

Govt firm to maintain peace, says Khaleda

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday categorically said those responsible for any injudicious activities will be dealt with a strong hand, assuring that her government is working firmly to maintain peace and security in all spheres of society.

The prime minister made the strongly worded statement while addressing the national conference 2006 of the Council for Interfaith Harmony, Bangladesh (CIH, BD) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre (BCFCC).

"Bangladesh shall move forward with firm footsteps in its journey of peace by joining the international cavalcade against subversion and terrorism. We consider our duties towards our citizens as our sacred trust. There is

Govt to seek more info on toxic ship Norway

STAR REPORT

The government has decided to gather more information about the possible extent of danger of asbestos-laden SS Norway, which a ship-breaker intends to buy and scarp at a ship-breaking yard in Chittagong.

The decision came yesterday at an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Environment and Forest Secretary Abu Jafar Chowdhury at the Ministry of Environment and Forest.

Environmentalists are protesting against bringing the ship to Bangladesh since newspaper reports unveiled its hazardous impact on environment and health of labourers.

Yesterday's meeting decided to gather more information about the ship before making a decision whether it will be allowed to enter Bangladesh waters, reports AFP

quoting Mohammad Riazuddin, technical director of the Department of Environment.

"We will collect more information and analyse how much damage it can cause to our environment and workers at the ship-breaking yards," Riazuddin told the news agency.

The meeting decided to prevent the import of SS Norway by not allowing opening any LC with Bangladesh Bank, directing the Chittagong Port Authority and Coastguard authorities not to let the ship enter Bangladesh and taking up steps as per the Bangladesh Environment Act, the WTO, ILO and Basel Convention, according to BDNEWS.

International environmentalist organisation Greenpeace had warned all not to buy SS Norway, an 11-story ship, which was launched in 1960 as the SS France. It has been docked in open waters off the Malaysian coast for years.

Greenpeace warned that harmful asbestos and poisonous gas that remaining inside the ship can cause cancer to humans and lead to a great environmental disaster around the ship-breaking yard.

It has enlisted the ship on a list of 50 vessels, which it fears will not be decontaminated before being scrapped. It says the French workers who built the ship claim it contains 1,250 tonnes of materials that contain asbestos.

Lokman Hossain, a Bangladeshi ship-breaker, has finalised a deal to buy the ship at over \$13 million.

"I could not make the payment due to the persisting dollar crisis in the local market. But I want to settle the thing soon," Lokman told The Daily Star.

He disputed the allegation that

Hasina for change of govt thru' fair polls

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the change of government should be ensured through free and fair elections after reforming the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC).

"The alliance government has become desperate to consolidate their power... that's why they appointed partisan people in all areas relating to the election process," she said in a statement expressing gratitude to the people for observing the 14-party sponsored dawn-to-dusk hartal across the country.

Hasina, also the president of Awami League (AL), alleged that the BNP-led alliance government had appointed a controversial person as the chief election



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia meets Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and her counterpart Shaukat Aziz at the presidential residence in Islamabad before she returns home Tuesday.

BIWTA fails to restore navigability in Baghabari

Huge sediments piled up in dredged river

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, from Bogra

With the loss of navigability in new areas including Harirampur in the 45 kilometres of waterway from Kazirhat to Baghabari in the Jamuna, the Baghabari river port-bound channel cannot be made fully functional in this dry season.

Revealing this fact, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) Site Engineer Akhtaruzzaman said BIWTA's attempt to increase navigability of the Jamuna river by dredging failed as huge sediment piled up in Majhkhali, Bahiakhara, Safullahpur and Harirampur areas before completion of the dredging.

After failure to increase navigability by dredging in the Baghabari-bound channel, the BIWTA took initiative to make the channel navigable by putting bamboo fences in the river in four areas including Pechakhola, Mohanganj and Charsafullah.

The BIWTA will conduct more dredging and put bamboo fences to

make the Baghabari-bound channel functional, officials said.

They, however, said the sand bags dumped by the Water Development Board at various points including Nakalia came down to the main channel.

Six to seven feet deep sediment deposited on the sand bags made the situation worse, they noted.

The BIWTA officials also blamed the lack of the coordination between these two government entities for the loss of navigability at different points including Nakalia in the Jamuna.

Meanwhile, the supply of diesel and other fuels from Baghabari Depot was not normal, as the waterway from Baghabari to Kazirhat could not be made fully functional.

Jamuna Oil Company in Baghabari depot had a reserve of 30 thousand litres of petrol and 25 thousand litres of octane yesterday but the Meghna and Padma oil companies there had no reserve of these two types of fuels.



The 11-storey toxic laden ship SS Norway seen in Malaysian territorial waters recently.

IMF for better capacity to deal with foreign investors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has asked the government to focus on the capacity building to negotiate with the foreign investors efficiently, lack of which has been sending out negative signals to other investors about Bangladesh.

In an evaluation report on the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction (NSAPR), the IMF also said "the NSAPR should have given foreign direct investment higher prominence, perhaps as one of the key drivers of improving overall competitiveness."

The evaluation report was released yesterday following a discussion in the IMF board meeting.

The report also said, "The inability to expediently and transparently process large investment proposals from foreign investors has had a bad signalling effect. There is also a need to build adequate technical capacity in government to negotiate with large foreign investors."

1 killed, 7 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.

Home shows dismal ADP implementation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry has implemented only 18 percent of its annual development projects (ADP) in the first six months of the current fiscal year (FY), with several of its tiers performing much lower than expectation.

Only Tk 42.03 crore out of Tk 238.49 crore ADP allocations has been spent so far, which stands 35 percent less than that in the same period in the previous FY.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar yesterday expressed dissatisfaction over the slow progress, saying, "Implement-

tation of ADP in the last fiscal year was the highest whereas some departments' performances in this year are unsatisfactory."

Presiding over a meeting on review of ADP-listed projects at the home ministry's conference room, Babar warned that action will be taken against those who will fail to attain their performance regarding implementation of projects.

Bureaucratic tangles are delaying implementation of many significant projects, the minister told reporters after the meeting.

"It is very painful that red-tapism has caused much delay," he said, adding that they are now working to

Russia, Iran to hold nuke talks

AP, Moscow

Russia and Iran will hold talks in Moscow on Monday on Russia's offer to enrich uranium for Tehran, the Russian Embassy in the Iranian capital was quoted as saying yesterday.

The Iranian government informed Russian officials about their intention to participate in the negotiations on February 20 -- four days later than originally planned, the ITAR-Tass news agency quoted an embassy official as saying.

"The Russian side has agreed to this," the Russian diplomat said on condition of anonymity.

Moscow has offered to host Iranian enrichment in Russia, where it would have better oversight -- a proposal meant to ease an international standoff over Tehran's nuclear program. The two sides had set Feb. 16 as a date for talks in Moscow.

But after the International Atomic Energy Agency reported Iran to the UN Security Council on February 4, Tehran suspended some cooperation with the UN watchdog agency and said it resumed small-scale enrichment of uranium -- a process that some fear could lead to the production of nuclear bombs.

On Monday, Tehran abruptly postponed the talks in Moscow, but a day later, officials in Iran said they had requested a new date: Monday.

Interfax quoted Russian Embassy official Vyacheslav Moshkalo as saying that the postponement had no particular significance and had been overblown by the media.



Commonwealth secy-general due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon will arrive in Dhaka today on a daylong visit to meet government and opposition leaders and discuss various issues, including trade, digital divide and promotion of understanding



Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman (C) poses for photograph along with participants of the SaarcFinance Governors' Symposium on Microcredit in the city yesterday.

Bangladesh's microcredit fights poverty best

Says symposium of Saarc central bank governors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Asymposium of Saarc central bank governors yesterday termed the microcredit operations run by NGOs in Bangladesh as the most effective model in the region for poverty reduction.

An expert committee with representatives of the central banks and

finance ministries of the South Asian countries would sit soon in Nepal to design the mode of operations of the Saarc Development Fund, decided the SaarcFinance Governors' Symposium on Microcredit. The committee will also look into whether microcredit would be a component of the fund.

"South Asian countries are

following different models of microcredit operations. But a number of countries have been able to improve their efficiency in microcredit operations and reach the poor following the Bangladesh model," eminent economist Wahiduddin Mahmud told

Outlaw killed in 'shootout' with Rab

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

A regional leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) was killed in a 'shootout' between his accomplices and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members in Harinakundu upazila of Jhenidah early yesterday.

The dead was identified as Shahidul Islam alias Shahidul of Kiorbila village in Alamdanga upazila of Chuadanga.

Acting on a tip-off, a team of Rab-6 arrested Shahidul from near a madrasa in Rishkhali village of the same upazila on Tuesday afternoon.

According to Rab, they took Shahidul to Bherakhali-Santanapur village to recover arms following leads extracted from him during interrogation.

As they reached near a field of the village at around 3:30am, the outlaws opened fired on them triggering an hour-long gunfight.

Shahidul got caught in the shootout when he attempted to flee from the Rab van. He died on the spot.

Rab retrieved a pistol, a pipe-gun and eight rounds of bullet from the spot.

Shahidul was accused in six criminal cases including five for murder, Rab officials said.

Prayer Timing		
February 16		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-25	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	5-57	6-01
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation