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CPA meet begins today amid opposition boycott

AL rejects association officials' last-ditch efforts

REAZ AHMAD and SHAKHAWAT LITON

The 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference opens in Dhaka today amid a boycott by the main opposition party despite last-ditch efforts by the CPA headquarters to bring it to the grand meet of lawmakers.

The Awami League remained unbending on its decision to skip the October 4-12 conference citing the government's arrogant attitude to the opposition' at an hour-long meeting with the grouping's Executive Committee Chairman Bob Speller, Secretary General Denis Marshall and other officials at Sonargaon Hotel yesterday.

For the first time, the 92-year-old institution is holding the conference without the participation of the host country's opposition. In all 48 previous events, the host nation's opposition leader addressed the conference launch.

Following the meeting with an AL-delegation led by the party's General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Speller said: "We're disappointed as the Awami League has decided not to join the conference."

Putting on a brave face, the Canadian lawmaker said they were hopeful of talks with Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and looked forward to the party's participation.

Speller flew in Dhaka on Thursday with Marshall a day ahead of schedule to persuade the AL into attending the meet.

On the rift between the ruling and opposition parties, which is casting a shadow on the conference, the CPA executive committee chairman said, "We don't care to involve

in your local politics." Earlier, Mahbob Alam, a CPA director, called Hasina's residence on Thursday on Bob and Denis' behalf for an appointment, but her aide advised him to contact Jalil, as Hasina was indisposed.

Briefing newsmen at the AL's Dhannondhi office yesterday afternoon, Jalil said, "We illustrated the reasons for our boycott and spelled it out that it was not possible for us to join the conference."

Jalil admitted that the CPA leaders expressed their willingness to hold talks with Hasina.

"I hope there will be a meeting with our leader within the next couple of days. But that will be a courtesy call. Our leader will explain the same stand that we told them today."

AL leaders Abdus Samad Azad, SAMS Kibria, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Faruq Khan and Asaduzzaman Noor were also present at the meeting with the CPA officials.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, also the president of the 49th CPA conference, held a separate meeting with CPA officials at Sonargaon Hotel in the afternoon. Sircar briefed them on the last moment preparations for the conference.

While coming out of Bob's hotel suite, Sircar told reporters, "I hope they'll (AL) join. I'll put the opposite at the meeting with the CPA officials."

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From left: AL presidium member Abdus Samad Azad, CPA Secretary General Denis Marshall, CPA Executive Committee Chairman Bob Speller, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and AL frontline leader SAMS Kibria after a meeting at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Bush defends decision to attack Iraq

REUTERS, Washington

US President George W. Bush yesterday defended his decision to go to war against Iraq, brushing off doubts from Americans and citing what he said was preliminary evidence from the top CIA weapons hunter that Baghdad had been developing unconventional weapons.

"This administration will deal with gathering dangers where we find them," Bush said, adding that he was not worried about a new CBS News-New York Times poll that said 53 percent of Americans doubted whether the Iraq war was worth the cost.

A day after the US team led by CIA adviser David Kay reported it had found no biological or chemical weapons, Kay said after briefing lawmakers behind closed

No WMDs found in Iraq: Kay report

AP, Washington

The initial report of US weapons hunter David Kay says he found no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq but possible evidence of covert programmes to make them.

Kay insisted he needed another six months to nine months of searching before he would feel confident enough to issue any conclusions about Iraq's weapons programmes. The Bush administration is asking for \$600 million to continue the search, according to congressional officials.

"We have not found at this point actual weapons," Kay said after briefing lawmakers behind closed

doors. "It does not mean we've concluded there are no actual weapons."

In a statement to several congressional committees Thursday, he only made one strong finding, that the regime of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was actively developing missiles that exceeded range limits imposed by the United Nations.

"In addition to intent, we have found a large body of continuing activities and equipment that were not declared to the UN inspectors when they returned in November of last year," Kay said.

Taken together, Kay's findings do



David Kay

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Petrobangla getting go-ahead for 5 self-funded gas projects

SHARIER KHAN

Responding to repeated pleas, the government is finally allowing Petrobangla to undertake five self-funded gas projects.

Petrobangla that earns more than Tk 2,000 crore a year but submits its earnings to the national exchequer was urging the government to allow it to invest in its own projects.

The original organisational structure of the state-owned corporation allows it to retain 20 per cent of its earnings for its own development.

In practice, Petrobangla projects are funded as part of the Annual

Development Programme of the government, but they do not get priority among hundreds of other plans processed by the Planning Commission.

Dozens of Petrobangla projects have been pending with the Planning Commission for years because of bureaucratic tangles and the lack of implementation of projects has been leading the energy sector to a crisis.

A few months ago, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman gave a directive that Petrobangla could finance its own projects. Following the directive, Petrobangla began work on designing projects to be pursued on bank loans, aimed at

increasing gas supply by more than 100 million cubic feet a day (mcmfd) in two years and helping meet the ever-growing gas demand.

In the first instalment, Petrobangla will spend Tk 77 crore on drilling two wells in Titas gas fields and finance three more projects.

"The proposal for drilling Titas wells -- 15 and 16 -- is awaiting clearance of the finance ministry and an inter-ministerial meeting," said a top Petrobangla official, adding, "We hope it will be cleared soon."

The gas wells to be drilled in the untapped southern part of the country's biggest gas field Titas are

expected to add around 50mcmfd gas. Titas now has 14 wells that produce about 400mcmfd. As the gas field is located at the heart of gas pipeline network, the new wells will be convenient for the authorities to connect.

The other self-financed projects in the wings are the Kailashita Gas Process Plant Extension project and drilling of two wells in Kailashita gas field.

The gas processing plant extension will help Bangladesh extract more condensate -- liquid petroleum, a by-product of natural gas.

"We believe if the Planning Commission does not interfere with

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Denied of justice for rape, she takes her life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Denied of justice by village elders, a young housemaid committed suicide after being raped by her employer's son at Matikata village in Rajshahi on Wednesday, the victim's family said.

Habibur Rahman, brother of Shefali, 29, said his sister drank poison out of utter frustration and shame after village leaders sat on their hand despite her pleas for justice.

Shefali, widow of Tafel Uddin, was raped on August 28 allegedly by Selim, son of Yumus, in his room at knife-point in the absence of his family members.

As Shefali broke her harrowing tale to Selim's brother Nur Banu the next day, she drove her out of the house.

Habib said he and Shefali went to Asadur Rahman and Rais Uddin for justice, but the village elders began to buy time for arranging a sitting.

The broken-heart girl complained to the local union parishad chairman who fixed arbitration on

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Doctor abducted in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A physician was kidnapped from Satkania upazila in the district on Thursday night.

Police quoting witnesses said Dr Anil Chandra Shushil, 50, was returning home at Temuhuni in a baby-taxi from his chamber at Beauty Pharmacy at Keranirhat at around 9:00pm when three armed men stopped the vehicle at Chittagong-Cox's Bazar road.

They hauled Dr Shushil into another baby-taxi and sped away firing gunshots to keep local people at bay as they came forward to rescue the screaming physician.

The victim's elder brother Swapan Chandra filed an abduction case.

District police officials visited the spot and ordered a massive search and rescue operation.

The victim could not be rescued, nor has there been any demand for ransom till filing of this report yesterday evening.

Irregularity in DU teacher recruitment

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

The Dhaka University (DU) authorities recently appointed five teachers in violation of the University Grants Commission (UGC) embargo in a process tainted by irregularities, DU sources alleged.

Three of the five lecturers in sociology were recruited at the cost of better candidates sidestepping the restriction on fresh appointment of teachers to any public university by the UGC.

One of the appointees is a relative of the DU pro-vice chancellor and another is a 'political candidate', the sources said requesting anonymity.

A committee headed by Vice-Chancellor (VC) SMA Faiz selected the candidates.

The said relative of the pro-VC stood first class fourth in Bachelor of Social Science (BSS) and first class seventh in Master of Social Science (MSS), while the alleged activist of the ruling four-party alliance stood first class 13th in BSS and first class 10th in MSS. Another recruit achieved first class second in both BSS and MSS.

Sources claimed a candidate

with better qualification and experience, Omar Faruque, was not recruited.

First class first both in BSS and MSS, Omar was awarded two gold medals by the DU authorities and is now a researcher at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies and a guest lecturer at the Institute of Business Administration of the same university.

Two others, who were not recruited, are Mehedy Hasan, first class second both in BSS and MSS, and Farhana Kader Labanya, first class first in BSS and first class 10th in MSS and now a lecturer at the Institute of Education and Research of the DU.

Omar Faruque claimed that he ranked third in the recruitment process was transparent. He will go for legal steps against the DU authorities soon, he added.

Some DU teachers said the VC headed the selection committee to recruit the pro-VC's relative in a break with university regulations that say the pro-VC will head the selection committee to recruit lecturers and assistant professors and the VC the selection committee

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Bombs, arms recovered from 2 CHT districts

OUR CORRESPONDENTS from Bandarban and Khagrachhari

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and army personnel recovered five bombs weighing 1.5kg each and a firearms from remote hilly areas of Naikhangchhari in Bandarban and Mahalchhari in Khagrachhari in the last two days.

Three youths reportedly belonging to the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), which opposes the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace accord, were picked up in this connection.

BDR sources said the bombs were recovered yesterday in 'prime condition,' meaning 'ready for explosion'. BDR troops have kept vigil on the spot as army explosive experts are likely to reach there by tomorrow to defuse the bombs.

A BDR team from Naikhangchhari zone led by Captain Anwar raided an abandoned camp at Nimali and found the bombs. The camp is five kms from Bangladesh-Myanmar border, the sources said.

Two weeks ago, the BDR recovered huge arms, ammunition and other things from the same area. These included 130 kg plastic explosive, two containers of sulphuric acid, 226 hand grenades, 310 grenade throwers, 50 time bomb clocks, 14 chemical containers, two cellular phones, three wireless sets, three

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End of abduction ordeal

Arifa gets back home after 'exile' in India

STAR REPORT

Carefree-looking Arifa flew back home yesterday after more than a month in 'exile' in India, thanks to an end to a cross-border legal battle over her return and abduction ordeal.

"I was in the car," the two-year-old girl, unaware of her flight from Kolkata, told journalists after she arrived at Zia International Airport, cradled in the arms of Salma Ali, executive director of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA).

Arifa was at the heart of media attention after she was abducted into Cooch Bihar in the Indian state of West Bengal on August 25 by an Indian smuggler, Noor Jamal, from her frontier Naodanga village in Kurigram apparently on a row with her father Ayub Ali, also a smuggler.

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) rescued the girl and held her abductor with the help of police on September 4, following a request from the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) as Arifa's father lodged a complaint with the border guards. A Cooch Bihar court sent Jamal to jail.

"The Deputy High Commission in Kolkata and the West Bengal government helped us a lot to send her back," Salma said of the procedure that might take more time if they were not cooperative.

Arifa will be kept in a BNWLA

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PHOTO: STAR

Two-year-old Arifa, accompanied by Advocate Salma Ali, yesterday smiles her happy return to Dhaka from the Indian state of West Bengal where she stayed more than a month after abduction from her home village in Kurigram.

Police informant shot dead in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police informant Bellal Hossain, 35, was gunned down by unidentified assailants near Islamia Hospital at Boyra under Sonadanga Police Station last night.

According to witnesses, one of a gang of four shot Bellal in the head point blank at about 8:20pm. He died on the spot.

The killers left the place brandishing arms before a large number of people present, witnesses said.

Police rushed there and sent the body to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Locals said Bellal was a police informant. He helped police arrest many outlaws from different areas of Khulna city.

The slain police informant was reportedly also involved in drug trafficking.

Listed criminal held after gunfight with police in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A listed criminal, the leader of a notorious criminal gang, was held after a gunfight with police at Boalkhali upazila in the district here yesterday.

Police said the arrested man Emdad, 43, the leader of Emdad Bahini, is one of the top two most wanted criminals listed with the Boalkhali Police Station.

Three policemen -- SI Mahbob Morshed, SI Ismail Hossain and Nayek Obayedur Rahman -- sustained bullet injuries during the gunfight.

Sources said the gunfight began when Emdad's gang numbering around seven opened fire on police in a bid to free their leader as he was being hauled into a police van following his arrest from Darogherghata of Kadurkhil under the upazila at around 4:00pm yesterday.

During the 30-minute gunfight, the gang fired some 100 shots at police and police retaliated by firing 40 rounds.

Emdad, reportedly a Shibir cadre, is an accused in 15 criminal including three murder cases. He would be produced before the court for remand, police said.

World oil and gas 'fast running out'

CNN, London

Global warming will never bring a 'doomsday scenario' a team of scientists says -- because oil and gas are running out much faster than thought.

The world's oil reserves are up to 80 percent less than predicted, a team from Sweden's University of Uppsala says. Production levels will peak in about 10 years' time, they say.

"Non-fossil fuels must come in much stronger than it had been hoped," Professor Kjell Alekett told CNN.

Oil production levels will hit their maximum soon after 2010 with gas

supplies peaking not long afterwards, the Swedish geologists say.

At that point prices for petrol and other fuels will reach disastrous levels. Earlier studies have predicted oil supplies will not start falling until 2050.

Alekett said that his team had examined data on oil and gas reserves from all over the world and we were "facing a very critical situation globally."

"The thing we are surprised of is that people in general are not aware of the decline in supplies and the extent to which it will affect production."

"The decline of oil and gas will affect the world population more

than climate change."

According to the Uppsala team, nightmare predictions of melting ice caps and scaring temperatures will never come to pass because the reserves of oil and gas are not big enough to create that much carbon dioxide (CO2).

Alekett said that as well as there being inflated estimates, some countries in the Middle East had exaggerated the amount of reserves they had.

Coal-burning could easily make up the shortfall. But burning coal would be even worse for the planet, as it would create even more CO2, he said.

Predictions of global meltdown by the Intergovernmental Panel on

Climate Change (IPCC) sparked the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, an agreement obliging signatory nations to cut CO2 emissions.

The IPCC examined a range of future scenarios, from profligate burning of fossil-fuels to a fast transition towards greener energy sources.

The Uppsala team say the amount of oil and gas left is the equivalent of around 3,500 billion barrels of oil -- the IPCC says between 5,000 and 18,000 billion barrels.

Alekett said his team had now established what they called the "Uppsala Protocol" to initiate discussion on how the problems of declining reserves could be tackled

- protecting the world economy but also addressing the problem of climate change.

The conclusions of the Uppsala team were revealed in the magazine New Scientist Thursday, of the University of Vienna who headed the IPCC team said it was standing by its figures.

He said they had factored in a much broader and internationally accepted range of oil and gas estimates than the "conservative" Swedes.

A conference in Russia this week heard a warning that global warming kills about 160,000 people through its effects every year. The

numbers dying from "side-effects" of climate change, such as malaria and malnutrition, could almost double by 2020, the climate change conference in Moscow was told.

"We estimate that climate change may already be causing in the region of 160,000 deaths... a year," Andrew Haines of the UK's London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said.

Most deaths would be in developing nations in Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, says Haines. These regions would be worst hit by the spread of malnutrition, diarrhea and malaria as a result of warmer temperatures, droughts and floods.

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