

Asean summit starts

Leaders call for lifting of Myanmar sanctions

AFP, Phnom Penh

Southeast Asian leaders yesterday met for an annual summit dominated by Myanmar's historic reforms, North Korea's planned rocket launch and strategic maritime disputes with China. Leaders of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) convened in the Cambodian capital two days after by-elections in Myanmar. The leaders called for Western sanctions against Myanmar to be lifted after its historic polls. The call came amid international praise for Myanmar's by-elections on Sunday which gave democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel laureate and former political prisoner, a seat in parliament for the first time.

The veteran dissident's National League for Democracy stormed to victory in 43 of the 44 constituencies where it fielded candidates in Sunday's polls, according to an election commission announcement on state television.

Leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) "call for the lifting of all sanctions on Myanmar", Cambodian Secretary of State Kao Kim Houn told reporters on the sidelines of the bloc's summit in Phnom Penh. "The lifting of sanctions would contribute positively to the democratic process and especially economic



CAMBODIA 2012

development of Myanmar," he said, quoting leaders inside the meeting room. Myanmar President Thein Sein told reporters the polls were "held successfully", in his first public remarks on the vote. Kao said the former general, who has overseen a series of dramatic reforms since taking office a year ago, told his counterparts inside the meeting room that he accepted the result. Election monitors from Cambodia, which holds Asean's chair in 2012, have already declared the polls free and fair, and said sanctions imposed over the Myanmar military's long

record of rights abuses should be lifted. Asean secretary-general Surin Pitsuwan on Monday said the vote should contribute to the "reintegration of Myanmar into the global community". The by-elections are the latest sign that Myanmar's military is genuine about loosening its grip on power after four decades of brutal rule which made the country a diplomatic pariah and economic backwater. Over the past 12 months the country's quasi-civilian government has freed hundreds of political prisoners, eased media restrictions and welcomed the opposition back into politics. At the last Asean summit in November, Myanmar was rewarded for its reforms by being promised the bloc's chairmanship in 2014.

India hails Myanmar poll results

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday congratulated Myanmar pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi on her landslide election victory, and hailed the polls as a "major milestone" towards full-fledged democracy. Once an outspoken supporter of Suu Kyi, India began engaging the Myanmar junta in the mid-1990s on security and energy issues and as a counter to China's growing strategic influence. The move drew international criticism, particularly from the United States, but India has pointed to recent reforms, as well as the weekend by-elections, as evidence that its engagement policy was more fruitful than sanctions. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is expected to visit Myanmar next month, the first Indian premier to do so for 25 years.

US offers \$10m bounty for LeT founder

STAR REPORT



Hafiz Mohammad Saeed

The United States has offered a \$10 million reward for the capture of the founder of the Pakistan-based Islamist militant group blamed for the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai. The bounty for Hafiz Mohammad Saeed, the founder of Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) who makes frequent public appearances in Pakistan, was announced by US Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman in India on Monday and posted on the US government's Rewards for Justice website, our correspondent from New Delhi said. The only higher reward currently offered by the US government is the \$25 million for al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. Washington also posted a \$3 million reward for Hafiz Abdul Rahman Makki, described as LeT's second-in-command. The move triggered an angry reply from the LeT founder. "We are not hiding in caves for bounties to be set on finding us. I think the US is frustrated because we are taking out countrywide pro-

tests against the resumption of Nato supplies and drone strikes," he was quoted as saying by Al-Jazeera news channel. He added, "I believe either the US has very little knowledge and is basing its decisions on wrong information being provided by India or they are just frustrated". Saeed is head of the banned charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa, seen as a front for LeT. The Rewards for Justice notice said Saeed was "suspected of masterminding numerous terrorist attacks, including the 2008 Mumbai attacks, which resulted in the deaths of 166 people, including six American citizens". The government in New Delhi welcomed the announcement, saying it reflected the commitment of India and the United States to bring the perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice. "It also sends a strong signal to LeT, as also its members and patrons, that the international community remains united in combating terrorism," the Indian foreign ministry said in a statement.

World Bank chief backs BRICS bank idea

AFP, Boao

Outgoing World Bank president Robert Zoellick yesterday gave his backing to a new development bank proposed by the leaders of the BRICS emerging countries. Zoellick said the World Bank would be prepared to work with the new financial institution, which was discussed by the leaders of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa when they met in New Delhi last week. While the plans are still in their preliminary stages, such a bank is seen as a potential counterweight to other multilateral lenders such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. "As a general principle if the BRICS countries want to develop it we would work with it," Zoellick told the Boao Forum in southern China, according to a transcript posted on the meeting's website. "We work with the regional development banks, and I have created a series of partnerships with these banks that are likely to be similar to the BRICS bank in that it will probably be more of a financing vehicle than a knowledge and experience vehicle." Last week's BRICS summit was the fourth since the bloc was formed in 2009. South Africa joined in 2010 and the five members now account for roughly 18 percent of the world's GDP, 40 percent of its population, 15 percent of global trade and hold 40 percent of global currency reserves.

MLA ABDUCTION Maoists set deadline for Odisha govt

IANS, Bhubaneswar

Maoists holding ruling Biju Janata Dal lawmaker Jhina Hikaka for the past 10 days in Odisha yesterday gave an April 5 deadline to the state government to fulfill their demands. This was conveyed through an audio message from a rebel leader who named himself 'Chandramouli'. Accusing the government of arresting several activists of Chasi Mulia Adivasi Sangh on false charges in Koraput and Malkangiri districts, the rebel leader asked the government to release all the people. Rejecting any negotiation on the matter, he said "We are giving the government April 5 deadline." The rebel leader however did not name the people whose release his group is demanding.

Malaysia endorses electoral overhaul

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia's parliament yesterday endorsed a raft of electoral reforms demanded in a mass rally last year, but protest leaders said the measures were not enough to stamp out fraud at the polls. The reforms were proposed by a parliamentary panel set up in October by Prime Minister Najib Razak, who came under pressure after police crushed the July rally by tens of thousands of demonstrators in the capital Kuala Lumpur. The panel's final report tabled in parliament made 22 recommendations including independence for the country's Election Commission (EC) and mainstream media access for the political opposition. "The panel suggests that all the recommendations in this report be considered to improve the electoral process and strengthen the EC to guarantee free and fair elections," the report said. It also called for a clean-up of the electoral roll amid reports of widespread irregularities such as dozens of voters registered at a single address. The report was endorsed by parliament, majority-controlled by the ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, obliging the government to implement the suggestions. However, electoral reform group Bersih 2.0, which organised the rally, said it was "disappointed" that several key issues were not dealt with in depth. Among the group's demands are a minimum three-week campaign period and automatic voter registration.

MUMBAI ATTACKS India to hand over documents to Pakistan

DAWN ONLINE

India will soon provide documents about Mumbai attacks to Pakistan, which will contain Ajmal Kasab's testimony, DawnNews reported. According to media report, the documents about Mumbai attacks are drafted on 700 pages, in which autopsy report of those people who were killed in attack is also included. Indian media also claimed that the aforementioned document includes the case diary of attacks. The Judicial Commission of Pakistan had also examined the document during the tour of India.

8 new banks

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be held today with its Governor Atiur Rahman in the chair where proposals for 16 short-listed new banks will be placed. A BB bank official said there is tremendous pressure from the government high ups to approve nine new banks. However, the central bank board may consider a maximum of five proposals. The five proposed banks are at the top of the list made by the central bank's scrutiny committee, said another BB official preferring not to be named. Besides, the government high-ups have been putting pressure on the BB for approving Chartered Bank Ltd, Meghna Bank Ltd, Kotak Bangla Bank Ltd, People's Islami Bank Ltd and Federal Bank Ltd. The central bank eventually gave in to "political pressure" and sought applications for new banks in September, receiving 37 applications till November 30 last year. The BB board then unofficially decided not to approve more than three banks, the BB officials said. A member of the central bank board told The Daily Star that several board members are against approving many new banks in the backdrop of the present economic situation and liquidity position in the existing banks. Some board members may not attend today's meeting as they do not want to remain involved with the process of approving new banks, he said. Earlier, there was a possibility of approving new banks in the board meeting held on March 15. A board member remained absent from the meeting as he was not in favour of allowing more new banks, he added. At present 47 public, private and foreign banks are already in operation in the country.

NEWS IN brief

Last heir of the Ottoman dynasty dies

AFP, Istanbul

Neslihan Sultan, last in line to the dynasty that once ruled the Ottoman empire, has died at the age of 91. Once known as Imperial Princess of the Ottoman Empire and Princess of Egypt, Sultan was the granddaughter of the last Ottoman sultan, Mehmed VI. She died on Monday and was to be buried yesterday in the former Ottoman capital after a religious ceremony. She was the last member of the Ottoman dynasty to be born before the empire was disbanded in 1922 in the wake of World War I and modern Turkey created in its place by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. After the death in 2009 of Ertugrul Osman Osmanoglu, the last pretender to the Ottoman throne, she took the title of "last in line to the Osmanogullari family", the Ottoman dynasty.

Iran suspends Reuters 'indefinitely'

AFP, Tehran

The Tehran bureau of international news agency Reuters has been "suspended indefinitely" because of a report it did mischaracterising Iranian female ninjas as "terrorists," authorities said on Monday. The head of the department in the culture and Islamic guidance ministry that monitors foreign media in Iran, Mohammad Javad Aghajari, announced the decision in a statement published by the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). Reuters said last week the report went out with the headline "Thousands of female Ninjas train as Iran's assassins" but, after complaints were received from Iran, it was changed to "Three thousand women Ninjas train in Iran".

FARC rebels free 10 hostages

AFP, Villavicencio

Colombia's leftist FARC rebels on Monday released the last 10 police officers and soldiers they were holding hostage, but the country's president said the move was "insufficient." The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Latin America's last major insurgent movement, made good on a February pledge to release the hostages, all held for 12 to 14 years in the country's dense jungle. The 10 men, visibly weary but smiling, emerged from a Brazilian air force helicopter at the airport in Villavicencio, the capital of Meta department located some 110 kilometers south of the capital Bogota. The Colombian military has suspended all operations in the area ahead of the release.

Controversial Saudi system to go

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would ultimately lead to nullification of the present system. The decades-old system has long been deplored for placing workers at the mercy of their employers. Under this system, employers usually take

employees' passports when they enter the country and even deport them if any dispute arises, according to Saudi rights body National Society for Human Rights (NSHR). The employers sometimes use possession of the employees' travel documents to

extort a hefty fee for renewal or transfer of residency permits and even for allowing them to go back home on vacation, added NSHR. After completing a five-year study, the Saudi labour ministry has proposed formation of the commission to look into the foreign labour issues and put an end to the traditional sponsorship system, stated the report.

transfer of workers from one company to another. Besides, an employer would not be held responsible for any wrong action of his employee outside the work. The labour issue is significant for Bangladesh as about two million Bangladeshis have been working in the oil-rich country. Officials at the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment ministry said the new recruitment policy will help protect better the rights of foreign workers in the Arab land. Contacted, Kazi Abul Kalam, deputy secretary at the ministry, said the move by the Saudi authorities apparently seems very positive. "Once we learn the details of the proposal, we can make comments."

Crisis turns acute

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of Gulshan are the worst sufferers as many of them have not got even a drop of water since the last week of February.

Anwarul Hossain Khan Choudhury, former lawmaker and a resident of Road-116 in Gulshan, said the condition is so bad that inhabitants of the area buy bottled water for drinking and cooking and take a bath once a week or fortnight. The situation is even more pathetic in Shekhertek of Mohammadpur. Amin Chowdhury, a resident of Shekhertek Road-4, has been unable to have a bath or shower for the last 22 days due to the water crisis in the area. "I have skin disease on my head and other parts of my body now," an angry Amin told The Daily Star on Friday. "What we are doing is just rubbing our bodies with wet towels," he said. Another resident of the area, Asgar Ali, said the water crisis took a turn for the worse over the last one and a half months. The crisis has hit around 100 homes on the road. "We have been purchasing water from Wasa's lorries every other day," he said. Against this backdrop, Wasa has been claiming that it is doing everything to solve the water crisis in the summer. Wasa officials said the water crisis was not so acute

this year compared to previous years as they had taken necessary measures early on. The water supply will improve significantly in the summer, they claimed. City dwellers are not convinced. They said if the situation was like this even before summer, what would happen in the scorching heat of summer?

The water crisis took a turn for the worse in Tejgunipara of Tejgaon in the last few weeks. The residents of the area even blocked a street near Bijoy Sarani intersection for two-and-a-half hours on March 26. Taqsem Khan, Managing Director of Wasa, claimed that only one or two percent of the pumps of Wasa, among the 606, were having problems for which some residents had been facing the crisis. He said on Friday that Wasa had been working to set up a pump on Road 41 in Gulshan, which would be completed within a week and setting up of another pump on Road-123 was also going on. He said with the two pumps up and running, the crisis in Gulshan would be over. Taqsem said the water crisis in Shekhertek was also due to pump issues and those concerned were working to fix the problem.

The study would soon be placed before the Saudi council of ministers for approval. The study has proposed introduction of a mandatory insurance scheme to protect financial rights of expatriate workers and employees. The scheme would cover any damages caused by a foreign worker, payment of unpaid salaries and expenses of air tickets. The recruitment companies will take necessary measures for hiring workers and will arrange return trips to their native countries, if they wanted so. The recruiters will also manage the

Biman staff threaten

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The strike will also have a negative impact on the activities of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, as Biman's staffs take care of the ground handling services of the airport, said Biman officials. During the strike, all administrative activities of Biman will be come to a halt and no flight of the national flag carrier will take off from 6:00am of April 16, said the demonstrators. They also threatened to go on an indefinite strike if their demands were not met after the 48-hour strike. The announcements came at a rally that was held following a sit-in by several hundred agitated officials and employees of the national flag carrier's head office at Balaka Bhaban at Kurmitola from 11:15am to 1:30pm. Under the banner of "Biman Bachao Oikya Parishad," seven trade unions of Biman demanded that Biman's Chairman and members of Biman's board of directors resign immediately taking liability of what they

claimed as Tk 1,000 crore loss that the national flag carrier incurred due to inefficiency of the current board. Police were deployed around Balaka Bhaban to ward off any untoward incident. During the demonstration, agitated Biman employees also locked the office room of Biman's Chairman Air Marshal (retd) Jamal Uddin Ahmed. The rally was addressed by the presidents of Bangladesh Airlines Pilots' Association (BAPA), Biman Officers' Association, Society of Aircraft Engineers' Association, Biman Cabin Crew Association, Biman Employees Union Association and the convener of Biman Bachao Oikya Parishad to press home the demand. Since the demonstration began on March 5, the chairman and other members stopped coming to Balaka Bhaban. Earlier on March 21, the Biman staff staged a sit-in and threatened to go for an indefinite strike if their demand was not met by March 26.

Vacancy Announcement



UNDP
Bangladesh

United Nations Development Programme in Bangladesh announces the vacancy for the post of Project Officer for the Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission - Capacity Development Project. The Project Duration is until April 2015.

The duration of the Service Contract is one year initially, subject to renewal on an annual basis upon satisfactory performance and availability of funds

For details of the Terms of Reference and instructions to apply, please visit our website: <http://www.undp.org.bd/jobs>. Applications should be received no later than 17:00 pm, 18 April 2012.

**Only short-listed candidates will be contacted.
Female candidates are encouraged to apply.**