

11 die in cruise liner accident

AGENCIES, Paris

About 11 people died yesterday after a stairway to the biggest and most expensive cruise ship ever built, the Queen Mary II, collapsed at a shipyard in Saint-Nazaire, western France, French police say.

About 20 people were injured when the gangway collapsed during an official visit which included dignitaries.

The ship completed sea trials a few days ago and is due to sail to her UK home port around Christmas.

A spokesman at General Hospital in Saint Nazaire, Luc Ronchi, said the hospital had activated a "special plan" to deal with the influx of injured people.

Four medical teams were at the dockyard, with surgery cancelled at the hospital to deal with more admissions, he said.

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Cabinet secy gets one-year extension

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Cabinet Secretary Saadat Hussain has been given one-year extension of service, highly placed sources said yesterday.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia approved the extension before she left for Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah.

But the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) kept it a secret 'fearing resentment' and decided to make it public through an official announcement on November 22 or 24, PMO sources said.

Saadat was due to go on leave preparatory for retirement (LPR) on November 23.

A top official at the PMO said despite 'strong opposition' within the administration, Saadat's service was extended considering his professional excellence, sincerity and

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Khaleda prays for country's peace

BSS, Madina

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia performed ziarat at the Rouza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) Friday night and had her iftar with the devotees at Masjid-e-Nababi earlier in the evening.

She also offered Juma, Asar, Maghrib, Esha and Tarabi prayers at Masjid-e-Nababi.

While performing ziarat at the Rouza Mubarak of the Prophet (SM), the prime minister prayed for continued peace, progress and prosperity of Bangladesh and its people.

She also performed ziarat at the mazar of Hazrat Omar (RA).

The prime minister exchanged pleasantries with non-resident Bangladeshis and inquired about their wellbeing.

Khaleda arrived in Madina

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Al-Qaeda to use germs in future attacks, says UN report

Fight against terror failing

AP, United Nations

The al-Qaida terror network has decided to use chemical or biological weapons in future attacks, and international efforts to halt the group are failing, a confidential report by a UN panel of experts has found.

The report, obtained Friday by The Associated Press, said the only thing holding al-Qaida back from using chemical and biological weapons is its lack of technical know-how.

"They have already taken the decision to use chemical and bio-weapons in their forthcoming attacks," the report said. "The only restraint they are facing is the technical complexity to operate them properly and effectively."

The lack of technical ability is the

reason the panel of experts believes that al-Qaida is focused on trying to develop new conventional explosive devices such as bombs that can evade scanners.

The report is the second by the expert group established in January by the UN Security Council to monitor implementation of sanctions against 272 individuals and entities linked to al-Qaeda and Afgha-nistan's ousted Taliban regime. The sanctions include freezing assets, a travel ban, and an arms embargo.

The experts participated in a series of international and European discussions on efforts to curb trafficking in weapons of mass destruction. They didn't cite any specific new evidence, noting only

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An overloaded truck with drums hanging precariously on both sides disembarks from a ferry at Daulatdia ghat yesterday, striking fear into roadside vendors. Such trucks often cause accidents dropping their loads on roads.

Outlaws kill 2 JSD men in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two activists of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) were gunned down allegedly by cadres of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) at Isalmari village in Mirpur upazila in the early hours yesterday.

The victims are Hamidul, 35, son of Khoda Box of the same village and Abdur Razzak, 38, son of Afser Uddin of Bhedmari village.

Police said 15 PBCP cadres swooped on them when both were in a roadside shop.

They took the JSD men to Isalmari GK canal area and shot them point blank to kill on the spot.

Police recovered their bodies in the morning and sent them to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

A case was filed with Mirpur Police Station.

Mirpur police said the victims had criminal records against them with Mirpur, Bheramara and Alamdanga police stations.

GP hands over renovated old rly building in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

The century-old Chittagong Railway Old Station Building was handed over to Bangladesh Railway Authority yesterday after renovations.

GrameenPhone Ltd renovated the building -- a landmark physical structure in the port city -- without any change in its original structure.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda attended the handing over ceremony on the station pre

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Power transfer in Iraq by June

BBC Online

The US-led coalition in Iraq will hand over power to a transitional government by June 2004, the Iraqi Governing Council has said.

The announcement came after Iraqi leaders met the US chief administrator, Paul Bremer, in Baghdad.

Bremer had earlier returned from the US, where plans for a faster hand-over were agreed at the White House.

The transitional body will prepare for a full sovereign Iraqi government by 2005, following a general election.

A BBC correspondent in Baghdad says the plan is a much faster process to achieving Iraqi sovereignty than the one previously laid out.

The move comes in the context of daily attacks on coalition troops, which continued on Saturday with fresh blasts in Baghdad.

Nevertheless, President George W

Bush insists US soldiers will remain in Iraq until it is "free and peaceful". Coalition forces could stay on in Iraq at the invitation of the new administration.

Council President Jalal Talabani -- speaking after the meeting with Bremer -- said the transitional body would be selected after consultations with "all parties" in Iraqi society.

Sunni Muslim council member Adnan Pachachi added: "The reason behind the setting up of this transitional government is to restore sovereignty, to end the occupation and to give a chance to a representative of the Iraqi people to represent Iraq."

One American soldier was killed and two injured by a roadside bomb in the centre of Baghdad.

An explosion was also heard in Baghdad on Saturday at about 1635 local time (1335GMT), with black smoke seen rising in the city centre.

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Mutilated body found at Shewrapara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kafrul police yesterday recovered body of a man sliced into three pieces in Shewrapara.

A police patrol team found the body stuffed in a sack at about 2:40am. The victim's legs were severed from the body and there were marks of injury all over. Police sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

The youth, aged about 25, was strangled at around 1:30am.

A murder case was lodged but police failed to arrest anyone till filing of this report at 6:30 last evening.

In another incident, Sutapur police recovered body of a man from KM Das Lane in Gopibagh Friday night.

The youth in his late twenties was bashed up before being strangled with a gamchha (thin country made towel). Miscreants crammed the body into a jute-sack, police said.

Later, it was sent to Mitford hospital for autopsy, police added.

A murder case was filed.

JS body brings graft charge against BIWTC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary standing committee has levelled allegation of corruption against Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) in the construction of three passenger vessels by amending tender at the last moment.

The parliamentary standing committee on the shipping ministry at a meeting at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday asked the shipping ministry to adjourn the entire tender process for a month until the committee resolves the issue.

Some Tk 20 to 22 crore will be spent on building the vessels.

The committee asked the ministry to stop toll collection in the waterways and take steps to hold back vessel owners from increasing the fare before Eid.

Ministry officials told the meeting that the ministry will sit with its different

organisations in a bid to stop toll collection and any increase in the fare.

The committee also asked the ministry to come up with all documents at its December 6 meeting to clarify the amendment to the tender for building three 900-passenger capacity vessels.

"Allegation has been raised that the BIWTC amended its tender at the last moment and that's why the committee wants to review the tender process," committee Chairman Golam Mohammad Siraj told newsmen after the meeting.

He said the shipping minister also agreed with the committee on a review of the whole tender process.

Meeting sources said Abul Hossain Khan, a ruling BNP lawmaker and committee member, raised the allegation of corruption in the tender process.

He said the

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3 children die as pneumonia turns grim in Cox's Bazar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Three children died of pneumonia at Cox's Bazar yesterday taking the death toll to seven in the last four days.

Three-month olds Shahabuddin and Rokeya Begum, and three-year old Nur Begum of Sadar Police Station died yesterday, acting Civil Surgeon of Cox's Bazar Dr Dulal Chandra Pal said.

At least 2,000 pneumonia patients were admitted to different

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FTA talks with Pakistan start today

UNB, Dhaka

After entering into formal talks with India and Sri Lanka on bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), Bangladesh starts such talks with Pakistan here today.

Elias Ahmed, joint secretary of the commerce ministry, will lead the home side to the two-day talks, where trade officials of the two countries will work out a broader framework for the next round of talks in Islamabad in January next year. Pakistan side to the

talks will be led by Jafar Iqbal Qadir, a joint secretary of the commerce ministry.

Dhaka's points of negotiation will more or less be the same as with New Delhi and Colombo, emphasising better stake in trade as a least developed country (LDC) within the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation).

Special trade preferences, longer phase-out period for tariff withdrawal and relaxed rules of origin are among the points Bangladesh will highlight from the LDC point of view.

Besides, Bangladesh will insist on a larger 'negative list' of items to protect its local industry.

Earlier, Dhaka had FTA talks with New Delhi on October 20-22 and with Colombo on November 1-2, both held here at the joint secretary level.

Among the seven members of Saarc, only India and Sri Lanka have got FTA since 1998, while India has a special trade arrangement with Nepal since early 50s.

As the efforts for a free trade area within the region so far failed to make any headway, member coun

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Hasina criticises PM for 'not standing by Monga people'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday criticised the prime minister for not standing by the people in the *monga* (a near-famine situation) affected northern districts.

"Our prime minister left for Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah, leaving thousands in famine," Hasina said at an iftar party hosted by Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) at the Jatiya Press Club.

"I want to ask her what greater prayer can there be other than standing by the distressed countrymen," she added.

Hasina starts visiting the northern districts this morning to see for herself the *monga* situation and distribute relief among the needy. She is scheduled to return on November 19.

"The government's relief works are too inadequate to feed the thousands of affected people. Worse still, the ruling party men are pilfering the relief. They are selling VGF cards and rice on the black market," she alleged.

She observed that the government did not open gruel kitchens in the *monga*-affected areas to save its image. She urged all to come forward to the aid of the starving people.

On the recent killings of AL activist

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Uncoordinated govt efforts stall law and order, dev activities

Roundtable on CHT told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The situation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is chaotic because the government has put several authorities in charge of law and order, speakers at a roundtable said yesterday.

Lack of co-ordination among different government bodies is also hampering development activities in the region, they said.

The roundtable on 'Success and future in the CHT region in last two years of the present government' was organised by the CHT affairs ministry at the ministry's auditorium.

Some speakers called upon the government to implement the Hill District Local Council Act to empower the council to appoint local police personnel for law enforcement as well as to oversee the peace process.

Other speakers lauded the government for what they said its activities to improve people's life in the region and foster peace and harmony.

Chief guest Mosharrar Hossain MP, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on CHT affairs, said the government is sincere about development of the CHT, adding that it is essential for all parties involved to trust and help one another to achieve lasting peace in the region.

He said a high-powered body headed by Local Government, Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has been working for the region's development and to take steps to implement the CHT peace treaty.

Moni Swapan Dewan, deputy minister for CHT affairs, who chaired the session, said the CHT region could greatly contribute to the national economy if the government properly utilised the development fund and resolved the region's problems. The government could

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Rescue teams yesterday work at the explosion scene in front of the Neve Shalom synagogue in Istanbul, after explosive-rigged vehicles blew up killing at least 17 people and injuring scores of others.