present in more than half of America's states with 226 confirmed infections in 30 states, and will probably cover the entire nation soon, US health authorities said Sunday.

There remains only one death in the United States so far, a Mexican toddler who was visiting relatives in Texas, the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) said.

"Virtually all of the United States probably has this virus circulating now," Anne Schuchat, the CDC's interim deputy director for science and public health, told reporters.

The CDC's tally Saturday had been 160 confirmed cases of the A(H1N1) virus in 21 US states.

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