

6 die in Gazipur

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the cause of the flame. Jamuna Group in an off-hand estimate claimed the fire gutted machines and goods worth more than Tk 100 crore. The group in a press release also promised to give compensation to the victims. Originated at simplex section-16 of the factory at about 10:30pm, the fire immediately engulfed the whole factory triggering panic among some 700 employees working at the night shift. The factory was totally devastated as the fire raged for several hours burning down machines and piles of cotton and yarn.

"Suddenly I saw clouds of smoke covering the whole factory. Electricity went out immediately," described a 15-year-old worker. "I heard yells of trapped workers and instructions to leave the factory."

The workers rushed towards the exits and found one of the two gates locked, said witnesses. Some of the workers lost their way to come out of the factory for darkness and smoke, they added.

The factory authorities in the press release claimed electricity went out automatically when the fire broke out while the workers alleged the mills officials switched off the power line. Several workers claimed they had managed to control the fire immediately as it broke out but the flame rose again from smouldering flammable goods like cottons, yams and threads.

Seeing the flame and smoke, several thousand workers of the six other mills and factories located inside the same boundary rushed to rescue the trapped workers but could not near the burning

Hanif

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while the city AL held a 'doa' mahfil at the party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue for early recovery of Hanif.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas yesterday visited the hospital and offered 'doa' for his recovery.

Meanwhile, AL Advisory Council member and former law maker Imamuddin Ahmed, seriously injured in a road accident, is fighting for life at Sikder Medical College Hospital in the city. He is in deep coma.

Hasina visited him at the hospital yesterday.

Bush waives

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with respect to Pakistan, the prohibition contained" in the Foreign Operations, Export Financing and Related Programmes Appropriations Act, Bush told Rice, asking her to inform Congress about the change.

Following the September 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States, Washington passed broad legislation waiving restrictions on US arms exports and military assistance to Pakistan and India.

These countries were sanctioned following nuclear tests in May 1998, and additional sanctions were levied against Pakistan when Musharraf launched the coup.

US-Pakistani ties have improved considerably since Musharraf made a key decision after the 2001 attacks to back Washington's ouster of Al-Qaeda's radical Taliban regime, which had supported the terror group al-Qaeda.

The United States regards Pakistan as a non-Nato ally, a designation given to close friends.

Danish envoy

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pledge to provide Bangladesh with financial help in agriculture, sanitation, improving governance and some other sectors.

At the briefing, the diplomat read out two messages from his prime minister and from world bodies for pacifying the protestors, who launched attacks on western missions in several countries.

One message was issued by Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen and the other jointly by the secretaries-general of UN, OIC and high representative for common foreign and security policy of the European Union.

"In a press statement issued few days ago, the Danish daily Jyllandsposten apologised to the Muslim world. The newspaper stressed that it was not their intention to be offensive. The newspaper apologises for the indisputable offence to many Muslims caused by the drawings," the envoy quoted his prime minister's message.

Ambassador Niels Severin Munk presented another joint statement issued on February 7 by the UN, OIC and EU.

It states that the anguish in the Muslim World at the publication of these "offensive caricatures" is shared by all individuals and communities who recognise the sensitivity and responsibility in treating issues of special significance for the adherents of any particular faith, even by those who do not share the belief in question.

"We fully uphold the right of free speech. But we understand the deep hurt and widespread indignation felt in the Muslim World. We

building. Reaching the spot at about 11:30pm, Gazipur Fire Service tried to douse the flame but it continued to spread.

Later, 12 more fire units from Savar, Tongi, Tejgaon, Kumitola, Mirpur and the headquarters with 80 firefighters strengthened the force to bring the blaze under control by 6:00am yesterday.

Shahidur Rahman, deputy assistant director of Gazipur Sadar Hospital, told the press that the fire could have originated from the friction of machines or from electric short-circuit.

He however said the reason could be ascertained after proper investigation. Firefighter Shamim Ahmed, 40, and police Havildar Sattar, 45, were injured while dousing the fire. They along with another injured factory worker were admitted to Gazipur Sadar Hospital.

Relatives thronged the hospital after the charred bodies were taken to the hospital morgue. Later they received the bodies. Hundreds of workers and locals were seen gathering at the hospital to find their relatives as some of the workers were missing, they claimed.

The high officials of Jamuna Group, local political leaders and district police and administration officials visited the spot. Sabujbagh police arrested Abdur Rahim, a rickshaw-puller, and his wife Nargis Begum at their house before the opposition's long march programme. They alleged a police sub-inspector (SI), who had arrested them, exacted Tk 2,000 from them threatening otherwise to implicate them in a case under the Narcotics Control Act. The SI finally showed them arrested on suspicion.

Bird flu

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enza -- which can be fatal to humans -- had been found in Sambawa Farm near Kaduna, 300km north of Abuja.

But Auwalu Haruna, secretary of the Kano State poultry farmers' association, said that a similar infection, identified earlier as "fowl cholera", has been spreading through flocks further north for the past two weeks.

"The disease is spreading like wildfire," he told AFP.

"We have 20,000 new infections reported today, bringing the figure for infected birds to 80,000. What worsens the situation is the farmers' movement of infected poultry, in a frantic effort to minimise losses," he said.

Haruna and several market stall holders told AFP that once chickens are seen to be infected, farmers are killing them and rapidly dumping the on the market in an effort to beat any future quarantine and make a quick profit.

"The announcement by the federal government of bird flu at Sambawa Farm shocked us, but we are just waiting for confirmation from the veterinary institute in Vom for our birds," Haruna said.

International experts from the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation were expected to arrive in Nigeria on Thursday and the agriculture ministry has promised a large-scale operation to quarantine farms and destroy sick birds.

Outlaw killed

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Molla dead on the spot. One pipe gun, four live gun cartridges and three used shells of bullets were recovered from the spot, the press release read.

According to Rab, Molla was the acting regional leader of the party in charge of Rampal and Mongla upazilas of Bagerhat. He was an accused in 10 criminal cases filed with Rampal Police Station. Allegations of bomb attacks, extortion, abduction for rape and ransom were brought against him in those cases, the press release added.

Blanket arrest

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prison yesterday said they had not have enough space even to sit comfortably, let alone sleep. The number of toilets is too little and many of the inmates are falling ill due to the unbearable crams, they added.

"I would receive a chapati and a drop of molasses as breakfast, and a small amount of rice and lentil soup as lunch and supper," mass-arrest victim Abdul Quddus told The Daily Star, adding the menu was the same for the seven days he spent in the jail.

"For the last eight days I had to sleep in the jail sitting in a highly congested space," said Abdur Rahim, another victim.

Prison department sources said as per the rule they serve a chapati and some molasses as breakfast, and rice with lentil soup and fish or beef of vegetables as lunch and supper.

Many relatives crowding at the jail gate yesterday were seen sending foods and fruits for the blanket-arrest victims.

Usually 10,000 detainees are kept in Dhaka Central Jail that has a capacity to house just 2,500 inmates. The jam-packed situation aggravated further with the arrival of 2,500 more arrestees ahead of the February 5 rally of the 14-party opposition combine.

However, until yesterday evening about 1,900 people arrested under the police clampdown on the opposition line-up had been released, including 260 released yesterday.

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Rahim and Nargis who came out of jail yesterday said they had to spend Tk 3,500, collected by selling their daughter's silver ornaments, some furniture and utensils, to get the bail.

Halima Khatun, 52, looked the most weary among a few hundred relatives of the mass-arrest victims waiting at the prison gate yesterday. "I have searched for my son, Mohammad Hanif, everywhere and have not slept at all for seven days at a stretch until I came to know on Tuesday that Tejaon police had arrested him," she said in a feeble voice.

The police picked up Hanif, a rickshaw-puller from Muktagachha in Mymensingh, on February 1 from a tea-stall at Begunbari in the city, where he had come to visit his sister.

His sister Azida Begum was also waiting at the jail gate with a one-year-old child in her lap. Azida said she had to spend Tk 2,000 borrowed on interest from a neighbour to bail out her brother.

With a baby in her lap and holding another by hand, Shahnaj Begum, wife of rickshaw-puller Belal Hossain, has been waiting at the jail gate for the last four days.

The police arrested her husband, the lone earning member of the family, at Keraniganj crossroads at about 11:00am on February 3. A court granted bail to her husband on February 6, but he had not been released until yesterday.

"Every day I come to the jail gate in the morning with the hope to see my husband released. But, every time I return alone at 8:00pm," said Shahnaj in desperation.

Japan expects

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election observers. Japan intends to continue such assistance, utilising our knowledge, experience and technology," he said.

"I believe that, for Bangladesh, improving governance is one of the main pillars for policy efforts to achieve development and poverty reduction and also to promote trade and investment."

Aso said Japan intends to assist Bangladesh government in its efforts to improve governance. This includes assistance for its efforts to improve the capacity of law enforcement agencies, improve civil servants' training programmes, raising resident participation in local government and enhancing transparency as well as in capacity building efforts for implementation skills in major sectors.

"In the Country Assistance Programme for Bangladesh that is scheduled to be revised in the near future, Japan intends to prioritise development of the private sector, together with transportation and power," the Japanese foreign minister said.

As such Japan intends to continue assistance for improving the trade and investment environment, basic infrastructure development support as a means of invigorating investment and exports, as well as human resources development assistance to private sector companies, mentioned.

Japan believes that Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) can provide a framework for stability and development in the South Asian region. This is why it supported Saarc activities through the Japan-Saarc Special Fund since 1993m Aso said.

"This was the first and the only financial assistance from a country outside the Saarc region," he pointed out.

"Japan was among the first to recognise Bangladesh's sovereign status after its independence in 1972. Even prior to independence and continuing to the present, Japan has continuously provided assistance to Bangladesh for poverty reduction and economic development, among other purposes," Aso noted.

(Full interview on page 11)

42,000 women unpaid

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man and its members, but nobody helped me with a single paisa for my daughter's treatment. If I were given a little support, I could save my daughter."

She said when diarrhoea affected her daughter in the morning of the last Eid-ul-Fitr, she sought money from her neighbours but everybody refused her. Disappointed, she ran to a local doctor, Mohan. He provided a bag of saline but refused to do anything more without money and said, "Females cannot be trusted."

Without treatment her daughter died at dawn after a day and a half. Halima had no money to arrange her daughter's burial. She did not even have enough money to buy a shroud. One of her neighbours lent her the money and helped her to arrange the funeral.

"I could not save my child for money nor could I give her a proper burial, what sort of a mother I am," Halima lamented.

Her tragedy did not stop there. Now the lender, Dulaler Ma, is pressing to get her money back and threatening to break down Halima's newly built tin-shed house if she fails to pay immediately.

The story of Jyotsna, another worker on the same team of road maintenance workers, is almost the same. Her seven-year old daughter, Rozina, had been suffering from typhoid for a couple of days. She was taken to the upazila health complex where the doctor advised regular treatment for six months straight.

"I don't know how I will manage the money to purchase costly medicines to save my child," Jyotsna said.

"The government should pay our dues or let us leave the job. What will I do? I have children. If I worked as a domestic worker in somebody's household rather than working for the government, the employer would understand my pain, he would support us," she said sobbing.

The RMA women work on the roads from 8:00am to 2:00pm. They have no chance of doing anything else during the period.

Amena Begum who came to the Satrosia union administrative headquarters with her 6-year old son said, "I have taken goods of over Tk 2,500 on loan from a local shop. Now the grocer does not trust me and does not want to give me any more foodstuffs on loan since I could not pay back the previous one yet. I try to avoid going to the shop. Other shop owners also do not trust us enough to give food on loan."

Dhaka, Islamabad

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Asian Free Trade Area) agreement so that it comes into effect on schedule.

The foreign secretary said the issues of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis (so-called 'Biharis') and apportionment of assets of pre-independent Bangladesh would also be taken up during the official talks between the prime minister and her Pakistan counterpart Shaukat Aziz.

The official discussion between the two prime ministers scheduled to be held on February 13 would focus on expanding cooperation in trade, investment, agriculture, tourism, communications, education and cultural sectors, he added.

The talks will be followed by signing of the three MoUs (Memorandum of Understanding) by Agriculture Research Council, Export Promotion Bureau and the Ministry of Tourism of the two countries.

Hemayetuddin said Khaleida Zia, current chairperson of Saarc, will also exchange views with Pakistani leaders on the implementation of the decisions taken at the 13th Saarc summit held in Dhaka in November last year.

The prime minister will call on Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and exchange views on bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern.

Replying to a question, Hemayetuddin said enhancing the volume of bilateral trade, which is in favour of Pakistan, will be a major focus of the talks. According to official statistics, in last fiscal year (2004-2005) Bangladesh imported Pakistan goods worth \$138.63 million and exported \$63 million.

When asked with what degree of importance Dhaka would raise the issue of repatriation of stranded Pakistanis, he said it would be taken up with the seriousness it demands.

On apportionment of pre-independence assets, Additional Secretary Touhid Hossain, who was present at the news briefing, said at least \$200 million remains in a Pakistani bank, apart from other assets.

About bilateral FTA with Pakistan, Hemayetuddin said if the Pakistani side raises it, it would be discussed. "We are now studying the pros and cons of the Pakistani proposal," he added.

Asked about cooperation in combating terrorism, he said Bangladesh's position in war on terror is well known to the world. The two sides will exchange views on that.

The foreign secretary informed that during her stay, Prime Minister Khaleida Zia will visit a relief camp of earthquake victims near Islamabad. Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat

She said her son had been suffering from fever for three days.

Amena's another colleague Mina Begum said, "I leave home early in the morning while my children are still asleep. I can't look after their faces. I have no word to say to them if they ask for food waking up in the morning."

The road crews of Satrosia union said they met with the thana nirbahi officer (TNO) and the chairman of the union several times and sought their salaries. But the officials said they could not help the women if the government had not released the salary fund. They said their job was just to supervise the women's work.

Two of the donors to the programme, CIDA and EC, have been pursuing the ministry concerned to release the fund to reduce the sufferings of these poor women workers. But their requests remain unheeded.

In a recent letter to Local Government Division Secretary Md KM Zahirul Islam on January 23, 2006, Counsellor and Head of Development Corporation of the Canadian High Commission Robert Beadle, and First Counsellor and Head of Operations of the EC Francoise Collet urged the government to release the fund.

"The situation is dire since the impoverished women have not been paid wages for over six months. Consequently, the women and their families are suffering as they are unable to afford basic rations, including food and medical supplies through the severe cold of this winter," the letter read.

"I have lost my daughter, my heart breaks, I have no food to eat, no cloth to wear, people do not trust us, what will I do," Halima posed a question to the government.

Halima and other RMA crews appealed to the government for quick payment of their salaries so they can pay off their loans and feed their children like before and continue their jobs.

4 govt officials

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industries ministry.

According to the FIR, the accused have caused "financial loss to the state in a bid to achieve personal gains by abusing their official power in connivance with one another".

They have been sued under Section 418/109 of the Penal Code and Section 5(2) of the Corruption Prevention Act 1947.

EC ignores law

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less than two lakh voters while 191 constituencies have over two lakh voters each. The number of voters in the rest 42 constituencies ranges between three lakh to six lakh plus.

Due to wide discrepancies between the constituencies in terms of population, the ceiling of Tk 5 lakh on election expenditure seem unreasonable as all candidates irrespective of sizes of the constituencies must abide by the same upper limit of expenses, electoral experts observed.

They gave the example of neighbouring India where the ceiling on election expenditure varies from constituency to constituency.

Officials at the EC Secretariat said they have not taken any initiative for demarcation, as they did not yet receive any instruction from the commission.

They said demarcation of the constituencies is a huge task and may take at least a year to be completed. Moreover, the commission has to face political pressures and objections while fixing boundaries of a constituency.

Because of a large number of appeals and objections, it took over a year for the EC to complete the demarcation in 1995.

The constituencies across the country have varying sizes of enfranchised population. For example, the number of voters in Dhaka-1 and -2 has been less than 2 lakh while that is about 5 lakh in Dhaka-4 and over 6 lakh in Dhaka-5.

Similarly, Mymensingh-1 and -3 have less than two lakh voters while Mymensingh-4 has about 4 lakh. Gazipur-3 has 1.5 lakh voters while Gazipur-2 has 5.5 lakh.

RU Prof murder

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Dr Mia Muhammad Mohiuddin as the mastermind of the killing.

Police on February 7 arrested Mohiuddin but could not take action against Shalehi, also a master's student at geology and mining department, due to political pressures, sources said.

The police employed forces to keep watch on Shalehi hours after Taher's body was found on February 3, but they were seen yesterday looking for his location.

The Shibir leader was leading students' movement protesting the murder, but he was not seen anywhere on the campus yesterday.

Shibir gathered over a thousand workers, mostly outsiders, on the campus and paraded in a procession and held a rally with Rokon Uddin, city unit general secretary, in the chair.

Rokon termed Shalehi a "holy person", saying it is the media that published his name to tarnish Shibir's image. "Journalists are trying to turn the RU into a volatile campus publishing false reports."

RU unit Shibir Secretary Noor Muhammad called upon newsmen to refrain from hatching conspiracy against Shalehi. "If they do otherwise, we know how to teach them," he threatened.

Shibir leaders at a press conference at the RU Cafeteria claimed Shalehi was outside Rajshahi during the murder.

They said Jahangir is the organising secretary of ward unit Jubo League and his statement was motivated.

Asked how Jahangir, an SSC examinee, can be a leader of the Awami League's youth front, they said it is none of their concerns.

PM condemns

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world and offended the people of other faiths.

"We are firmly confident in free expression of opinion and thought and freedom of press. But it is a responsibility to remain aware so that this freedom doesn't curtail anybody's feelings, belief, dignity, legitimate rights and reputation," Khaleida observed in the statement.

"We believe that limits of freedom and responsibility has been violated through publications of cartoons," said the prime minister.

The prime minister said when the present world is passing through a vulnerable situation to keep peace and friendship intact, such instigation is very undesirable and sorrowful. It will only contribute to deterioration of the situation.

"So, we expect regret and apology immediately from the appropriate level for this act," she said in the statement.

Khaleida further said Dhaka is also sympathetic to the international protests against this communal attitude.

"But we don't support any ill attempt of destroying peace, harmony and stability anywhere, taking advantage of this situation," the prime minister noted.

She made a clarion call to the people of Bangladesh to uphold the country's reputation and national image in the present situation.

Ashura

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the capital and elsewhere in the country.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleida Zia and the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, in separate messages, said the supreme sacrifice of Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA) in Karbala teaches us to search truth and establish justice in every sphere of life.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels will air special programmes, while national dailies will publish articles highlighting the significance of the day.

Ahmadiyyas

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any attack on the Ahmadiyyas.

Fanatics under the banner of International Khatme Nabuwat Movement, Bangladesh (IKNMB) have been holding rallies, making announcements through loud-speakers and distributing leaflets in the area as part of their campaign to motivate people, especially the madrasa teachers and students, to join them.

IKNMB Chairman Mufti Noor Hossain Noorani announced the programme on February 24 at a press conference at Abbasi Alia Madrasa in Trishal to capture Dhanikhola Ahmadiyya mosque after the Jum'a prayers today.

Advocate Monjur Anam, President of Dhanikhola Ahmadiyyas, lodged a general diary (GD) with Trishal Police Station on February 28 seeking security of their life and property.

Amid growing apprehension, some families have shifted their members to other places, said Humayun Kabir, an Ahmadiyya member.

The people of Dhanikhola village had been living there in peace but they are now panic-gripped due to

Khatme Nabuwat's programme, Helal Uddin, a farmer of the village said.

A Khatme Nabuwat committee, formed with Abdur Kader Khan Kanhuri and Principal Maulana Nazrul Islam as its president and secretary, who are also local leaders of Islami Olkya Jote, yesterday brought out a truck procession to drum up support for today's programme.

Mymensingh Superintendent (SP) of Police Abdullah Baki, who along with the Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Trishal Police Station Abdul Latif Bhuiyan visited the area several times in last couple of days, assured the Dhanikhola people of security.

Police officials also held discussions with Khatme Nabuwat leaders to persuade them to maintain peace.

Demanding full security for the Ahmadiyyas in Dhanikhola, eminent citizens of the district met the SP yesterday morning.

The Ahmadiyyas have been living at the village on the bank of Sutta river since 1964 and the mosque was built in 1965.

Iran dismisses

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nuclear weapons but instead nuclear technology and science. Science cannot be destroyed by Western weapons," Mashae said in Farsi through an Iranian interpreter.

The Iranian nuclear crisis escalated last week when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) voted to report the Islamic republic to the United Nations Security Council over its nuclear programme.

Iran said on Monday that large-scale uranium enrichment work would begin in "due course" in response to the IAEA decision.

Mashae described Rumsfeld as "Dracula" and said threats of military action against Iran "are all lies and mere tough words."

He said Tehran has always "clearly" shown that "all of Iran's nuclear actions and activity are for peaceful means."

The top Iranian official has travelled to Indonesia for meetings with Vice President Yusuf Kalla, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and others although the issues being discussed are unclear.

Kalla said Indonesia opposed any military action against Iran based simply on suspicion that Tehran was attempting to acquire nuclear weap-

ons. Jakarta abstained during last week's vote by IAEA board members in Vienna to report Iran to the UN Security Council.

Senior Iranian officials have warned that a referral to the council would bring "an end to diplomacy" as well as tough international inspections.

Earlier China said it welcomed nuclear talks between Iran and Russia planned for next week to defuse a crisis over Tehran's atomic programme.

"We hope that this Russian invitation to Iran to hold talks on the 16th about participating in an international uranium enrichment centre will help break, or encourage a break, in the current stalemate over the Iranian nuclear issue," Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Qun told a regular news conference.

The deputy head of Iran's National Security Council would lead Tehran's delegation to the talks in Moscow next week, Russia's Itar-Tass news agency reported earlier.

Sunny, Awal

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younger brother of Abdur Rahman. Abdul Awal is a member of JMB Majlish-e-Shura (highest policymaking body) and Abdur Rahman's son-in-law.

Sohel Ahmed, 35, senior assistant judge of Nalchhiti upazila, and Jagannath Pandey, 38, senior assistant judge of the Sadar upazila, died and three people were wounded when Mamun blew up a microbus carrying the judges in Jhalakathi on November 1