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NEW AGE National

Smaller SAARC issues first, bigger issues later: Muhith

Support packages only for the rich, not the poor, complains Menon

Staff Correspondent

The finance minister, parliamentarians and economists at the South Asian regional conference on Tuesday stressed the need for greater cooperation between the SAARC countries, at least on the smaller issues, to pave the way for resolving the bigger ones.

'Issues like regional common currency, customs union, connectivity and visa are big and difficult,' said finance minister AMA Muhith while inaugurating the two-day conference at the Spectra Convention Centre.

'We can start with something smaller,' he added. 'We should focus on the activities of the regional bodies concerned with agriculture, water resources and transportation.'

Muhith said these bodies can accelerate and enlarge regional cooperation amidst the prevailing political mistrust.

The two-day conference titled 'Regional Conference on Inclusive Development and Climate Justice in South Asia', was organised by the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad.

The conference is being attended by delegates from India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bhutan. Rashed Khan Menon MP and BUP chairman Dr Qazi Kholiquz-zaman Ahmad also addressed the inaugural session and expressed similar views. They underlined the need to remove the mistrust which is blocking regional socio-cultural and economic development.

Rashed Khan Menon, chief of the leftwing Workers Party and also chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on the education ministry, said that unfortunately there is widespread mutual mistrust among the South Asian countries.

He pointed out that a dangerous phenomenon like militancy in Afghanistan and Pakistan would also affect other countries of the region due to lack of cooperation.

Referring to climate change and its adverse effects, Menon said poor countries like Bangladesh are not responsible for global warming but they are paying the penalty.

He criticised the World Bank for dictating the ways of utilising the funds which are coming from the developed countries to mitigate the impact of climate change.

'They (the multinational lenders) do not let us utilise the

funds according to our requirements,' he complained.

Menon also stressed the need for tackling the problems faced by the common people while considering any sort of regional cooperation. He said the preparation process of the next fiscal budget is not indicative of a participatory budget.

'We could not yet reach the general people and they still remain outside the budget,' he said.

Though the common folk are the worst sufferers of the global recession, he said, the government was preparing support packages for the only the businessmen and industrialists.

CAG asked to audit JS accounts, expenditure since 1972

Staff correspondent

Speaker Abdul Hamid on Tuesday asked comptroller and auditor-general Ataul Hakim to audit the accounts and expenditure of the parliament since 1972. It is the first time in the country's history that this will be done.

He also asked the CAG to strictly follow the laws and rules concerned while auditing the accounts and expenditure of the parliament and other government offices.

The speaker also asked the CAG to ease the process of granting pensions to retired officials and employees.

This was done when the CAG called on the speaker at the latter's invitation.

The speaker made this move after the lawmakers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led opposition demanded that the activities of all speakers since 1972 be investigated.

The opposition lawmakers placed the demand in the House after the speaker on March 19 constituted an 11-member parliamentary committee to investigate the alleged corruption, irregularities, abuse of power and wastage of public money by the immediate-past speaker, Jamir Uddin Sircar.

Hamid also included his tenure as the speaker of the seventh parliament in the purview of the committee. He was speaker of the seventh parliament from July 12 to October 28, 2001.

The probe committee on Monday also decided to probe the allegations of corruption by former chief whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain and former deputy speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, both of whom are leading BNP members.

The parliamentary probe body was asked to submit its report to the parliament within a month. The findings of the audit report will also be placed in the House.

Matia warns private growers against producing substandard seeds

Staff Correspondent

The agriculture minister, Matia Chowdhury has warned of the government intervention if the private sector seed producers provide substandard seed to the farmers.

'The private sector seed producers and importers should

be more careful about the supply of seeds so that the farmers are not cheated buying them', the minister said while speaking as chief guest at a day-long workshop on Tuesday on the vegetable seed scenario in Bangladesh and its technology at the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council.

The seed companies will have to bear the responsibility in case of any damage to the crops because of substandard seed, the agriculture minister cautioned.

The executive chairman of BARC, Khabir Ahmed chaired the session while principal scientific officer of Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute, M A Rshid presented the keynote paper at the inaugural session of the workshop.

Criticising the role of the previous governments, the agriculture minister said the immediate past political and interim governments had no control over the development of agriculture sector during the past seven years.

But the present government is committed not only to providing cooperation to the farmers but also to taking stern actions to end all types of harassments and frauds against the farmers.

The minister, however, claimed that the private sector seed companies spent a huge amount of money for their advertisement but little for research and technology, adding that even the private sector seed companies did not have laboratories and scientists.

Matia Chowdhury urged the agriculturists to introduce the zoning system in the high land in different districts across the

country so that it could be brought under vegetable cultivation to meet the people's demand for vegetables.

At present the country's annual vegetable production stands at only 2.50 million tonnes while per day consumption by a person is only 45 grams against the recommended consumption of almost 220 grams per day, said M A Rashid in his keynote paper.

According to the recommendations, the country needs to increase the production to 11million tonnes.

Short supply of good-quality seeds of improved varieties, nutrient deficiencies, inadequate irrigation facilities, vulnerability to pests and diseases, unplanned production, weak marketing system and slow technology transfers have been identified as the main obstacles in vegetable production in the country, the keynote paper mentioned.

Regarding the importance of vegetables, the keynote paper said that vegetables were affordable food, rich in vitamins, minerals and fibres which are essential for human health, adding that vegetables are protective food and can prevent many diseases and ailments like dislipidemia, cardiac diseases, diabetes and constipation.

In Bangladesh, the per capita consumption of vegetable is only 45 grams per day while it is 258 grams in Thailand, 229 grams in India, 292 grams in China, 433 grams in Japan and 684 grams in Korea, it added.

ECNEC okays three projects of Tk 291cr

Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha . Dhaka

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council on Tuesday approved three development projects with an outlay of about Tk 291 crore.

For two of the projects, Tk 237 crore will come from Japanese Debt Cancellation Fund, said an official handout.

The approval was given at an ECNEC meeting held in the NEC conference room with the prime minister and ECNEC chairperson, Sheikh Hasina, in the chair.

The approved projects are: Strengthening Bangladesh Prisons Department through Procurement of Modern Equipment and Construction of Related Structure Project under the home ministry, Diesel Generator Procurement for Water Pumps of Dhaka City Project under the Local Government Division and Climate Victims Rehabilitation Project under the land ministry.

Finance minister and alternate chairperson of the ECNEC Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, planning minister AK Khandoker, agriculture minister Matia Chowdhury, home minister Sahara Khatun, land minister Rezaul Karim Hira, water resources minister Ramesh Chandra Sen, commerce minister Faruq Khan, communications minister Syed Abul Hossain, shipping minister Afsarul Amin, and advisers to the prime minister HT Imam, Mashiur Rahman, Dr Modasser Ali, Alauddin Ahmed and Toufiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury attended the meeting.

Cabinet secretary, prime minister's principal secretary, planning secretary, members of the planning commission, secretaries of the ministries and senior officials concerned were present.

Three killed as trawler capsizes at Babujanj

Our Correspondent . Barisal

At least three women were killed as a trawler, on board about 30 people, capsized near the Rahmatpur landing point in the River Sugandha at Babujanj in Barisal when thunderstorm lashed different parts of the south from Tuesday afternoon till well into the night.

Power supply and communications had been suspended in many places for about six hours during and after the thunderstorm.

The trawler, which was ferrying people from the Bakultala landing point at Dehergati to the Rahmatpur landing point at Babujanj, capsized at about 7:00pm.

The upazila nirbahi officer, Shah Riaz, and the Babujanj police officer-in-charge, Iqbal Bahar Chowdhury, said there were 30 people on board the trawler and a half of them had gone missing.

Local sources said a Tabligh Jamaat team of women was on board the trawler and it was overloaded.

The Dehergati union parishad chairman, Ataur Rahman Badal, who was on board the trawler and survived the incident, said local people and fishermen had rescued 15, including him. Three women were recovered dead till 9:30pm.

Atia, 4, niece of former BNP lawmaker Syed Moazzam Hossain Alal, also a central Juba Dal secretary, and Alal's

sister Nasima, Atia's mother and Tabligh Jamaat activist, were rescued in a critical condition, the family said.

Fire service team from Wazirpur with divers reached the place for rescue operation.

Bandits loot bus passengers in N'ganj

United News of Bangladesh . Narayanganj

Bandits looted cash about Tk 10 lakh and valuables from the passengers of a bus near Daudkandi Bridge of Sonargaon in Narayanganj early Tuesday.

The police said five bandits in the guise of passengers boarded the Dhaka-bound bus from Chittagong shortly after midnight.

'As soon as the bus crossed the Daudkandi Bridge, the thugs attacked the passengers and took control of it at gunpoint,' said a passenger.

He said the robbers looted cash about Tk 10 lakh, 35 tolas of gold ornaments, 22 mobile phone sets and other valuables.

They disappeared with the booty in Langalband area. A case was filed.

New student immigration system in UK begins

Staff Correspondent

The new visa application procedure for international students to study in the United Kingdom under Tier 4 of the streamlined points-based system began on Tuesday.

The global system is fairer for applicants because it uses transparent and objective criteria, said a British high commission release.

It said, 'Under the new system, international students need to pass a points-based assessment and score 40. They will need 30 points to prove that they have been accepted onto a course run by an education institution which is a UK Border Agency-licensed Tier 4 sponsor, and 10 points to prove that they have the means pay the course fees and to support themselves. They will also supply their biometric details at their local visa application centre.'

'If granted a visa, the new Tier 4 regulations allow international students to undertake part-time work of up to 20 hours per week during term time, full time work during the holidays and undertake any course-related work placements,' said the release.

Stuart Percival, head of the immigration services at the British high commission in Dhaka said, 'The United Kingdom has a lot to offer international students. Applicants will now be able to see whether they are eligible for a visa before they even apply — making the system much clearer and easier to understand. The aim is to make the application process more transparent and straightforward.'

For the first time, all independent fee-paying schools, colleges and universities that want to accept international students to study with them now need a licence to do so.

The system will help to protect students from exploitation by bogus colleges, something which will be welcome news to many Bangladeshi students, who can now be sure the language school, college or university they intend to study at is an approved educational institution. So far over a thousand UK institutions have signed up to sponsor international students.

Warrants issued for arrest of 3 policemen, six others

Staff Correspondent . Khulna

Senior judicial magistrate's court of Koyra in Khulna on Tuesday issued warrants for arrest of nine people, including three officials of the Koyra police, in a case filed with the court on March 18 by one Iman Ali Sana, a resident of Madinabad of the upazila.

The warrants were issued against officer-in-charge Ali Azam and subinspectors Shahjahan and Abdullah Al Mamun of the Koyra police and Shahanara Khatun, Anisur Rahman, Zahura Khatun, Sultan Sana, Rafiqul Islam and Rezaul Sana, all residents of Madinabad.

Magistrate Abu Zafar Md Kamruzzaman, after hearing in the case, ordered the Khulna superintendent of police to take steps to arrest the police officials, said court sources, adding the court also ordered the police to arrest six others.

According to sources, Iman Ali in his case alleged the Koyra police officer-in-charge and two subinspectors with the help of six others arrested him on March 6 and tortured him in the police station. He was released after he had been forced to sign blank non-judicial stamps so that the possession of his land could be given to his rivals.

National Disability Day today

Staff Correspondent

The 11th National Disability Day will be observed across the country today with the slogan 'collective stride for the development of the disabled people.'

Action on Disability and Development will hold a drama festival with the participation of people with disability and a rally in association with the National Alliance for the Disabled Women at Rabindra Sarobar of Dhanmondi in the Dhaka city at 3:00pm.

The National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled will bring out a procession from the Bangladesh Betar at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and it will end at the department of social services at Agargaon. The forum will also hold a discussion at the department auditorium.

According to the World Health Organisation, around 14 million people of Bangladesh, about 10 per cent of the total population, have various kinds of disability and most of the disabled people belong to the rural areas and poor families.

The ministry of social welfare, the department of social services and the National Foundation for Development of the Disabled Persons are the three apex government bodies catering to the needs of persons with disabilities in areas such as education, employment and rehabilitation.

Apart from the government, approximately 400 non-governmental organisations are working with people with disability.

Despite the existence of these government and non-governmental organisations, disabled people in Bangladesh are still in a vulnerable position.

The government has adopted decisions to create separate ticket counters and reserved seats for people with disabilities in public transports.

Building code in Bangladesh clearly demarcates accessibility options for all people including people with disabilities. But the codes have not been adequately practiced with prescribed standards.

Man gets life for killing wife

Our Correspondent . Sirajganj

A Sirajganj court Tuesday sentenced a man to life-term imprisonment for killing his wife.

The district and session judge, Biplab Goshwami, also fined the convict, Fazlur Rahman, a resident of Goprekhi of Enayetpur in Sirajganj, Tk 10,000 cash, in default, one year rigorous imprisonment.

According to the prosecution, following a family-feud, Fazlur Rahman killed his wife, Sufia Khatoun, 25, at his own house on the night of July 12, 2007.

Later, he tried to prove it to be an incident of suicide. Sufia's brother Sirajul Islam filed a case.

JS passes bills for Barisal, Sylhet metropolitan police

JS bodies recommend mandatory provisions for upazila parishads to take suggestions of lawmakers

Staff correspondent

The parliamentary standing committee on LGRD and cooperatives ministry on Tuesday unanimously recommended passage of the Upazila Parishad Bill, reintroducing a provision which makes mandatory for local government bodies to take suggestions from lawmakers in running their activities.

The committee made the recommendation in its report, submitted by its chairman M Rahmat Ali, on the bill earlier in the day.

The LGRD and cooperatives minister, Syed Ashrafur Islam, placed the bill in the house on February 25, seeking reintroduction of the now-defunct Upazila Parishad Act 1998.

The bill proposed making the lawmakers advisers to upazila parishads in their constituencies.

But the lawmakers, irrespective of the benches, were demanding to get back their authority to supervise all local development activities.

The Upazila Parishad Act 1998 categorically said the parishads will take suggestions of the lawmakers.

The upazila parishad elections were held on January 22 under the Upazila Parishad Ordinance 2008, promulgated by the military-controlled interim government.

The house is likely to pass the bill, which will have

retrospective effect of June 30, 2008, in a week.

The newly elected upazila parishad representatives who took oath about a month ago could not start working in the absence of laws.

The parliamentary standing committee on education ministry on Tuesday recommended passage of a bill for the establishment of a separate affiliating university for the armed Forces.

The committee made the recommendation in its report on the Bangladesh University of Professionals Bill 2009.

The committee chairman, Rashed Khan Menon, placed the report in the house, which is likely to pass the bill in week, having retrospective effect of June 5, 2008.

The parliament on Tuesday unanimously passed two bills — Sylhet Metropolitan Police Bill 2009 and Barisal Metropolitan Bill 2009 — to legalise the installation of metropolitan police authorities in the cities.

The home affairs minister, Sahara Khatun, moved the bills. The house passed the bills by a voice vote.

Several lawmakers of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party-led main opposition proposed some amendments to the bills, but the amendments were rejected by a voice vote.

SC refuses to stay HC bail to Razzaq

Staff Correspondent

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court on Tuesday rejected a petition filed by the government seeking to stay the High Court order that granted anticipatory bail to Jamaat-e-Islami leader, Abdur Razzaq in connection with the BDR rebellion case.

The chamber judge of the Appellate Division, Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman passed the order after hearing the petition filed by the attorney general, Mahbubey Alam.

Moving the petition, the attorney general argued the High Court order should be stayed in the interest of a fair investigation into the BDR rebellion case.

Following the chamber judge's order, the High Court's order on bail to Razzaq, also a lawyer by profession, will remain valid till April 5, Razzaq's counsel, barrister Mainul Hosein also former adviser to the military-controlled interim government told reporters.

On March 29, the High Court vacation bench of Justice Shahidul Islam granted bail to Razzaq till April 5, and asked the government not to arrest or harass him during the period.

The government on March 30 filed a petition with the Appellate Division, seeking the High Court order to be stayed.

Dhaka begins talks with Moscow on nuclear power plants

Staff Correspondent

Dhaka and Moscow on Tuesday began a three-day dialogue

towards signing an agreement for peaceful use of nuclear energy to pave the way for cooperation in setting up nuclear power plants in Bangladesh, officials said.

'We will discuss the possible deal to pave the way for cooperation in this field,' said MM Neazuddin, a joint secretary of the science and ICT ministry, who is leading the Bangladesh side to the talks.

A two-member delegation led by Vladimir Averkeiv, the head of international co-operation of the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation, gave an overview on Russian technology on the first day of talks.

The Russians will be briefed on Bangladesh situation, particularly on the preparation and infrastructure developed so far at the Rooppur nuclear power plant site. The project was originally taken up in 1961. The team is also expected to visit the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Bangladesh considers installation of two medium-sized nuclear power plants by 2017 and opened discussion with countries capable of installing such plants after the Awami League-led alliance government had assumed office in January.

The countries included China, South Korea and France.

'We will try to have at least two nuclear power plants of 1000MW of generation capacity as early as possible,' Neazuddin told New Age adding the country's infrastructural improvement was in progress.

The Russian team also gave a presentation on the Russian technology to the state minister for science and ICT in his office.

On the discussion on a draft of an agreement for peaceful use of nuclear energy between Bangladesh and Russia, the joint secretary said the matter would be referred to higher authorities for their consideration after the preliminary discussion.

Bangladesh so far has agreements on peaceful use of nuclear energy with the United States, China and France. On the second day, the two sides will discuss the cost and financing of the proposed Bangladesh project.

Dhaka is still uncertain about how to finance the nuclear power project as a medium-sized plant would require about \$1.5 billion.

The final decision to set up the power plant will be made after reviewing offers of other countries. The government also had talks with China and South Korea on the matter, and expected more discussions in future.

ADB suggests linking climate change to dev planning

Khawaza Main Uddin

As climate change may pose a major threat to Bangladesh's medium-term growth, the Asian Development Bank has emphasised integration of ways and means of tackling such concerns into economic development plans and activities.

Bangladesh, in view of its geographic location, low deltaic floodplain, and hydrological influence of erratic monsoon rainfall, is being faced by development challenges which are made worse by the climate change.

According to the latest Asian Development Outlook

released on Tuesday, the major climate-induced disasters, such as more frequent floods, cyclones, and storm surges, as well as droughts, are causing loss of lives and damage to property, and are seriously affecting the country's development prospects.

'The damage to infrastructure is particularly costly, as it erodes the productive capacity. It also reduces the security of livelihood assets for the poor,' noted the outlook in a separate chapter titled 'Addressing the Climate Change'.

The key challenges in tackling the effects of climate change are said to be ensuring food and water security, protecting infrastructure, and managing disaster risks. Addressing health insecurity, forced migration, and overall environmental degradation is also recognised as an important issue.

'With climate change looming as a major threat to longer-term growth, tackling such concerns needs to be integrated into economic development plans and activities,' the Bank's country director, Paul J Heytens, told newsmen.

Apart from the rising sea temperature that is likely to make cyclones and storm surges more frequent, the climate change may also cause higher salinity intrusion in coastal areas and riverbank erosion across the country, affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of the poor, said the report.

It may threaten the significant gains made in poverty reduction over the past 20 years, and efforts to reduce poverty will only be sustainable over the longer term if climate change adaptation can be successfully incorporated in the development planning, added the report.

Contractual appointment, transfer continue

Staff Correspondent

Retired major MM Iqbal has been appointed on a contractual basis chairman of the Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation.

The establishment ministry issued a gazette notification to the effect on Tuesday.

Officer on special duty Md Sanwar Ali has been posted as director to the Bridge Authority, Md Akhteruzzaman, who was under a transfer order as member of the Rural Electrification Board, has been made member of the National Housing Authority and Shahjadi Anjumanara, project director of the ADB-funded primary school construction project Phase II, has been transferred to the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation as director.

Abu Naser, director of the Bridge Authority, has been made an officer on special duty.

Language course for women media professionals

Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka Language Club and the Bangladesh

Development Initiative are going to organise an English language course for women in the media in May.

All the participants in the course will be given scholarship amounting half of the course fee, said a release.

The adviser to the Dhaka Language Club, Ali Niamat, will supervise the course and it will be conducted by the Dhaka Language Club founder, Masud A Khan.

Interested persons are requested to contact the organisers by dialling 01911340586 and 01190254663, and sending e-mail to info@dhakalanguageclub.com.

Bangabandhu College students union election held in Gopalganj

Our Correspondent . Gopalganj

The Bangladesh Chhatra League won all but one posts in the Bangabandhu College central students union election in Gopalganj, with Nazrul Islam Hira, the rebel candidate of Chhatra League, elected vice-president on Tuesday.

A total of 19 candidates for 22 posts in the association were elected unopposed as no other student organisations took part in the election.

A total of 2,483 of 5,528 votes were cast in the election. Chhatra League-nominated Al-Hussain Mamun was elected general secretary defeating his nearest candidate Bijan Chandra Roy while Tito Baidya, getting the highest 1,865 votes, defeated his nearest candidate Zahirul Islam and became the assistant general secretary in the election.

Vice-president-elect Nazrul bagged 1,551 votes and defeated Chhatra League candidate Farzana Islam Tani.

Of the elected candidates, eight were elected to different secretarial positions. They are Kazi Towhidur Rahman Litu, Al Mamun Mollah, Ramendra Nath Biswas, Selim Reza, Tarun Mollah, Mahmudul Hassan, Kabita Islam and Niaz Morshed.

Those who were elected to eight assistant secretarial posts are Gazi

Abdus Samad, Jewel Mahmud, Shah Alam Kiron, Pritam Saha, Belal Hossain Khan, Suman Khan, Tahera and Hosne ara Swarna.

Khalequzzaman, Rahamat Ali Sikder and Shah Alam were elected members.

No untoward incident was reported in the election.

Policemen work under risk: IGP

Staff Correspondent

The working condition of the policemen is risky as they often fall victims to road accidents and attacks of criminals, inspector general of police Nur Mohammad said on Tuesday.

The IGP said this while addressing a function on presenting memorabilia to the family members of the policemen, who died in 2008.

Out of the total 21 policemen, 20 died in road accidents and one was killed in a gun attack of the extremists at Bagmara in Rajshahi in 2008. The deceased included: two

sub-inspectors, two assistant sub-inspectors, one head constable and 16 constables.

The IGP presented a crest, a certificate, cash money and a gift packet to each of the families of the deceased policemen at the function held in the Telecom auditorium at the city's Razarbagh police line in the afternoon.

Addressing the function, additional inspector general of police Naba Bikram Kishore Tripura said that each of the families of the deceased policemen, who died while performing duty, got Tk 3 lakh as grant from the police welfare fund.

Talking to the newsmen, the IGP said that they would propose to the government for increasing the amount of grant to Tk 5 lakh.

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