

Dhaka pitches for market access

FROM PAGE 1 Seeking greater access for Bangladesh's goods to Indian markets, Saifur told the Indian business leaders. "Even if you lost \$100 million [by importing from Bangladesh], it is nothing compared to your two-billion-dollar worth of exports to Bangladesh."

"If you do this, we will take two steps forward," Rahman said. Seeking access to the Indian corridor for Bangladeshi exports to Nepal and Bhutan, Saifur urged India to upgrade a 17km stretch of road in India as it is unsuitable for movement of trucks carrying goods.

He said Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam during his meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday afternoon raised the issue of Bangladesh government's clearance to the Tata investment proposals to set up power, steel and fertiliser plants in Bangladesh.

"We are giving serious examination to the proposals which have so many imponderables like Tata's access to coal mines, use of ground water which is scarce, price of land in a land-hungry country and the price of gas which the Indian company would use for their plants," he said.

"We have to sign 23 agreements—not one or two—relating to royalty, fees and other aspects of the investment proposals by the Tata," he added.

Saifur said the power and steel plants were the core of Tata's investment but the fertiliser unit is no big deal as Bangladesh has enough fertiliser factories.

"We are giving a serious study to Tata's proposal not only from narrow business angle but also from the point of India-Bangladesh relations," he said, adding, "If the proposal is pushed through, it will create an environment for giving a

different direction to relations between the two countries."

He said while fixing the price at which gas will be supplied to Tata, the Bangladesh government has also to keep in mind the domestic investors who should not feel let down.

He suggested economic integration in South Asia like the European Economic Community and said countries in this region should not allow "small problems" to affect their economic ties.

"If European countries could come together for economic integration after fighting among them for centuries, why can't we? After all, we have not fought for centuries. Bangladesh, India and Pakistan know each other so well and yet we are hit by small problems," Saifur said.

He said he has no objection to FTA with India. "Maybe we cannot go the whole hog but some steps in this direction will be a great boost—a sort of micro FTA between India and Bangladesh."

Stressing the need for harmonisation of customs rules and testing of products between the two countries, he said India must upgrade its infrastructure on its side at border trade points to boost bilateral commerce.

Saifur rejected India's offer of technical support to Bangladesh to set up testing laboratories, saying, "We have enough resources for doing that."

Pointing out that he is a great believer in liberalising trade between India and Bangladesh, Saifur said, "I have not imposed any countervailing duty on any goods from India. In fact, I have resisted compulsions to impose countervailing duties on Indian cars."

Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan was also present at

the meeting but did not speak.

Earlier, President of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) Yogendra K Modi in his welcome speech said India recognised the need for reducing the adverse trade balance against Bangladesh. "One plausible solution [to this] seems to be the increased Indian investment into Bangladesh with possibilities of re-export to the Indian market," he said.

Pointing out that Indian investment in Bangladesh was a minuscule \$12.5 million, Modi put forward an 11-point plan to boost bilateral trade and Indian investment in Bangladesh.

Later, the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry and FICCI signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to promote Bangladesh's trade and investment opportunities and encourage Indian companies to choose Bangladesh as their preferred investment destination.

The two chamber bodies decided to set up a joint task force to work out time-bound and target-bound activities to spread awareness of bilateral trade opportunities in the wake of implementation of Safta, identifying tariff and non-tariff barriers, anti-dumping and countervailing duties and effecting policy changes to remove them.

The task force may also consider setting up of special economic zones for Indian investors in Bangladesh.

It will also formulate recommendations for creating and upgrading infrastructure at all land border points between India and Bangladesh, containerisation of traffic up to Dhaka and vice versa.

The MoU was signed in the presence of Saifur Rahman and Morshed Khan.

Student strike today

FROM PAGE 16 unavoidable reasons, a DU press release said.

Following removal of the embattled principal of Eden College, general students of the college and different student bodies yesterday continued to demonstrate demanding acceptance of the other points of their six-point demand.

"We are sticking to our scheduled strike programme, as JCD cadres are yet to get punishment for launching attack on the demonstrating students and involving in murky business over seats at the college hostels," Liaqat Siddiq, president of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), which leads the Chhatra Sangram parishad, said.

The parishad brought out a procession and held a rally on the Dhaka University campus yesterday to reiterate their demands.

General students of the college will form a human chain in front of the college in the morning. Pritilata Sangsad, a platform of Eden College students, will also hold a rally on the Dhaka University campus tomorrow to meet the same demands.

Women organisations attached with the 14-party opposition alliance yesterday brought out a procession and held a rally on the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city demanding punishment to the Eden College JCD leaders for attacking the general students.

They also demanded immediate

halt to illegal seat dealings by the JCD leaders.

The women leaders said the alliance government has been conducting repression using police and their party cadres since they took charge. They urged all the women as well as people of the country to be united against the government's repression on women.

Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Matia Chowdhury, Shirin Akhter, Hajera Sultana, Jahanaara Begum, Ashrafunnessa Mosharrar, Fazilatunnessa Indira, Nazma Akhter, Zakia Hossain and Khaleda Khanam, among others, addressed the rally.

Industries

FROM PAGE 1 parliamentary body observed yesterday, reviewing the facts at a meeting.

The parliamentary standing committee on agriculture ministry blamed the industries ministry for mismanagement in distributing fertiliser. It asked the authorities concerned to find out the persons responsible for this.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar in a letter to the industries minister in September said the stock of fertiliser was supposed to be between four lakh tonnes and 4.5 lakh tonnes. "But the actual stock is now 2.48 lakh tonnes," the letters said.

Talking to The Daily Star after yesterday's meeting, committee member and Awami League lawmaker Dr Abdur Razzak said the industries ministry was supposed to import seven lakh tonnes of fertiliser but it imported less than the requirement.

Officials of the industries ministry however claimed at the meeting that there is no fertiliser crisis.

But the AL lawmaker said the agriculture minister admitted that there was a shortage of fertiliser but it was met.

One dies in Ctg fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

One person was burned to death and properties worth around Tk 1 crore damaged in fire incidents in the city and district.

Abul Hashem, 40, son of Samad Ali of Fedainagar under Sitakunda upazila was burnt to death in a fire that broke out in the reserve forest adjoining the Government forest office at Baroiadhala of the upazila on Saturday evening.

Forest officials recovered the charred body of Hashem on Monday afternoon, sources said quoting locals and witnesses.

The fire originated from a burning cigarette, fire service sources said. Fire fighters, workers of forest office and locals were trying to extinguish the fire till yesterday noon.

A fire broke out at the finishing department of the state-owned Gul Ahmad Jute Mill in Chhoto Kurmia under Sitakunda upazila at 4:00pm on Monday.

Soon it engulfed the export department of the mill and reduced gunny bags worth about Tk 80 lakh to ashes, fire service sources said.

Four fire-fighting units from Kumira and Agrabad fire service stations rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze with the help of locals at around 7:00pm.

A tin-shed house of Razzak Ahmad of Kazi Para of Dooa Pukurganj in Kumira was burnt down in a fire that originated from the kitchen oven at 1:20am yesterday.

Property worth about Tk 50 thousand was damaged in the fire.

Another fire gutted a semi-pucca slum of Ilias at Mistri Para in Doublemooring in the city at 4:05am yesterday. It originated from an electric short circuit and the damage was estimated at Tk 5 lakh.

Dhaka, Delhi sign

FROM PAGE 1

cooperation for preventing illicit trafficking in narcotics and psychotropic substances and related matters was signed by Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath.

The revised trade accord was inked by Bangladesh Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and Kamal Nath.

Earlier, Khaleda Zia said Bangladesh and India can immensely benefit from a time-bound exploitation of full potential of relations between the two countries, reports UNB.

She noted that differences of opinion on various issues between the two countries are natural, but "these need not stand in the way of honest efforts by our two countries to address them. I believe we owe it to ourselves to do our best to narrow down these differences."

Khaleda made the remarks in her speech at the banquet hosted in her honour by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad State Guesthouse last night.

She said one of the foremost objectives of her India visit is to constructively contribute to the promotion of trust, understanding and cooperation between the two countries.

Seeking cooperation in promising sectors, she said the potential of Bangladesh-India cooperation in human resource development, science and technology, education, agriculture, people-to-people contact is enormous.

"We are eager to promote cooperation in these areas. We also remain ready to consider any idea that you may like to put forward in this regard," she said.

The prime minister urged India to adopt specific steps to encourage more export from Bangladesh and duty-free market access of Bangladeshi products to India to put the economic relations on a solid foundation.

"Your positive response will help Bangladesh in narrowing the widening trade gap between our two countries," she said.

Khaleda said Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner among the Saarc countries. "This robust trading relation between our two countries speaks volumes about the important economic underpinning of our bilateral ties," she said, seeking Indian investments in Bangladesh.

On water sharing, the prime minister called for a common approach towards water-sharing of the common rivers for which the countries have no dry-season sharing agreements.

"Constructive engagement in result-oriented solution to water-related issues will certainly contribute to consolidating and strengthening Bangladesh-India relations," she said.

Making clear Bangladesh's position on the water-sharing issue, Khaleda said, "We should not allow the natural courses of our major rivers to be changed, as that will cause unmanageable economic and ecological consequences."

On terrorism, Khaleda said her government is trying hard to deepen democracy and combat extremism and terrorism to ensure orderly progress and preserve the liberal ethos of Bangladeshi nationhood.

She hoped that despite the odds and problems, the true Bangladeshi spirit would always prevail. She assured that in a vibrant, dynamic and forward-looking Bangladesh, "You will always have a close friend, valuing your friendship and working hand in hand with you to actualise the true potential of our relations."

Khaleda, the current chairperson of Saarc, said a strong Saarc with India and Bangladesh working together will certainly be in the larger interest of the region.

AL takes it positively

FROM PAGE 1

committee and did not seek names of representatives from the components of the opposition coalition.

Jaill, also the coordinator of the opposition coalition, said they will send a letter to BNP seeking explanation for the lack of clarity in details of the invitation.

The AL general secretary at yesterday's meeting clarified that the 14-party coalition had placed the reform proposal, not AL alone. So any discussion will have to be with the coalition, meeting sources said.

Copies of the letter sent by BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to the AL general secretary were distributed among the leaders of the components of the 14-party coalition. They will discuss the issue within their parties and sit again today.

Meanwhile the opposition coalition yesterday said the government has finally been forced to acknowledge the peoples' demand through sending the letter seeking discussion on the oppositions' proposed reforms in the system of caretaker government and the Election Commission (EC). They termed it a preliminary success of the people in realising their demands.

"When the government sent the letter inviting us for discussion after terminating the oppositions' demands baseless and illogical for long, it proved that our demands are logical," Jaill told journalists after the meeting at AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

On Monday, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan sent a letter to Abdul Jaill seeking names of AL representatives for the committee to discuss the opposition's proposal for electoral reforms.

Jaill said the government sent the letter acknowledging the reality and they have taken the letter positively.

"When we placed the reform proposal in the House on February 12, we hoped that the leader of the House would respond positively, but she called it illogical and unacceptable," Jaill added.

The AL leader said the government sent the letter because they had asked for an official invitation to discuss electoral reforms.

IGP, 14 cops

FROM PAGE 1

Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka against the accused for their alleged involvement in the attacks.

The accused are IGP Abdul Quayyum, Additional IG (Headquarters) Anwarul Iqbal, Additional IG (Special Branch) Fakrul Ahmed, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Director General Abdul Aziz Sarker, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Mizanur Rahman, DMP Additional Commissioner Faruk Ahmed, deputy commissioners of Police Mazharul Haque (north) and Kohinur Miah (west), Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Mohammadpur Police Station Shahinur Rahman, OC of Dhanmondi Police Station Harun-or-Rashid, an unknown second officer, constables Pinki, Faruq, Dulal and Aminul, and a number of sub-inspectors and constables.

Farida Yasmin alleged that a team of police led by Kohinur Miah, Mazharul Haque and Shahinur Rahman attacked a Jubo Mahila League procession in front of the Dhanmondi Government Boys' School on March 12 when it was going towards the EC Secretariat.

Some Jubo League leaders, activists and general people were injured in the attack.

Asma Akter complained that the accused attacked a Jubo League procession on the street when it was going from Russell Square towards the Samoria Hospital during hartal on March 13.

Sabina Akter also complained about attacks on the procession the same day.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mizanur Rahman recorded the statements of the complainants and fixed April 3 for order on the cases.

Seismic survey

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gas and oil in St Martin's Island, Teknaf, Cox's Bazar and surrounding areas by the Awami League (AL) government in 1997. A production sharing contract (PSC) was also signed the same year.

Two of the three islands that constitute the St Martin's are forest reserves while the other called Narikel Jimjira is a human habitat.

The 7.315 kilometres long island has some 182 species of marine and wild lives.

Govt

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to Bangladesh to earn fast money by setting up new kinds of business houses.

Later, Bol made it mandatory for all foreign investors to prove cash investment of US\$50,000 in the country for setting up any liaison office or any business house, prompting some foreigners to wind up their businesses.

Ceremonial reception

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Monday afternoon, said she was impressed by the reception and looking forward to fostering "a very important" bilateral relationship.

"I came here with an open mind and will discuss everything of bilateral relations," a smiling Khaleda Zia told journalists shortly after taking salute at a guard of honour at the presidential palace.

She praised the majesty and elegance of the forecourt of the British-built Rashtrapati Bhavan and was looking pleased when briefly talking to around 100 Bangladeshi, Indian and foreign journalists.

"She is our honoured guest," Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh said when asked about Bangladesh prime minister's visit.

"Bangladesh is a country with which we have intimate ties of friendship," he said adding, "a peaceful, strong, prosperous and stable Bangladesh is an Indian interest... It is the interest of South Asia and all."

Asked about the outcome of the visit, the Indian prime minister said, "We will discuss all aspects of bilateral relations."

The mounted President's Bodyguards, an elite cavalry unit that was formed in 1773 by the then British Governor General Warren Hastings, presented national salute to the Bangladesh prime minister and escorted her to the forecourt when her car entered the Rashtrapati Bhavan at 10:23am (IST). She was about 23 minutes behind schedule while her Indian counterpart arrived at the Presidential Palace right at 10:00 and waited to receive her.

A detachment of the Defence Forces, assembled near the Jaipur Column, also saluted the Bangladesh prime minister upon her arrival.

Dr Manmohan Singh received Khaleda Zia and the Indian Chief of Protocol took her to the saluting dais. The guards comprised of the members of the three wings of the Indian Armed Forces and the President's Bodyguards then presented arms when the national

Man dies

FROM PAGE 16

Makuarati vialgje under Rajarhat upazila in Kurigram, our Bogra correspondent reports.

Some 500 farmers including Mantu stood in a long queue in front of Bhai Bhai Fertiliser to collect fertiliser since morning. The shop, however, had only 220 sacks of fertilisers.

During the long wait, Mantu collapsed on ground at about 1:30pm, witnesses said.

He was taken to his nearby house where he died after some-time.

Mantu stood in the line for fertiliser although he does not have any land, locals said.

Hundreds of farmers Birganj upazila blocked the Dinajpur-panchagarh highway near Kabirzhat village from 10:00am to 1:00pm.

On information, Birganj UNO Abdul Mannan went to the scene with police forces and persuaded the farmers to withdraw the barricade.

Hundreds more fertiliser-hungry farmers in Kaharal upazila barred Dinajpur-Dhaka highway at Dashedile intersection for two hours.

Later police removed the barricade that had blocked hundreds of vehicles.

The farmers of Dinajpur have continued their agitation demanding adequate fertilisers from the beginning of IRR1-Boro season in this year.

BDNEWS adds: Farmers in Rangpur yesterday barricaded the main road of the town and demonstrated demanding fertiliser.

Farmers who gathered at the fertiliser shops on the College Road of the town got furious to see the shops under lock and key.

They kept the main road blocked from 2:00pm to 5:00pm.

Later, they withdrew the barricade following assurance from the deputy commissioner.

Each of the 97 dealers for eight upazilas of Rangpur district is allocated 94 tonnes of fertiliser, dealers said.

But there are allegations that farmers are not getting fertilisers as per requirement although there is stock of fertiliser in the buffer godown.

The total demand of fertiliser in the district is 9,118 tonnes.

BNP candidate's

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Mill that was liquidated in 2001 and Tk 36 crore and 91lakh bank loan of the mill remained default.

However, Supreme Court lawyer Ahsanul Karim and his two associates barrister Khairul Alam Chowdhury and Makim Chowdhury said on behalf of the BNP candidate that the allegation of loan default is false and the BB message is invalid as the mill was liquidated in 2001.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 16

under the shipping ministry issued addendum number 3 to the pre-selected bidders by fax transmitted late night on March 13. The tender was scheduled to be opened on March 20. There was no way that any company which is outside of Bangladesh could have responded to these changes in such a short time.

The changes made by this amendment include: Bill of Quantity (page 6-5), Specifications of Tender (Article 10.8 (b) of Section 8, Drawing No 3C of Section 9, and CDA Land to be filled with required quantity of 1,000,000 cubic meters of soil.

Regulation No 15(2) of the Public Procurement Regulation (PPR) dictates that any amendment in tender specification must be accompanied by commensurate time extension to enable fair competition.

We question how the ministry can claim that there was no change in view of the above fax.

NBR smells rat in cash

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cotched export documents with the help of bank officials, a NBR high official said.

NBR had initiated an investigation last month and asked all the 43 privatized commercial banks (PCB) to provide documents in this connection.

But only 13 banks provided information revealing that 20 apparel manufacturers misappropriated cash incentives of about Tk 17 crore.

The government allows 5.0 percent cash incentive to any cent percent export-oriented RMG and knitwear manufacturer.

Thirty out of the 43 PCBs did not submit any report in this connection despite NBR's repeated requests.

Most of the banks sought more time yesterday when NBR again requested the banks over telephone to submit the required documents, sources said.

NBR Chairman Khairuzaman Chowdhury said the misappropriated amount will be about Tk 100 crore and the people involved must return the money to the government.

Kibria Murder

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stayed all proceedings of the case upon a petition seeking leave to appeal by the complainant of the case.

This could mean the project would be delayed.

But the ministry has been unusually hasty over the project due to political reasons, and a delay will not serve the purpose, the source added.

The ministry in January forced the R&HD to slash the contractor's time required for site study to kick-start the project before the campaign for the next general election settles off.

Engineers and the project's consultants had suggested a time frame of six months for studying and designing such a project but the communications ministry was pressured by Chittagong-based ruling BNP lawmakers and policymakers to cut it down to two months only.

This pushed four short-listed and reputed firms to withdraw from participating in the bid citing "unreasonable time allowed for bid preparation". R&HD engineers also believe that designing such a bridge only in two months would result in nothing but a faulty one.

In addition to inadequate time frame, the bidders were given incomplete information for preparing the design.

Another case

FROM PAGE 16

As per direction from the home ministry on March 18, 2004, Public Prosecutor Abdullah Mahmud Hassan on January 1 last year submitted a petition to the Fifth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka along with a photocopy of the home ministry's missive for revoking the case.

A senior lawyer, on condition of anonymity, yesterday told The Daily Star that he does not know how the charges could be labelled "politically motivated". "It is nothing but a bid to save the lawmaker from a judicial trial," he said.

Masud Ahmed Talukder, a lawyer representing Pintu, on the other hand, told The Daily Star that his client was implicated in the case as part of a conspiracy to harass him falsely.

Ministry going ahead

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generous contribution to the "election fund".

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda in a press statement later argued that 75 days are good enough to submit bid proposals and this time frame will not be extended.

The work order for the Kuwait government-funded bridge would be given in March and construction will begin in April.

Fisheries Minister Abdullah Al Noman, who was elected to parliament from Chittagong, declared at a public meeting in Chittagong in January that if construction of Karnaphuli bridge did not start soon, he would not contest the next election.

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PM

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water in the subcontinent. He underscored the need for water management, the sources added.

Kalam suggested more connectivity between India and Bangladesh and said: "Physical connectivity will lead to more connectivity of mind."

The Indian president said there should be more links between the two countries by road, rail and air, a Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman said.

During the 30-minute meeting at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Kalam also offered assistance to Bangladesh in its rural health programme, including telemedicine.

Khaleda invited Kalam to visit Bangladesh.

Outlaw

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law enforcers to retaliate.

According to a Rab press release, Rezaul was shot during the "shootout" that continued for 20 minutes. He died on the spot.

One pistol, one pipe gun, four bullets and two cartridges were recovered from the scene.

The outlaw was an accused in four murder and several other cases, the press release said.

He was one of the most faithful armed cadres of NBCP founder Monoranjan Goshai alias Mirinal who was killed in India in January last year.

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