



Awami League leaders scuffle with police to get an activist freed at the Russel Square at Dhanmondi in the city during hartal hours yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

1 killed, seven hurt as train hits trolley

UNB, Sirajganj

A contractor died and seven workers were injured in a collision between an inter-city train and a trolley at Dilpasha Railway Station in Ullapara upazila of the district yesterday.

Railway sources said the Dhaka-bound Silk City train collided head on with the Ishurdi-bound trolley near the outer signal of the station at about 9:00am, killing contractor Lutfar Rahman, 42, on the spot and injuring seven construction workers.

The injured workers are undergoing treatment at Ullapara Health Complex and Sirajganj General Hospital.

Obituary



Begum Bilkis Momen, retired assistant director of Social Welfare Department, passed away yesterday at the age of 80, says a press release.

Bilkis served Mujibnagar government during the War of Liberation. Her husband, Mohammod Abdul Momen was a deputy secretary at the Establishment Division. He also served the Mujibnagar government.

Bilkis is survived by her three daughters.

Her quikhwani will be held at A-201, Dhansiri, 35, Indira Road in the city after Asr prayers tomorrow (Friday).

M Habibur Rahman

BSS, Dhaka



M Habibur Rahman, director of Dhaka Ahsania Mission and former joint chief of the Planning Commission passed away due to a cardiac arrest at Suharawardy Hospital in the city yesterday at the age of 63.

He is survived by his wife and a son.

He was buried at his family graveyard at Premnagar village in Barhatta under Netrakona district.

His quikhwani will be held at his village home on Friday after Juma prayers.

Abul Kalam Mollah



Abul Kalam Mollah, an employee of the Daily Ittefaq, passed away due to cardiac arrest at his Golapbagh residence in the city yesterday at the age of 50, says a press release.

Mollah, also former chairman of Chomardi union under Bhanga thana in Faridpur, is survived by father, mother, wife, two sons and one daughter.

His namaz-e-janaza was held on the Golapbagh Jame Masjid premises and in front of the Daily Ittefaq office.

He was buried at his family graveyard at Chomardi village.

Leaders of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) and Ittefaq Workers Union condoled the death.

DHAKA-ISLAMABAD FTA Formal talks to start soon

Says Morshed

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and Pakistan will soon start formal negotiations on bilateral free trade agreement (FTA) in a bid to sign the deal by next September, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said here yesterday.

Islamabad also agreed to introduce passenger cum cargo service between Dhaka and Karachi bringing in Boeing-747 jets to carry Bangladesh goods, including RMG, to Pakistan and beyond for lack of a direct shipping link. Initially, this service will operate once a week.

Briefing newsmen on the outcome of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's three-day official visit to Pakistan, Morshed

said Bangladesh sought Pakistan's cooperation at the next meetings of WTO in Geneva and Washington so that some Bangladeshi garment items could get duty-free access to the US market.

"We've discussed the issues of our bilateral interests, focusing on trade and economic cooperation," he told the press briefing at the foreign ministry.

The foreign minister said Pakistan has agreed to give duty-free access to 73 Bangladeshi items under nine categories, and it will be easier with a bilateral FTA in place.

Asked about the longstanding issue of repatriation of some 250,000 stranded Pakistanis and apportion-

ment of pre-independence assets, he said: "We've been discussing the issue and it will continue."

On the easing of visa regime, he said Pakistan has agreed to liberalise visa for professionals and businesses.

The foreign minister said the Pakistan government also agreed to increase scholarships for Bangladeshi students from 75 to 100 annually for higher studies in Pakistan.

Asked about the possibility of signing bilateral FTA with India, he said Bangladesh will sign such a deal with any country wherever the country's business interests will be protected.

The foreign minister said both the countries have agreed to take necessary steps to expand the bilateral trade to one \$ 1 billion in next two to three years.

About fighting terrorism, the foreign minister said the leaders of both the countries have agreed not to allow the rise of militancy in the name of Islam and also to face the vile campaign against Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance. The two sides agreed to strengthen OIC to achieve this end.

On Saarc, Morshed said the two sides agreed to implement the decisions so far taken by the Saarc leaders. He mentioned that the standing committee comprising foreign secretaries of the member states will meet in Dhaka in April to make recommendations on how to strengthen the Saarc secretariat and evolve modalities to raise fund for implementation of the Saarc projects.

The Saarc foreign ministers will sit for an interim meeting to take decision on the recommendations of the standing committee.

Terming the prime minister's visit fruitful, the foreign minister said the two sides had constructive and productive discussions that would help strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation in every field.

Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin and senior officials of the foreign ministry were present at the briefing.

Five killed in road accidents

STAR REPORT

At least five people were killed and 40 others injured in separate road accidents in Barisal and Savar yesterday.

Our correspondent from Barisal reports: Four people, including a student leader, were killed and 40 others injured after a overloaded bus with 80 followers of the Pir of Atashi fell into a roadside ditch at Bakarkati-Khezurtala under Bakerganj upazila on Barisal-Patuakhali highway on Tuesday night.

The accident occurred when the bus was trying to give side to a truck.

The dead were identified as Kazi Farid, 26, leader of the student front of Zaker Party, Mujibar, 30, Manir, 15, and Jewel, 26.

Of the injured, 22, including Ilias, Nur Islam, Shamim, Al-Mamun, Joyanal Abedin, Alamgir Hossain,

Rahat, Nabin, Sabuj, and Alam, were admitted to Barisal SBMCH in critical condition.

Other injured were admitted to Bakerganj and Patuakhali hospitals and different private clinics.

Witnesses, police and the injured said the bus carrying about 80 passengers was returning from the Darbar Sharif of Atoshir Pir at Biswa Zaker Manjil under Faridpur district after performing religious functions.

BDNEWS from Savar adds: A woman was crushed under the wheels of a Dhaka-bound passenger coach yesterday near Jirani bus stand at Savar on Dhaka-Aricha highway.

The identity of the deceased was not known immediately.

Witnesses said the woman was killed on the spot when she was crossing the road.

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212 posts of district level judges vacant

Moudud tells JS

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said a total of 8002 cases were filed under the Law and Order Disruption Act after its enactment.

Of those, 6,494 cases were settled, in which about 8,954 accused were convicted.

The law minister said this at the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday while he was replying to a question from MM Shahin.

Replying to another question of Muhammad Giasuddin, he said in present 212 posts of district level judges, including 11 posts of district judge, 33 posts of additional district judge, 28 posts of joint district judge and 140 posts of assistant and senior assistant judge remain vacant.

Moudud told the House that the process of filling up the vacant posts is underway.

DHAKA TODAY

Workshop

Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit organises a workshop on 'Mobility of skilled labour from Bangladesh: The case of nurses'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 3:00pm.

Memorial meeting

Sylhet Division Development Action Council will hold a memorial meeting to mark the 22nd death anniversary of Bangabir General MAG Osmani. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 3:15pm.

Publication ceremony

Bishwa Sahitya Kendra organises the publication ceremony of a compilation of writings by noted writer Abdullah Abu Sayeed. Venue: Bishwa Sahitya Kendra. Time: 4:30pm.

Discussion

A discussion on 'Free and Fair Election: Expectations of the Nation' will be to mark the 22nd death anniversary of Bangabir General MAG Osmani. Venue: Osmani Memorial auditorium. Time: 3:00.

Launching ceremony

Family of slain former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria will stage a silent sit-in as part of their Blue for Peace Programme demanding trial of the killers of former minister. Venue: Central Shaheed Minar. Time: 4:00pm.

Procession towards Nepal embassy

People's Health Movement will take out a procession towards the embassy of Nepal in Dhaka demanding release of political leaders, including former Nepali health minister Dr Mathura Seresta and protesting repressive policies of Nepali king. Venue: Mukhtangon. Time: 11:00am.

Seminar

Independent University of Bangladesh will hold a seminar on 'A common man's approach to Islamic philosophy'. Spectra Convention Centre, Gulshan. Time: 3:45pm.

Blue for Peace

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'Participation in decision-making a must for women empowerment'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Participation of women in decision-making process at the family, society and national levels is a must to ensure their empowerment, experts at an international conference said yesterday.

The position of women has been changing across the world slowly, but its pace should be accelerated to reduce gender discrimination, they said at the closing ceremony of the three-day conference titled 'The Impact of Global Issues on Women and Children'.

They also called for changing the people's attitude towards women. Men must be aware of the challenges facing women, they added.

Gender discrimination exists not only in Bangladesh or developing countries but also all over the world, although the manifestation varies because of cultural and economic contexts, said Dr Basanti Majumder of McMaster University of Canada.

The State University of Bangladesh and McMaster University jointly organised the conference attended by 400 rights activists, educationists and students from 35 countries.

Speaking as the chief guest, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Haque said the government has been implementing a number of specific women and child-focused programmes, strengthening legal

framework and evolving a rights-based society by creating effective working synergy and network, along with the NGOs and development partners.

"It cannot be denied that there is a lot to be done to get our women and children prepared to meet the world standard. Its time to assess our strength and weaknesses on a collective level in order to redefine and reposition ourselves as active agents of development," she added.

Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof SMA Faiz said globalisation bears promise and possibilities for women in Bangladesh and they should take the challenge.

Bangladeshi women have been

contributing to various sectors such as textile, pharmaceuticals and shrimp cultivation, which gives the status of competitiveness of women in the global market, he said.

"At the same time, they have been abused and harassed by males. But women should not surrender and they must have the confidence to change their own position."

Maj. Gen. (Retd.) M Shajahan of State University of Bangladesh, Chairman of University Grants Commission Prof M Asaduzzaman, Dr Mahbubur Rahman, Associate Vice-President of McMaster Health Sciences International Dr Andrea Baumann also spoke.

'Stop felling of trees at Dhanmondi'

Environmentalists at a rally yesterday demanded not to fell a single tree in Dhanmondi area ignoring the High Courts (HC) directive, says a press release.

They also demanded immediate arrest and punishment of those who are involved in tree-felling.

Green Peace, a youth environmentalist organisation, in association with Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), organised the rally and a sit-in programme protesting felling of trees in front of a house at road 11/A at Dhanmondi area in the city.

The speakers alleged Public Works Division (PWD) felled these old trees in the dark of night ignoring the HC directives.

Joint secretary of Bapa Mihir Biswas presided over the rally where Shahzahan Mridha Benu, Sharifuzzaman Sharif and Alamgir Kabir were also spoke.

Media in South Asia to work for regional peace, harmony

BSS, Dhaka

South Asian media can effectively contribute towards promoting peace and harmony in the region by minimising negative trends for larger benefits of the one fifth of mankind living in the area, a high-profile media conference agreed after three-day deliberations.

The just-concluded gathering in the southern Indian city of Hyderabad under the aegis of the South Asian Free Media Association (SAFMA) has stressed that media -- both print and electronic -- can play a catalytic role in this direction and the task of local language media in particular is enormous with huge subscribers in all the countries of the region.

The South Asian Media Conference, the fifth in sequence since the inception of the SAFMA, dwell on various issues at stake and agreed to take forward the caravan of peace despite limitations to the avowed objective of a harmonious

South Asian environment.

The three-day conference that began on February 11 was attended by more than 150 editors and senior journalists from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Maldives and Afghanistan.

Indian Information, Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Priya Ranjan Das Munshi was the chief guest and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Rajsekhar Reddy was the guest of honour on the inaugural day.

Keynote papers were presented by Dr. Bhaskara Rao of India, Md Ziauddin of Pakistan, Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury of Bangladesh, Narayan Wagle of Nepal and Sunanda Deshpriy of Sri Lanka.

The theme of all the papers presented was broadly the role of media and especially the language ones in shaping the society and affairs on both national and regional scale.

The opening day also saw the handing over of the SAFMA presi-

dency from Reazuddin Ahmed of Bangladesh to KK Katyal of India.

The proceedings witnessed interesting deliberations from persons like Indian Urban Development Minister Jaipal Reddy, who earlier held the information portfolio, former information minister RM Prasad of the previous BJP-led NDA government, Andhra Pradesh Public Information Minister Md Ali Shabber and former state chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Indian media personalities like former editor of several leading dailies George Verghese, Chief Editor of the Hindu N Ram, and Ramji Rao of the Ennadu Group of Publications also addressed the conference.

The speakers brought into sharp focus the need for a better South Asian political climate by making relentless efforts in the right direction where the media's role is tremendously important in creating a happy and healthy region.

Trawler capsizes in Sandwip Channel: Six missing

BDNEWS, Ctg

Six people went missing when a trawler laden with cement capsized in the Sandwip Channel in Chittagong yesterday.

The trawler, MB Dilruba, carrying 1,300 sacks of cement and seven crew capsized when it reached near Sandwip Channel at around 3:00pm.

One of the seven crew aboard the trawler, which sailed for Sandwip from Chittagong swam ashore while the fate of six others could not be known.



A delegation of Yunnan University of China and North South University calls on President Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

JCD beats up five JU BCL activists

JU CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal (JCD) beat up five Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activists and a general student in separate attacks on the Jahangirnagar University (JU) campus yesterday and Tuesday night.

Protesting the attacks, the BCL has submitted a memorandum to Vice-Chancellor Prof Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman with a 72-hour ultimatum to take action against the JCD cadres responsible.

It also threatened to enforce a strike on the campus if the attackers are not punished by Sunday.

Sources said a group of JCD cadres led by Rafique, joint secretary of Meer Musharraf Hossain Hall JCD, Imran, Sajib, and Kashem, beat up Sayed Maniruzzaman, a student of government and politics department, with hockey sticks and rods in his room at the same hall at 1:00am yesterday as he got his name enlisted in the hall sports competition defying a JCD order. Manir suffered a fractured hand.

Abdul Matin Bappi, a final year student of drama and dramatics department, was beaten up by a group of JCD musclemen at Shuparitolta at 11:45am for his alleged involvement in pro-hartal activities. Bappi was given first aid at the university medical centre.

Three BCL workers -- Mahibur Rauf Shaibal, Zahid Parvez Khan Pulok and Emon -- were beaten up on the cafeteria premises by a group of JCD activists led by Mehedi at 9:00pm on Tuesday following an altercation over smoking during a Valentine's Day mock debate at Mukhtamanch.

An hour later, another JCD group led by Tanjil, Habib and Himel attacked Nazrul, a BCL activist, at Maulana Bhasani Hall for his involvement in the BCL.

When contacted, proctor Prof Kamrul Ahsan said action would be taken against the attackers through proper channels.

'31 women die a day due to childbirth complications'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 31 women die every day in Bangladesh due to childbirth related complications, said visiting Netherlands Minister for Development Cooperation Agnes van Ardenne yesterday.

"While the country is performing well on a number of other Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is clearly lagging behind in reducing maternal mortality rate," she said at a press conference at Matlab Health Research Centre of ICDDR,B in

Chandpur.

The minister also announced that the Dutch government will double its donation to around Tk 17 crore (two million Euro) for the ICDDR,B up to 2007 as the USAID will suspend its funds for population research work of the ICDDR,B as per the Mexico City Policy of the US.

Executive Director of ICDDR,B David A Sack, Dutch Ambassador BCM Beemsterboer and other officials of the Dutch embassy and ICDDR,B were also present at the press conference.

Seventh death anniversary of Kazi Aref today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Today is the seventh death anniversary of Kazi Aref Ahmed, one of the key organisers of the liberation war and founder of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD).

The JSD has drawn up different programmes to mark the day.

The programmes include hoisting a black flag at the party's central office, placing wreaths at his portrait and his grave and a discussion at the Colonel Taher auditorium in Dhaka.

Local unit of JSD has also organised a discussion at Shaheed Yakub Ali College ground.

An armed gang killed Aref, then president of JSD, along with four local leaders while he was speaking at a rally at Kalidaspur village in Daultapur, Kushtia, on February 16, 1999.

The four others are Kushtia JSD president Lokman Hossain, general secretary Yakub Ali, Israil Hossain and Shamsur Ali.

Amir Shakil



Today is the 4th death anniversary of Amir Shakil, son of late Hazi Abdul Quadir of Zinzira at Keraniganj, says a press release.

On the occasion, a milad and doa mahfil will be held at his Gutzarbagh residence at Zinzira after Asr prayers today.

Friends, relatives and admirers have been requested to attend the milad and pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

WEATHER TODAY

Rain or thundershowers likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Rajshahi, Dhaka and Sylhet divisions in the next 12 hours till 6:00pm today.

Weather may remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country during the period, Met Office said forecasting slight rise in night temperature over the country.

Highest temperature 34.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 14.5 degree Celsius at Ishwardi.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:54pm today and rises at 6:30am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	31.7	20.6	85	56
Chittagong	29.2	19.1	72	80
Rajshahi	32.2	15.5	92	50
Khulna	32.7	18.6	89	49
Barisal	32.0	20.5	89	75
Sylhet	28.4	19.9	91	74
Cox's Bazar	29.4	19.5	81	--