

Dozens of nations sign treaty on shipbreaking

AFP, Hong Kong

Dozens of nations signed a new treaty yesterday to make ship recycling safer, but activists called it a step backwards for the environment and the labourers who carry out the dangerous work.

The UN's International Maritime Organisation (IMO) convention is the first-ever such agreement on shipbreaking, which often exposes workers to asbestos, mercury and other hazardous substances.

The deal requires shipowners to provide an inventory of hazardous materials aboard a ship before it is sent for recycling—work that is mostly carried out in China, Turkey and south Asia, often by unskilled migrants.

But activists say it fails to end the controversial practice of "beaching," when ships are dumped at high tide and then drift to beaches to be taken apart—a practice 107 environmental and rights groups have urged the IMO to ban.

The new convention on ship recycling adopted today won't stop a single toxic ship from being broken on the beach of a developing country," said Ingvild Jenssen, director of NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, an umbrella group of non-governmental organisations.

"It legitimises the infamous breaking yards of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and actually rewards these exploitive operations while punishing those companies that have invested in safer and cleaner methods."

Much of the shipbreaking done in developing countries takes place on soft sand beaches, where access for heavy lifting equipment and emergency vehicles is difficult or impossible.

Workers, many of them children, face a high rate of accidents, including the loss of life and limb.

But the IMO defended the agreement without a ban on beaching and proclaimed the Hong Kong conference a suc-

cess after 66 member states lined up to sign the treaty -- including Australia, Brazil, China and South Africa.

IMO spokesman Lee Adamson said the member states had to deal with reality in an important multi-million dollar industry.

"There is nothing that can force a sovereign state to become party to an international convention should it consider it not in its interests to do so," he told AFP.

He said the treaty, which must now be ratified by individual member states, was "a tremendous step forward in terms of health and safety for workers in the industry and for protection of the environment from end-of-life ships -- it will set standards where none previously existed."

The IMO estimates that between 1990 and 2006, more than 10,000 ships that weighed over 500 gross tons were recycled worldwide.

Breakers pay ship owners by the ton and make their money from re-selling the recovered materials. According to the NGO Platform on Shipbreaking, 80 percent of recycling is done by ill-protected workers on beaches in poor nations.

Yards in less well-regulated parts of the world can pay much more to break up the ships, as they pay lower wages and have less rigorous health and safety laws.

"(A ship owner will get) more than 10 times the price by selling to a yard in Bangladesh than to a yard in the European Union," where regulations are much stricter, said Jenssen.

Presently, ship owners can expect to earn around 300 dollars per ton by selling to a south Asian shipbreaker, she said, down from around 700 dollars, as prices for raw materials have tumbled because of the global economic slowdown.

Beaches provide a poor environment to contain the pollutants released when ships are broken apart, said NGO Platform spokeswoman Helen Pervier.

Bhola power plant starts operation

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

The 34.5MW gas-based power plant of Venture Energy Resources at Purbo Charkhali Kheyaghat near Bhola town started trial generation yesterday afternoon.

On the first day the plant produced and supplied 4MW power to the Bhola 33KV substation.

Bhola Power Development Board Executive Engineer Zakir Hossain told The Daily Star that the plant will start feeding the national grid informally next week and it will go into regular production at the end of this month.

ATM Nadiruzzaman, general manager of Venture Energy Resources, Company Ltd, owner of the plant, said they tested the machines on May 10 successfully.

The gas-based power plant constructed at a cost of Tk 200 crore is situated about 33km from the Shabbajpur Gas Field in Borhanuddin upazila of the district.

Mizan, wife

FROM PAGE 1 computer shop in the district headquarters," Sharmin, daughter of Iman Ali of Korotia, disclosed to The Daily Star yesterday.

Sources said Mizan also has an estranged second wife, who left him six months ago after she had come to know about his JMB link.

Lying on a bed in Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) with bandages at the wrist of her right arm where there had been a hand before she blew it up with a grenade on Thursday, and with her two wounded children on her side, Sharmin said she met Mizan of Jamalpur on her way to an HSC preparatory coaching centre in Tangail town, and soon she fell in love with him.

"After dating for seven months I got married, and our married life started at my father's house," Sharmin said adding, "Three months into the marriage, I and my family came to know that Mizan is a JMB man and his family had disowned him for that reason."

"My family also ended up disowning me. So Mizan and I came to Dhaka where our two children were born, and during two years and seven months we changed six houses," she went on saying, "At one stage, I was won over by my husband's persuasion and accepted his path."

"My husband told me that it's better to commit suicide than to surrender," she said adding, "I tried to commit suicide, along with my two kids. When I detonated the grenade, my daughter Tora was on my lap and my son Naim was also next to me. The grenade exploded in my right hand."

"I didn't throw it at the Rab men, the door was closed."

She said her husband left their belongings in previous residences thrice as they changed dwellings six times during their short stay in the capital.

Before their arrest on Thursday night, they had not faced any trouble, she added.

"Mizan is a son of a poor family and his father is deceased. I never met any of his family," Sharmin said.

Meanwhile, Rab intelligence sources said Mizan's estranged second wife Mariam Akhter alias Mukti, daughter of Abdul Majid of Dighi Dampara under Shibganj upazila in Bogra, left Mizan because she did not have an amiable relationship with his first wife Sharmin.

"Mizan also married Mukti by hiding to her his first marriage and his JMB connection," a senior official of Rab intelligence wing said adding, "Mukti's father took his daughter back from Mizan's residence."

Rab officials also said Mizan was maintaining several houses simultaneously in the capital.

Confession

FROM PAGE 1 in arranging transport and equipment for the 10 truckloads of firearms and ammunition hauled at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Ltd Company (CUFL) jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004.

He named a few former high officials of NSI and the then men in government as well as some foreigners, sources said.

The former NSI director was produced before the court for recording his confessional statement yesterday afternoon after his six-day remand ended Thursday.

He had been placed on remand for three days on May 4 as well. He was arrested at a house on Green Road in the capital on May 3.

His arrest was made after arrested NSI Field Officer Akbar Hossain Khan in a confessional statement on May 2 evening mentioned that Sahab had links to the sensational case.

Lanka vows

FROM PAGE 1 was blocking a two-billion-dollar International Monetary Fund bailout package for Sri Lanka.

Tens of thousands of Tamil civilians are believed to be trapped inside a tiny patch of jungle on the northeast coast still held by the rebels.

Hundreds have been reported killed in indiscriminate shelling over the past week, adding to the thousands left dead since the rebels were pushed into a corner at the start of the year.

Sri Lankan government spokesman Anusha Palpita said the war against the remaining rebels would be over by Sunday morning.

"The president (Mahinda Rajapakse) assured that within the next 48 hours the thousands of Tamil civilians will be freed from the clutches of the Tamil Tigers," Palpita said. "All territory will be freed from Tiger control."

"We are closing in from all directions," military spokesman Brigadier Udaya Nanayakkara added.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com said the rebel zone was being heavily shelled, with close-quarter battles also raging.

State media showed footage of fires sweeping through the tropical beach and lagoon battle zone, and said the guerrillas appeared to be retreating and destroying ammunition stockpiles.

Sri Lanka's ITN channel said some civilians were managing to escape. A fleeing Tamil woman told the channel that "there are people dead everywhere, on the streets and everywhere."

The government maintains that the Tigers are using civilians as human shields and they need to be rescued. Any civilian deaths inside Tiger territory have been blamed on the rebels.

The UN's human rights chief Navi Pillay, however, has said both sides may be guilty of war crimes.

The ICRC, the only aid organisation that the government allows to work in the conflict zone, said the situation was disastrous.

"Our staff are witnessing an unimaginable humanitarian

Tax net

FROM PAGE 1 "If the political parties are brought under the tax net, not only will the national revenue increase but transparency will also be ensured and respect towards democracy would be established," he said.

Jatiya Kar Ainjibi Samity arranged the press conference ahead of the budget of 2009-2010 fiscal year.

The organisation placed forward a 24-point demand that include investigation into the source of income of former corrupt ministers, lawmakers and government officials who lead luxurious lives.

"For the sake of the national revenue, the country and for the establishment of rule of law here, we demand investigation into the sources of income of all former ministers, lawmakers and government officials who lead luxurious lives but whose income and expenditure seemingly don't balance," Zakir Hossain said.

The demands also include - transformation of existing income tax ordinance into an income tax act, holding the budget meeting in May instead of June, appointment of a senior commissioner to the tax tribunal, and appointment of a tax ombudsman.

Bagmara

FROM PAGE 16 committee of Balia during the December 29 polls, Mokbul added.

The attackers numbering over 15 waylaid Shahadat at around 4:00pm when he was going to Bhawaniganj bazar with his son Emadul by a motorcycle, locals and police said.

The attackers also clashed with locals who rushed out of their houses to his rescue leaving 20 villagers injured, said locals. Ahad Ali, the victim's elder brother, was also injured in the attack.

Later, the angry mob torched the houses of Seher Amin and his sons Shamsul Islam, Amjad, Amser and Ashful blaming them for the murder.

Police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members rushed the spot and brought the situation under control. Two years ago, Seher Amin developed an enmity with Shahadat as the latter joined AL quitting the politics of Jamaat for Seher's link to JMB, said victim's family members and police sources.

"The incident is not political but it was linked to a feud over lands and other disputes," said Rajshahi SP ASM Masum Rabbani adding that Shahadat's body was sent for autopsy.

catastrophe," ICRC director of operations Pierre Krahenbuhl said in Geneva, adding Red Cross staff had been unable to bring in food and pull out civilians for the past three days because of fierce fighting.

The UN has said as many as 50,000 people may be trapped -- huddled under plastic sheeting, in shallow dug-outs and with little or no food, water or medical facilities.

A top UN envoy, the secretary general's chief of staff Vijay Nambiar, was meanwhile due on the island on Saturday "to help resolve the humanitarian situation," officials in New York said.

Prior peace missions by top diplomats have ended in failure, and on Thursday the Sri Lankan government -- which finally has the upper hand against the LTTE after more than three decades -- repeated it would not cave in to pressure.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said this meant it was "not an appropriate time" to consider a massive IMF bailout loan for the island. Sri Lanka's central bank, however, brushed off the threat.

In Britain, junior foreign minister Bill Rammell called for a war crimes probe -- something already demanded by leading human rights groups.

"The UN's estimate, if it is accurate, of over 6,500 civilian deaths since January is truly shocking and appalling," he said, stressing a need for a probe "to determine whether war crimes have been committed."

Shootout

FROM PAGE 1 Barisal.

The latest incidents of crossfire occurred although Local Government and Rural Development Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam on May 5 said that the government would not allow any more extrajudicial killing in the name of 'crossfire'.

Rab sources said they started raiding vehicles in Khilgaon, Kamalapur and Sabujbagh areas yesterday night following a tip-off that terrorists might assemble there to commit crime.

Sources said a microbus tried to pass near Khilgaon flyover violating signal while checking was going on there at about 1:30am. Rab members then chased the microbus and the criminals opened fire from inside the motor vehicle.

Rab retaliated the fire resulting in a gunfight that lasted for 10-15 minutes and killed both the criminals.

The Rab team also recovered three revolvers and nine bullets from the microbus.

A Rab press release said the deceased were wanted in a number of cases including those of murder and extortion.

Locals, however, claimed that three persons including the two deceased were arrested from Mirpur-2 in the afternoon of May 13.

Meanwhile, a mugger was shot during a gunfight with Rab in the city's Banani last night.

Injured mugger Mokbul was admitted to a local hospital while another mugger Jahangir was arrested with a revolver.

Rab-1 officials said one of their patrol teams chased a gang of muggers while they were snatching valuables from a pedestrian at Kakoli-Banani around 10:30pm.

At one stage, the gang opened fire on Rab men who also retaliated the fire triggering the gun battle, Rab said.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Expelled Jubo League activist Jalal Akand was killed in "crossfire" during a shootout between his accomplices and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel in Barisal early yesterday.

Rab recovered two firearms, 16 bullets and 15 empty shells from the scene after the gun battle. A Rab member was also injured during the shootout, said Rab sources.

The sources said acting on a tip off, a team of Rab-8 led by KM Mamunur Rashid went to Dapdapia Ferry Ghat in Barisal city around 4:00am.

A group of the criminals hiding there opened fire on the law enforcers, who had just arrived, triggering a 15-minute-long gunfight. At one stage, the criminals fled leaving behind one of their injured men.

Rashid told The Daily Star that injured Jalal succumbed to his injuries on the way to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital.

Police sources said he was accused in 10 criminal cases including a murder case.

Lokman Hossain Dakua, Jubo League president of Bakerganj upazila, told The Daily Star that Jalal was ousted from the secretary position of the Rangosheri union unit of Jubo League, as he was wanted in several cases.

Indigenous

FROM PAGE 16 conference yesterday at the Young Women's Christian Association auditorium.

"The adivashi people have become the minorities in the hilly areas," said journalist Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul at the conference.

Besides, many of them migrated to other places in the country losing their land since the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Land Commission could not begin its activities.

"Bangalee people have their roots in adivashi people," said Prof Mejbah Kamal of Dhaka University.

Bangladesh Adivashi Forum also made a seven-point demand.

They are: constitutional recognition of the indigenous people, ensuring adivashi people's right to their land, full implementation of the CHT peace accord, ensuring adivashi representation in every development project, increase the quota for adivashi people in educational institutions and during employment, exemplary punishment for human rights violators and formulation of development plan for ultra-poor adivashi people.

The Bangladesh Adivashi Forum claims adivashi population in the country to be 30 lakh in 45 ethnic communities while the government estimate is only 18 lakh, the report read.

Shaktipada Tripura delivered the welcome speech at the conference while adivashi leader Sanjib Drong presented the keynote paper. Sayed Abul Maksud, Bibhash Chakraborty, and Mangal Kumar Chakma spoke at the programme.

The report also claimed that the indigenous people have experienced a silent famine and the region experienced a huge food shortage last year due to rat infestation.

BNP sits today

FROM PAGE 16 Following the December 29 election debacle, BNP had taken initiatives to reorganise the party and formed six central teams that sat with district-level leaders in February.

Accepting the recommendations of grassroots-level leaders, the standing committee at a meeting later decided to form convening committees dissolving all district committees by April 7. But it failed to implement the decision.

Party leaders said implementation of the reorganising process was delayed because of the April 2 parliamentary by-polls and the party's rally on May 2 marking the May Day at Paltan Maidan in the capital.

They said district convening committees will be assigned to reorganise the party from union level by holding council. Later, the party will hold central council after forming committees at district level.

AI director

FROM PAGE 16 difficult to see how it can handle the events of the 1971 war which are a hundred times more complicated and at this point the evidence is much more questionable," he observes.

Sam Zarifi was speaking in an interview with The Daily Star last week during his maiden visit to Bangladesh to assess the work of the new government.

Repeatedly emphasising examination of the War Crimes Tribunal Act, 1973 in standard with international laws, Zarifi views that it is a must for the government to get best advice and expertise from different countries in this regard.

Zarifi discussed in details his points on war crime trial, rise of militancy, human rights, judiciary, student politics, industrial labour, BDR mutiny, and extrajudicial killings.

He also suggests that the government be fully responsive and representative of the people to meet challenges of economical and social rights and adequate housing, healthcare and education.

"We need very strong protection of civil and political rights to ensure that the economic and social rights are properly understood and we need very strong economic social rights to help improve civil and political rights."

Khatib

From page 1 in fruits, Salahuddin said serious punishment awaits those involved in such crimes.

He called upon the businessmen concerned to refrain from such odious acts.

Swine flu-hit NY

FROM PAGE 16 with "influenza-like symptoms."

National health authorities earlier said that the number of confirmed cases of swine flu in the United States jumped Thursday from 3,352 to more than 4,298.

Sixty five people have died from swine flu, mainly in Mexico, but with three in the United States.

Health authorities around the world have acted to keep the lid on the virus.

In Geneva, acting assistant WHO director-general Keiji Fukuda said a meeting Thursday of experts came to "no big decisions" on whether to begin producing a vaccine.

Production of vaccines against the new virus could disrupt the production of seasonal flu vaccines, he added.

Fukuda said more meetings were needed to examine the technical process for manufacturers to ready themselves to go into mass production, which will "require several weeks."

The WHO announced it would shorten its world assembly, scheduled to start on Monday in Geneva, from nine to four days because of the outbreak.

According to WHO figures the number of laboratory-confirmed swine flu cases has increased from 6,497 in 33 countries on Thursday. New countries are being infected nearly every day.

Malaysia on Friday confirmed its first swine flu case,

Peru also registered its first case while Belgium became the latest European nation to record a case. New Zealand said its number of confirmed cases had risen from seven to nine.

China, meanwhile, stepped up a search for people who had come into contact with the mainland's two confirmed swine flu patients.

Authorities in Beijing and eastern Shandong province were looking for passengers who might have travelled with a 19-year-old student, who on Wednesday became the second confirmed sufferer on the mainland.

One killed, 2 hurt as storm lashes city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A day labourer was killed and two others were injured when a portion of wall built on the roof of an eight-storey building collapsed and fell on a tinshed house in the city's Kafrul during a storm yesterday afternoon.

The deceased was identified by police as Abul Kashem, 28, of Section-10 in Mirpur.

The injured were admitted to a local hospital.

A number of trees were also uprooted and several billboards collapsed in different areas.

Congress, BJP

FROM PAGE 16 also Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

At the other end of the spectrum, BJP's prime ministerial candidate LK Advani yesterday held a closed door meeting with his party's policy makers like Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley, Narendra Modi, and some others about the number crunching and post poll parliamentary arithmetic.

What has set the political circles here abuzz is a meeting between BJP President Rajnath Singh and Amar Singh, at a wedding reception where the former was the host.

Amar Singh's party is now an outside supporter of Congress-led UPA government, a role it has donned ever since left parties withdrew support to the alliance in July last year.

claimed before the media yesterday that his talk with Rajnath was not political.

With neither Congress nor BJP projected by exit polls to reach anywhere near the majority mark of 272 seats in the 545-strong Lok Sabha, both the principal contenders for power are faced with the challenge of not only scouting for new allies but also to ensure that existing coalition partners are not poached with the lure of power. And in this effort, ideologies blur and loyalties count for little.

In a bid to reach out to as many parties as possible, Congress said it is willing to tie up with all parties except 'communal' BJP and Shiv Sena, to install a secular and

progressive government at the centre.

This is a shift from Congress' familiar stand of having no truck with any constituent of BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) until they leave that grouping.

BJP on the other hand, is hoping that some regional parties like BJD in Orissa and Telegu Desam Party (TDP) in Andhra Pradesh whose main political plank is opposition to Congress in the states, will be attracted to NDA.

Meanwhile, all eyes are on what President Pratibha Patil does once the poll results are out; which party or coalition she will call first to form the next government?

The questions doing the rounds in political circles are the following: (1) will the president invite the single largest party or a pre-poll alliance or (2) the party or coalition which she assesses will be able to provide a stable government.

Constitution experts say the president may ask claimants to government formation to come up with letters of support from allies before inviting them to form a government.

Whichever party emerges with the highest number of seats might get the president's invite to form a government, provided she is convinced that the letters of support produced by the leader of that party has enough number to provide a stable government.

Pakistan allows

FROM PAGE 16 family were killed in shelling. The army did it. We have spent the last two weeks in hell."

The military says up to 15,000 troops are taking on about 4,000 well-armed fighters in Swat, where Islamabad has ordered a battle to "eliminate" the militants branded by Washington as the greatest terror threat to the West.

UNHCR spokeswoman Ariane Rumrery said Friday the fighting has sent 907,298 people fleeing Swat as well as the areas of Lower Dir and Buner, while hundreds of thousands are believed still trapped in the conflict zone.

She gave no figure on Friday's influx.

Pakistan's military insists it is taking all possible measures to lessen civilian casualties and avoid populated areas, but analysts have warned that general public support for the offensive could sour as the human cost soars.

Before Friday, the military estimated that around 200,000 people remained in Mingora. Based on combined military tolls, more than 870 militants and 42 troops have been killed in operations in Swat as well as Lower Dir and Buner, though there is no independent confirmation of the figures and no word on civilian deaths.

Once a picturesque ski resort popular with Westerners, Swat Valley is now the crucible of a fierce battle between emboldened Islamist militants and a government under intense pressure to rein them in.

Muggers

FROM PAGE 1 Sub-inspector Mizanur Rahman of Shah Ali Police Station said a truck smashed the taxicab by which four muggers were trying to escape after mugging a rickshaw passenger at around 8:00pm.

One of the muggers managed to flee.