

Floors added to Phoenix building without Rajuk approval

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The top two floors of the six-storey Phoenix building that collapsed at Tejgaon on Saturday were constructed without any approval of Rajuk, sources in Rajuk said.

land.

Rajuk Chief Engineer Emdadul Islam said they have found out that the owner of the building obtained approval for a four-storey building plan in 1997, but gradually he built two more floors without seeking further approval.

Then the owner went on to change the 'use pattern' of the building from a fabric factory to a 500-bed hospital and the engineer in-charge demolished several columns in the process. Due to this 'amateurish modification work', the entire structure became extremely vulnerable to sudden

collapse. Moreover, the building had undergone various structural modifications earlier when it was used as a fabric factory.

Rajuk officials are trying to find out the engineer in-charge of the modification work.

The Ministry of Housing and Public Works and Rajuk have formed a joint enquiry committee to investigate the cause of the collapse.

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US TEAM MEETS HASINA Repression of minorities after 2001 polls discussed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A US delegation led by Chairman of the US International Commission for Religious Freedom Michael Cromartik called on Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in the city yesterday.

They discussed overall situation of law and order, terrorist activities and repression of the minorities after 2001 general elections. The meeting lasted for about one hour, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to Hasina, told reporters after the meeting.

Hasina, also the Awami League president, told the delegation that her party fears that terrorist activities might increase centring on the next general elections.

The terrorist activities, including killings of political leaders, journalists and common people, have been given a kind of legality to some extent, Saber said quoting Hasina as saying.

"If fair investigation into these killings is not conducted, terrorist activities might increase centring on the general elections."

Michael Cromartik, however, made no comments to reporters. "We discussed at large...thank you," he said.

The US delegation members included Vice-Chairman of US International Commission for Religious Freedom Felice Gaer, Charge d'Affaires of the US Embassy Judith A Chammas was also present.

AL leaders Obaidul Quader, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, Quazi Zafarullah, Dr Hasan Mahmud and ST Imam attended the meeting.



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ATTACK ON HUMAYUN AZAD No action yet against attackers

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Department of Bangla of Dhaka University and different socio-cultural and political organisations observed the second anniversary of the attack on prominent writer Prof Humayun Azad yesterday.

To mark the day, the Bangla department formed a human chain at 11:00am on the campus demanding arrest and trial of the attackers. University teachers, students and different progressive organisations joined the human chain.

The Sangskrit Noya Setu, a cultural organisation, organised daylong programmes that included protest painting, protest poetry recitation at Aparayee Bangla and a seminar on the works of Prof Azad presided over by prominent writer Hasan Azizul Haq.

On this day in 2004, unknown assailants brutally stabbed Prof Azad in a bid to kill him near Amar Ekushey Book Fair while he was returning from there.

Later that year, he went to Germany getting a scholarship of PEN International on August 7 but he was found dead at an apartment in Munich on August 12.

Prof Azad's family members claimed that his death was not a usual case. They reiterated that he was killed in a cunning way by the fundamentalist forces that opposed to the spirit of the liberation war.

But the government is yet to take any actions against the people who attacked him about two years into his death.

Services of 3 high officials extended for second time

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday extended the contractual appointment of three high officials for the second time.

The services of Prof Abul Kalam Manzur Morshed, director general of Bangla Academy, Prof Mahmudul Haque, DG of Bangladesh National Museum, and Muhammad Ali Khan, member of Securities Exchange Commission, were extended for two years.

The tenure of their appointment was scheduled to expire on February 27.

The contractual appointment of Prof AJM Sahidullah, chairman of Chittagong Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board, was also extended for one more year.

The government also cancelled the LPR of Mohammad Ali Akhand, headmaster of Comilla Zila School, and reappointed him for two years on contract basis.

Fresh combing operation in Sundarbans from tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and coastguards will launch a fresh combing operation in Sundarbans on March 1 in the wake of alarming rise in the incidents of robbery, extortion and looting of firearms.

Sources at the Sundarbans Forest Division said the combing operation has become an urgent need as the government is losing revenue earnings from various resources due to rise in crimes.

Many fishermen, Bawalis, fish traders as well as tourists are not going to Sundarbans due to rise in crimes, leading to a sharp decline in revenue earnings, they explained.

Incidents of abduction for ransom and armed attacks on forest guards have become a regular phenomenon.

This time, the Rab will assist the police and coastguards in the combing operation, which will continue for long, said DIG of Khulna Range Noor Mohammad.

DAB celebrates golden jubilee today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) celebrates its golden jubilee, the 50th founding anniversary today.

Founded by late National Professor Dr Mohammad Ibrahim, the non-profit voluntary socio-medical organisation started its journey on this day in 1956 to provide fundamental health care to diabetic patients.

The association has now expanded its activities through its research institutes, health care development projects and 53 affiliated bodies across the country.

Speaking at a press conference at BIRDEM yesterday, DAB Secretary General Prof A K Azad Khan said diabetic is a chronic disease and regular check up, jogging and intake of low calorie foods are the main key to lead a diabetic-free life.

Lack of political will blamed for power crisis

UNB, Dhaka

Speakers at a seminar yesterday blamed the lack of political commitment on the part of the government for the current power crisis.

"Fund constraint is not the main problem. Only the absence of political commitment of the government was the main reason behind the present power crisis," said Shamsul Islam, former chairman of Power Development Board (PDB).

Forum for Energy Reporters, Bangladesh (FERB) organised the seminar titled "Power Crisis: Way out" at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity auditorium in the city with Forum chairman Mollah Amzad Hossain in the chair.

FERB Executive Director Mahmud Hafiz presented the keynote paper at the seminar.

The speakers said that in the last 16 years, the nation never saw a full-fledged energy minister that reflected the negligence to the vital sector by the successive governments.

General Secretary of the Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) of Power Development Board (PDB) Zafrul Hassan, also general secretary of Jatiyatabadhi Sramik Dal, said the lack of coordination and also political will have led to such a critical situation in the power

sector.

"In last four years, the PDB chairman was changed five times while the Power Division secretary changed four times... this reflects the clear apathy of the government to the sector," he said.

Newly appointed PDB chairman ANM Rijwan said the situation will improve by the end of March when the ongoing rehabilitation and maintenance programmes of some power plants will be completed.

He said of the total 103 units, some 21 units with about 980MW capacity are now under maintenance and rehabilitation.

"We're hopeful these units will resume operation by March 31 and then the situation will improve reasonably," Rijwan said.

He, however, said despite this, the country may still have to face a shortage of about 1,000MW, as the demand will go up to 4,500MW against the available supply of 3,500MW.

He said of the total generation units, 45 with combined capacity of about 2015MW, are aged between one and ten years. The remaining 58 units are very old while some 34 units are 20 to 41 years old -- most have become obsolete, he said.

Rijwan said the government has taken initiative to put in place some fast-track barge, skid and trailer

mounted power plants to address the present power crisis. "If these plants come into operation, they may add another 360MW in the coming summer."

Former PDB chairman Brig General (Retd) MA Malek, served during the last Awami League government as well as under the present alliance government, said discontinuation of the supplier's contract in the power sector has resulted in such crisis.

"Soon after assuming the charge, the present government cancelled some supplier's credit-funded projects. But they failed to arrange any alternative funding," he said.

Moazzem Hossain, president of Bangladesh Energy Companies' Association (BECA) and chairman of Hosaf Group, said the private entrepreneurs are ready to invest in the power sector.

"We can set up barge-mounted plants within next six months if the government gives us firm commitment. In that event, the government will have to accept even unsolicited offers," he said.

Chairman of Khulna Power Company Mohammed Aziz Khan said if the government really wants a healthy and vibrant power sector, a fullfledged minister will have to be given the charge.

4 of a family hurt as gang hurls bomb, abducts 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Agang at Pragpur in Daulatpur upazila abducted one person early yesterday and hurled bombs injuring four of a family as the family members failed to provide the toll money they demanded.

According to the police, a gang of 10 criminals stormed into the house of Shamsul Islam, a quack of the village, around 2:30am and held the family members at gunpoint.

The gang asked Shamsul to pay them Tk 1 lakh. As Shamsul expressed his inability to pay the money the gang abducted his son Shimul, 16, an SSC examinee. As the family members came forward to resist the abduction, the criminals hurled four bombs and fired gunshots on them injuring four.

They injured are Samsul, 45, his wife Arzina, 39, Shamsul's brother Kausar, 25, and nephew Amin, 22. The injured were admitted to Kushtia General Hospital. Later, Kausar and Amin were sent to Rajshahi Medical and Hospital as their condition deteriorated.

The gang called the family over cellphone and demanded Tk 2 lakh as ransom later on.

As many as 12 people were abducted in the district during the last two months. Of them two are still missing, while the rest were freed after paying the ransom. Police said organised gangs and outlawed party cadres are involved in the incident.

5 killed, 42 hurt in road accidents

UNB, Dhaka

At least five people were killed and 42 injured in separate road accidents in Dhaka, Jessore and Pirojpur yesterday.

Two people, including a woman, were killed and two others injured when a speedy pickup van knocked them down in the city's Pallabi area yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Lutfa Begum, wife of Muksed Ali of Mirpur Section-10, and Hasan, 35, son of Najir Ahmed of Mirpur Section-10.

Quoting witnesses and relatives of the victims, police said Lutfa died on the spot when the pickup van hit her while she was talking to one of her relatives near Mirpur Shaheed Smriti High School at about 2:30pm.

Three others Farhad Hossain, 30, a pedestrian, and Haran Sheikh, a rickshaw-puller and its passenger Hasan, 34, were also injured in the incident.

Farhad and Hasan were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition while Haran Sheikh to a local hospital. Hasan succumbed to his injuries at the hospital at about 5:00pm.

Pedestrians caught helper Obaidullah, who was driving the bus, and handed him over to police after a good beating.

Another report from Jessore

adds: One person was killed and 40 others were injured when a bus carrying students and teachers of Durgapur Senior Madrasa for study tour to Mongla fell into a ditch at Mongalkot yesterday.

Saddam Hossain, 14, died on the spot, survivors said. The accident occurred at about 10:00am when the tyre of front wheel of the bus bursts and the vehicle turned turtle into the ditch.

Of the injured, teachers Imran Ali, Elias Hossain and Kohinur Begum and 17 students were admitted to the Jessore General Hospital and others taken to Keshabpur Health Complex.

After the accident locals put up road barricade.

In another accident, Abul Hossain (40) of Choto Megla village was perished under the wheels of a train at Ander Bot-Tala on Jessore-Benapole line at about noon.

The accident occurred when he was crossing the rail line, police said.

A man was crushed under the wheels of a speedy bus at Kuniori on Nesarabad-Barisal road in Pirojpur yesterday.

Police and locals said Mosharrif Hossain, 45, of Alangkar Kathi village in Nesarabad upazila, crushed under the wheels of the bus when he was crossing the road at 10:00am.

Angry people damaged the bus.



Former Bapa president Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury speaks at a press conference at the Reporters' Unity auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right is Bapa General Secretary Mohidul Haq Khan and on his left is Bapa executive member Architect Iqbal Habib.

Changes in UK immigration rules for children

UNB, Dhaka

The British Government has introduced a change to the immigration rules from February 12 to provide further safeguards for children when entering the UK as visitor.

According to the new rule, all children applying to visit the United Kingdom will need to declare whether they are travelling alone or with an accompanying adult.

If they are travelling with an accompanying adult, their visa will be endorsed to that effect and will only be valid if the child travels with that particular adult.

In both cases, there will be need to satisfy the Entry Clearance Officer that satisfactory arrangements have been made for the children's care while they are in the UK. Each child will be issued with a separate entry clearance vignette.

When applying the visa for a child, the parent and guardian will be required to indicate whether the child will travel to the UK alone or with a nominated adult.

The child's entry clearance will be endorsed to indicate the adult/adults who will accompany the child. The entry clearance will not be valid for travel other than when accompanied by the identified one.

Before the changes, a child was able for entry clearance at the same time as other close family members. The Entry Clearance Officer, if satisfied with the proposed arrangements, issues an entry clearance.

But there was nothing to stop that child then traveling to the UK either alone or in the company of an adult who was either unrelated or with whom they had little connection.

Further information is available on British High Commission website www.ukinbangladesh.org

Make Rajuk free of corruption, ensure accountability

Demands Bapa

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Building Construction (Amendment) Act, 2006, passed in the Jatiya Sangsad on Sunday with a view to ensuring construction standards, will be ineffective unless Rajuk, the implementing authority, is thoroughly reformed and made corruption-free, said environmental activists yesterday.

They also called for ensuring full accountability of the Rajuk, the sole authority to approve building plans and monitor construction.

Rajuk is not properly performing its duty and it always defends itself saying that it has not enough manpower to monitor all constructions, said leaders of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) at a press conference in the city.

They also demanded strict enforcement of the building construction code to save the life of innocent people.

Bapa organised the press conference in the wake of recent disasters -- building collapse in Dhaka and a devastating fire in a textile mill in Chittagong.

Former president of Bapa Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury said the building construction code is a technical matter. It needs amendment from time to time.

Referring to the absence of workers' safety laws, he said the

government has already ratified the ILO Convention on workers' safety. So, it is the responsibility of the government to follow the international laws in this regard, he added.

Architect Iqbal Habib, executive member of Bapa, called on the government to ensure strict enforcement of the building construction code.

He also urged the government to compel the owners of garments factories to implement all kinds of safety measures for the workers.

Habib called for taking immediate action against those responsible for deaths in building collapse and fire incidents with a view to averting such disasters in future.

He also demanded re-inspection of all buildings to identify vulnerable ones which should be demolished to save the lives of people.

He called on the government to pay compensation to the victims of the Tejgaon building collapse and ensure proper treatment of the injured.

Kazi M Sheesh, former chief engineer of Dhaka Wasa, Bapa General Secretary Mohidul Haq Khan, Joint Secretary JK Boral and Abu Sayeed of the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh were also present.

Hasina to visit KTS Textile Mill tomorrow

UNB, Chittagong

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina arrives here tomorrow on a daylong visit to the port city.

During the tour, she will visit the badly fire-damaged KTS Composite Textiles Mill in Kalurghat industrial area at about 11:30 am and the injured garment workers at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital at noon.

Hasina, also Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, will also address a grand rally of the 14-party combine in the port city at 3:00pm.

White Panel sweeps DU dean elections

DU CORRESPONDENT

Ruling BNP-Jamaat-backed White Panel swept the Dhaka University dean elections for seven faculties yesterday.

Out of seven, White Panel won deans of five faculties, including Arts Faculty, Science Faculty, Pharmacy Faculty, Business Studies Faculty and Law Faculty and pro-opposition 'Blue Panel' won two deans -- Social Science Faculty and Biology Faculty.

Social Science Faculty incumbent Dean Prof Dr Harun-or-Rashid of Blue Panel was elected securing 132 votes while his rival Prof Shahed Hasan of White Panel got 30 votes.

Arts Faculty incumbent Dean Prof Sadrul Amin of White Panel was elected securing 129 votes and his rival Prof Khandaker Ashraf Hossain of Blue Panel got 77 votes.

Prof Tazmeri SA Islam of White Panel was elected dean of Science Faculty securing 101 votes while Prof RIM Aminur Rashid of Blue Panel got 98.

Prof Mohammd Abdur Rashid of White Panel was elected dean of Pharmacy Faculty securing 20 votes while Prof ABM Faruq of Blue Panel got six votes.

Prof Mohammd Anwar Hossain of Blue Panel was elected dean of Biology Faculty securing 75 votes and his rival Prof Sayed Salehin Kadri of White Panel got 71.

Prof Sirajul Islam, incumbent dean of the Business Studies Faculty, was elected securing 67 votes from White Panel while his rival Prof Mizanur Rahman of Blue Panel got 58 votes.

Dr Borhan Uddin Khan of White Panel was elected unopposed dean of Law Faculty as Blue Panel boycotted the poll as a symbolic protest against teachers' appointments on political consideration at the faculty.

The newly elected deans will take over by the end of this week, sources said.

Pabna Krishak League leader shot dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

A leader of Bangladesh Krishak League was shot dead in a crowded bazar at Chatmahar upazila in Pabna last night.

The dead was identified as Mojibar Rahman, son of late Irad Ali of Kholkari village in Chatmahar upazila.

Locals said a group of outlawed Purba Banglar Sarbahara Party (PBSP) opened fire on Mojibar at about 8:00pm yesterday and he died on the spot.

Mojibar was a leader of Krishak League, Chatmahar unit, locals added.

The body of the slain Mojibar was lying on the spot while filing this report although police rushed to the spot.

No case has been filed yet. Extremists killed 12 people in the house of Mojibar in 1988.



No change in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours till 6:00pm today.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period, Met office said.

Highest temperature 37.8 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 18.5 degree Celsius at Jessore and Rangpur.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:01pm today and rises at 6:21am tomorrow.

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

Table with 4 columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.



Imarat Nirman Sramik Union Bangladesh stages a demonstration at Muktangan in the city yesterday to realise its 12-point demand.