

20 years of Star

FROM PAGE 1
till April 11, 2011. In a separate advertisement we have given details about the supplements. Suffice it to mention here that through these supplements we present to our readers an elaborate set of articles written by experts in respective fields covering politics, administration, economy, business, education, culture, etc. We hope that our effort will contribute to the building of our Sonar Bangla, whose 40th anniversary of independence we celebrate along with the nation. I take this opportunity to thank our readers, patrons, well wishers, advertisers, sponsors, and others who have consistently supported us and stayed beside us through thick and thin, and helped to bring us where we are today. On behalf of The Daily Star board of directors, and all the staff, I extend our sincere gratitude to all. Thank you.

- EDITOR AND PUBLISHER

Dipu Moni

FROM PAGE 20
International Airport last night with 300 Bangladeshis.

Dipu Moni also visited border areas between Egypt and Libya to observe the condition of the stranded Bangladeshis waiting to return home.

She inquired about the workers who were moved to Al Salloum border point by road from Libya. She met and assured them of early repatriation home.

Dipu Moni directed the foreign ministry officials and Bangladesh mission in Cairo, who have been supporting the humanitarian and repatriation efforts, to take effective measures to help the stranded citizens to return home as soon as possible.

Bangladesh Ambassador in Egypt Mizanur Rahman, Foreign Ministry Director General (Africa) Md Wahidur Rahman and private secretary to the foreign minister Jishnu Roy Choudhury accompanied her during the visit.

Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes is now also visiting Egypt and Tunisia to coordinate the repatriation and hold meetings with the senior government officials of both the countries so that the countries continue their support to the Bangladeshis.

Meanwhile, the foreign ministry said yesterday that many Bangladeshis, who were passing their days helplessly in troubled Libya, have already relocated themselves to safer places.

Quoting reports of Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli, it said currently there are around 25,000 Bangladeshis inside Libya; a number of them are female doctors and nurses working in various hospitals.

"There are Bangladeshis still living inside Tripoli along with their families and many of them are expecting relocation through the Tripoli airport," said a foreign ministry statement.

Around 3,704 Bangladeshis took shelter at the Egyptian border of Al Salloum until yesterday, while 12,103 at Ras Adjir of Tunisia, said the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

With government support, the IOM repatriated around 13,000 Bangladeshis so far.

Employing companies have repatriated over 3,287 Bangladeshis while some returned home on their own.

All the registered 3,704 Bangladeshis at the Egyptian border camps will be brought home by March 15 while 12,103 Bangladeshis at the Tunisia border by March 26, Rabab Fatima, South Asia Regional Representative of IOM in Dhaka, told reporters at a press briefing at her office.

An additional member of staff from Bangladesh Embassy in Rome has joined the team of Bangladesh officials in Tunisia. The team discussed with the UN food agency regarding adequate food supply in the camps.

At Djerba airport, Tunisian organisations are supplying food, which is being distributed by the Tunisian Red Crescent Society.

At the camps, IOM registers and prepares lists of persons to be evacuated, confirms all travel documents, provides fit-to-travel health check up and transportation from the camp to the relevant airport. The IOM also assists in providing food, water and blankets.

An SOS to world

FROM PAGE 1
fleeing workers.

In the morning, as I reached the Choucha camp near the Tunisia-Libya border, news of my arrival from The Daily Star in Bangladesh attracted hundreds of weary young men of all ages. All had the same complaints. They were robbed, beaten, tortured and raped in Libya as they tried to flee to Tunisian border from different parts of the trouble-torn country.

All had to line up for up to five hours to get food and drinking water and all were too tired to move in the scorching sun during day time and sub-zero temperatures at night.

Last night 71 more Bangladeshi migrant workers fled Libya and entered Tunisia. The border camp of Choucha is also receiving hundreds of African migrants, who emerged as severe headache for aid workers.

As about 100 Bangladeshis lined up for water distributed under the supervision of at least 37 different local and international bodies, some tough young men from some African countries tried to force their way into the source of the water -- several taps connected to mounted water reservoirs. Tunisian army guarded the camps but the Africans were too thirsty to fear anything.

I talked to Lutfur Rahman of Manikganj, Atiar Rahman of Jhenidah, Ahad Hossain of Gaibandha and many other Bangladeshis.

They said they saw hoodlums in military uniform abduct a Bangladeshi nurse while they were fleeing Libya.

"These military men stopped our bus in which we were fleeing. A Bangladeshi nurse was also travelling with us," said Monir Hossain Fakir from Bhola. "They forced the woman out of the bus and asked the driver to drive on."

I also talked to Soumaya Beltifa, communications officer and spokesperson of the International Committee for Red Cross, which is providing free telephone service for the refugees.

She said she had heard of

atrocities on these migrant workers but could do little until her organisation could enter Libya. "We are all taken by surprise at the extent of exodus of these migrant workers from Libya," said Beltifa. "It will take months to repatriate these people."

Omar Jumbe of the IOM said the biggest problem was to get the funds for the repatriation. Taking back each of the migrants costs about \$1,000. Availability of flights is another issue.

IOM and UNHCR official sources said the \$27 million they had received from the UN would run out today with more than 50 flights operated so far from Egypt and Tunisia.

"As they are getting the money piecemeal so there is no scope of chalking out a grand plan for the repatriation," said an IOM source, adding, "A single flight on a jumbo jet with 450 people would cost half a million dollars."

A major issue is bureaucracy at the level of donors, a UNHCR source said.

"We urgently need to open a line of credit... otherwise it [the repatriation] will take months," the official added.

Aid workers cited the example of Egyptian government which took initiative to repatriate so far 63,000 of its nationals fleeing Libyan troubles and sheltering in different countries.

"Governments' concern is important but in the case of Bangladesh there seems no hurry at all," alleged the IOM source.

He said last Wednesday when the IOM was sending about 1,000 migrant workers from Djerba International Airport a Bangladeshi embassy official fell into the hands of angry people. "They shouted slogans against the Bangladeshi embassy official and chased him out of the lounge," said the IOM source.

The first migrant workers started coming into Tunisia on February 28. The number slowly grew and then descended as the Libyan hoodlums started attacking the fleeing workers.

Grass, vines

FROM PAGE 1
Hospital after landing at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

He said he along with hundreds of other labourers was "overjoyed" to see the grass and shrubs in the desert in Benghazi after spending six days without any food.

The workers then devoured the grass blades and shrubs.

"I had convinced myself that I would eat sand if I had to for survival," Mohammad Liton told The Daily Star.

"Seeing the grass and shrubs in the desert... seeing something that we could put into our mouth... it was overwhelming," he recalled.

Liton worked at a government construction site at Benghazi with some 1,500 Bangladeshis and 1,000 Egyptians.

After the unrest broke out, the rebel forces looted the food storehouse of the site, leaving the workers without any food or supplies.

"Fortunately, we were able to put away some bread and other dry food before they looted the storehouse," he added.

However, the food they had stored lasted only six days. The hundreds of labourers hiding at the factory spent the next six days without any food.

It was on the 12th day that the rebels finally let the labourers come out of the factory.

"Many of us were barely conscious and had to be dragged around by others," Liton said.

When the labourers asked the rebels where they would go, the soldiers told them to go wherever they wanted including their home countries.

"There was plenty of drinking water in Benghazi, but there was no food," he said, adding, "When we asked the soldiers for food, they fired blank shots to shoo us away."

The labourers split themselves into different groups, each consisting of hundreds of people, and started walking towards unknown destinations.

tions. At this stage, the group Liton was in came across the grass.

"It was the most joyous and beautiful site we saw in weeks," Liton said.

They were picked up by a United Nations team within a few hours.

The labourers spent a few days at a seaside UN camp where food was scarce too.

"Once again there was water, but not enough bread for us. Everyone had to fight for one tiny piece of bread," Liton said.

There were hundreds of workers who could not get hold of one loaf of bread for an entire day or two, he added.

After spending three days at the UN camp, Liton was taken to Cairo. Some 600 labourers took a flight from Cairo to Dhaka yesterday.

For the first time in 29 days, Liton had his first square meal on the plane.

"I did not think I would survive, I thought I'd die from starvation," he said.

Parveen Begum, Liton's wife, thanked the almighty to see her husband alive.

Liton was a fish trader at Ashkana Bazar in Dhaka. He went to Libya 18 months ago to earn a promised salary worth Tk 25,000 per month from a construction company.

However, he received Tk 7,000 per month and had to return home without five months' pay.

"I had a cell phone when I was hiding in that construction site, but it did not have any reception," Liton told The Daily Star.

As he hung between life and death, all Liton could think of was the faces of his mother, wife, two sons and a daughter.

It was on the 12th day of his hiding when he had reception for a minute or two. That was when Liton called his wife Parveen Begum.

He broke down in tears and asked her to pray for him.

Seventeen days later, Parveen was standing by her husband.

Militants kill eight Shiite Muslims in Pakistan

AFP, Peshawar

Militants opened fire on a passenger van in a lawless northwestern Pakistani town yesterday, killing at least eight Shiite Muslims and wounding seven others, police said.

The incident took place in Hangu district, 150 kilometres southwest of Peshawar, the capital of insurgency-hit Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa province.

"Militants intercepted a passenger van at Mamoo Khwar village in Hangu district and opened fire, killing eight passengers and wounding seven others," senior local police official Abdul Rashid told AFP.

He said, "It seems to be a sectarian incident, as all those killed in the firing were Shiite Muslims."

He said that the militants, who numbered six, fled the scene but police later launched an operation in the area and killed three rebels.

"A search operation has already been launched to arrest the remaining ones," he said.

Police spokesman Fazal Naeem also confirmed the incident and casualties in Hangu, a town that regularly suffers from sectarian violence and a Taliban-linked insurgency.

Pakistan's northwest and tribal areas have been wracked by violence since hundreds of Taliban and Al-Qaeda fighters sought refuge there after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

The government has claimed a number of military successes against the Islamist hardliners during the last two years, but attacks continue across the country and are concentrated in the northwest.

ACC gets

FROM PAGE 1
Badiuzzaman Khan and former district judge Shahabuddin -- are known to be loyal to the ruling Awami League.

ACC sources said they received a gazette notification yesterday regarding the appointments.

"The appointment process was not transparent," said Prof Muzaffer Ahmad, a member of Transparency International Bangladesh Trustee Board.

Advertisements should have been run in the newspapers before appointing the commissioners, he added.

The government published the gazette notification when anybody hardly knew how the appointments have been made.

The ACC is comprised of a chairman and two commissioners. According to the ACC law, a five-member committee, comprised of an appellate division justice, a High Court judge, comptroller and auditor general, public service commission chairman and retired cabinet secretary, is supposed to select at least two persons against each vacant post of commissioners.

The president will then choose one from the two for each post.

The previous commissioners, Habibur Rahman and Abul Hasan Manzoor Mannan, completed their four-year tenure on February 25.

The appointment procedure including the formation of the committee to select a list of nominees was completed only in ten days.

Until the appointment, nothing could be known either about the list of nominees or the proceedings of the government-formed committee.

Badiuzzaman Khan also served as director general of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during the tenure of Awami League government in 1996-2001. During the same period, Shahabuddin worked as a director at the PMO under Badiuzzaman.

ACC Chairman Gulam Rahman said, "I hope the drive against corruption would get strengthened with the help of the newly appointed commissioners."

Japan toll to exceed 10,000

FROM PAGE 1
rescuers and aid. At least 1.4 million households had gone without water since the quake struck and some 2.5 million households were without electricity.

Trade Minister Banri Kaeda said the region was likely to face further blackouts and that power would be rationed to ensure supplies go to essential needs.

Large areas of the countryside remained surrounded by water and unreachable. Fuel stations were closed and people were running out of gasoline for their vehicles.

The government said 2,75,000 people have been evacuated to emergency shelters, many of them without power.

In Iwaki town, residents were leaving due to concerns over dwindling food and fuel supplies. The town had no electricity and all stores were closed. Local police took in about 90 people and gave them blankets and rice balls but there was no sign of government or military aid trucks.

At a large refinery on the outskirts of the hard-hit port city of Sendai, 100-foot-high bright orange flames rose in the air, spitting out dark plumes of smoke. The facility has been burning since Friday. A reporter who approached the area could hear the roaring fire from afar, and after a few minutes the gaseous stench began burning the eyes and throat.

In the small town of Tagajo, near Sendai, dazed residents roamed streets cluttered with smashed cars, broken homes and twisted metal.

Residents said the water surged in and quickly rose higher than the first floor of buildings. At Sengen General Hospital the staff worked feverishly to haul bedridden patients up the stairs one at a time. With the halls now dark, those that can leave have gone to the local community centre.

"There is still no water or power, and we've got some very sick people in here," said hospital official Ikuro Matsumoto.

One older neighbourhood sits on low ground near a canal. The tsunami came in from the canal side and blasted through the frail wooden houses, coating the interiors with a thick layer of mud and spilling their contents into the street on

the other side.

"It's been two days, and all I've been given so far is a piece of bread and a rice ball," said Masashi Imai, 56.

Police cars drove slowly through the town and warned residents through loudspeakers to seek higher ground, but most simply stood by and watched them pass.

Dozens of countries have offered assistance. Two U.S. aircraft carrier groups were off Japan's coast and ready to provide assistance. Helicopters were flying from one of the carriers, the USS Ronald Reagan, delivering food and water in Miyagi.

Two other US rescue teams of 72 personnel each and rescue dogs were scheduled to arrive later yesterday, as was a five-dog team from Singapore and a 102-member South Korean team.

In Fukushima prefecture, people said the city of Soma was hardest hit. Rubble was all that remained of one coastal housing district where some 2,000 people lived. Their houses were simply washed away.

No signs of life remained yesterday night, except for the occasional dog searching for its owner. The only lights in town came from the fire engines patrolling the area.

MELTDOWN FEAR
Japan fought yesterday to avert a disastrous meltdown at two earthquake-crippled nuclear reactors.

Officials worked desperately to stop fuel rods in the damaged reactors from overheating after some controlled radiation leaks into the air to relieve pressure.

The government said a building housing a second reactor was at risk of exploding after a blast blew the roof off the first the day before at the complex, 240 km of Tokyo, reports Reuters.

The fear is that if the fuel rods do not cool, they could melt the container that houses the core, or even explode, releasing radioactive material into the wind.

Authorities have set up a 20-km exclusion zone around the Fukushima Daiichi plant and a 10 km zone around another nuclear facility close by. Around 1,40,000 people have been moved from the area, while authorities prepared to distribute iodine to protect people from radioactive exposure.

The nuclear accident, the worst since the Chernobyl

disaster in 1986, sparked stinging criticism that authorities were ill-prepared for such a massive quake and the threat that could pose to the country's nuclear power industry.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano said there might have been a partial meltdown of the fuel rods at the No 1 reactor at Fukushima. Engineers were pumping in seawater, trying to prevent the same happening at the No 3 reactor, he said in apparent acknowledgement they had moved too slowly on Saturday.

"Unlike the No 1 reactor, we ventilated and injected water at an early stage," Edano told a news briefing.

The No 3 reactor uses a mixed-oxide fuel which contains plutonium, but plant operator Tokyo Electric Power (TEPCO) said it did not present unusual problems.

Asked if fuel rods were partially melting in the No. 1 reactor, Edano said: "There is that possibility. We cannot confirm this because it is in the reactor. But we are dealing with it under that assumption."

He said fuel rods may have partially deformed at the No. 3 reactor but a meltdown was unlikely to have occurred.

"The use of seawater means they have run out of options," said David Lochbaum, director of the Union of Concerned Scientists Nuclear Safety Project.

TEPCO said radiation levels around the Fukushima Daiichi plant had risen above the safety limit but that it did not mean an "immediate threat" to human health.

Edano said there was a risk of an explosion at the building housing the No. 3 reactor, but that it was unlikely to affect the reactor core container.

The wind over the plant would continue blowing from the south, which could affect residents north of the facility, an official at Japan's Meteorological Agency said.

The disaster prompted an angry response from an anti-nuclear energy NGO in Japan which said it should have been foreseen.

"A nuclear disaster which the promoters of nuclear power in Japan said wouldn't happen is in progress," the Citizens' Nuclear Information Centre said. "It is occurring as a result of an earthquake that they said would not happen."

Listen to 80 lakh owners

FROM PAGE 20
roundtable on "Microcredit and Poverty Alleviation" organised by leading Bangla daily Prothom Alo at its office in the capital.

The comments came days after the government removed Prof Muhammad Yunus from Grameen Bank - a move considered by many as a plot to take control of the country's most prestigious organisation.

The economist said there are many misgivings about the concept of microcredit, and the notion that microcredit is supposed to alleviate poverty is pointless.

He mentioned the government spends 30 to 40 percent of its annual development budget for poverty alleviation and said, "You can easily measure the government's investment in the area in the last 20 to 30 years and the reduction in poverty. Then you will reach a conclusion for who is responsible for what."

"In this circumstance, we are now caught in a totally ridiculous discussion. What you have to do is to put it into perspective."

Sobhan said microcredit creates opportunity for people to get out of extreme poverty.

"The lesson should be what would be our direction from here. This is a 30-year-old sector and a lot of significant changes have taken place."

Sobhan said the great contribution of Grameen Bank is that it recognises the ownership of its shareholders.

"The government contributed Tk 1.8 crore out of Tk 53 crore of capitalisation of an organisation, and now claims to be the supreme

owner of the organisation," he said.

Former Bangladesh Bank governor Salehuddin Ahmed said there has been a microcredit boom in Bangladesh, as the poor did not have any access to finance.

"Many programmes and projects were taken to help the poor in the past, but nothing worked."

"The sector is very disciplined and everyone should think what would have happened if microcredit had not existed. Its impact can only be felt but can not be measured easily by index," he said.

SR Osmani, professor of economics at the University of Ulster, said the ongoing discussion on microcredit in the media is misleading.

"They talk about high interest rates. But they never consider that commercial banks do not want to lend money to the poor and will not be able to do so even if they want to."

"It will be pointless to compare interest rates between microfinance institutions and commercial banks."

Osmani countered the claim that microcredit borrowers have been continuing loans for years and said, "The same happens in the formal sector, where entrepreneurs continue bank loans as long as they are alive. Then, why is this double standard?"

He came down hard on the critics of the concept of microcredit, who say it could not eradicate poverty despite being in practice for three decades in Bangladesh.

"The politicians have been spending thousands of

crores of taka for years in the name of poverty alleviation. But we do not see any reduction in the poverty level."

Referring to studies between 1988 and 2008, Osmani said, "Those who participated in microcredit programmes were better off than those who were not involved in any microfinance institutions."

MM Akash, professor of economics at Dhaka University, said the spectrum of interest rates in the sector creates suspicion. If one microfinance institution, such as Grameen, charges 10 percent flat rate, others charge 15 to 20 percent.

"Microcredit Regulatory Authority needs to regulate this."

The economist said differential treatment of microfinance institutions has made a mess in the sector that needs to be cleared.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former adviser to a caretaker government, said Grameen Bank has been unfairly put in the dock on various grounds.

"We see a major danger in this, as many of our microcredit-related achievements such as girls' enrolment in schools will be questioned," he said.

Binayak Sen, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the government spends Tk 27,000 crore for poverty alleviation every year.

"This has been going on for years. But we do not see any dramatic change in poverty alleviation," he said.

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman also spoke at the roundtable.

Yunus

FROM PAGE 20
about the creeping politicisation of development work and civil society in Bangladesh.

In a joint statement in London issued on March 11, Avebury and some British MPs and academics said the microcredit approach to poverty reduction pioneered by Prof Yunus is an important innovation in the fight against poverty.

There are 8 million women borrowers in Bangladesh and the basic idea of microcredit has been copied by many other public and private agencies across the world, Avebury said.

"At the same time, advocates of microcredit have sometimes made exaggerated claims about its efficacy, and in some countries the sector itself has been poorly regulated," he said.

He, however, said the government's decision to take action against Yunus now appears to be motivated more by a desire to gain short term political capital by cashing in on a current global microfinance media backlash, than by evidence of any wrongdoing.

"No substantive reasons have been given for the sacking, nor has there been an opportunity for Professor Yunus to answer any criticisms of his performance as managing director," he said.

"It looks as though the government is punishing him for attempting to form a new political party in 2007 that could have challenged the existing two party system, rather than for proof of any wrongdoing," he said in the statement.

The statement is also supported and consented by Peter Bottomley MP, Charles Tannock MEP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Prof Geoff Wood and Dr Joe Devine of Bath University, Prof David Lewis of London School of Economics, Maggie Bowden, general secretary, Liberation (human rights organisation), and Sadat Sayeed, barrister at Garden Court Chambers, Lincoln's Inn.

Pirates shoot

FROM PAGE 20
Jagannath Jaladas, 35, Ram Prasad Jaladas, 28, Abu Naser, 28, Krishna Jaladas, 30 and Hari Jaladash, 35.

Of them, Amir received a bullet and was rushed to Hatiya Upazila Health complex. Later, he was transferred to Noakhali General Hospital.

A group of 30 fishermen reached Dardona Ghat of Burirchar around 7:00am, with their trawlers full of fresh catch when a gang of pirates raided their vessels and fired shots at them, Amir said.

The fishermen tried to save themselves by jumping into the river but the pirates started hitting at the ones who were staying afloat.

Subhas Chandra Pal officer-in-charge of Hatiya Police Station, said they informed the coast guards for immediate arrest of the pirates.

HC rule

FROM PAGE 20
On March 6, the same bench of Justice Md Shamsul Huda Manik and Justice Abu Bakar Siddique granted bail to them, Deputy Attorney General Zahid Sarwar Kjal told The Daily Star.

The HC also directed the Natore superintendent of police to enquire into an allegation that after being released from jail the accused issued threats to the plaintiff of the murder case, and asked to submit a report within two weeks.