

# Drive to punish fire hazard factories next month

**MD HASAN**  
The government will launch a countrywide drive on April 1 to identify and punish industrial units non-compliant with safety rules to eliminate fire-related accidents. The home ministry has taken this decision in the wake of a series of factory fires, particularly in garment units, causing huge loss of lives and property, sources said. Fire Service and Civil Defence Department teams, each headed by a magistrate, will conduct the operation. The department has already

issued letters to trade bodies in different sectors about the drive. A high official of fire service said the drive will detect how many factories are operating without fire safety licence and how many are violating the Fire Protection Act 2003. The Act provides that all buildings, including industrial units and commercial establishments, must have sufficient fire-fighting equipment and comply with public safety measures. It says high rise buildings and commercial units must have emergency exits, elevators and emer-

gency electricity supply. Meanwhile, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is also taking action against non-compliant factories. The BGMEA has so far identified 169 garment factories with risk of fire, said its Vice President Shahadat Hossain Chowdhury. "We have already proposed to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) to put some of its officials on our vigilance teams to ensure its representation," he said.

## Asia Energy warned not to interfere with policy decision

**UNB, Dhaka**  
Energy Ministry yesterday warned foreign firm Asia Energy, the developer of Phulbari coal-mine project, not to interfere with policy decision of the government. The warning came following a letter by Asia Energy to the adviser of the Energy Ministry protesting his remarks. Chief Executive Officer of the Asia Energy Corporation Bangladesh Gary Lye in his letter dated March 19 protested the advisor's comment on Phulbari project. "The government has been surprised to receive such a letter from Asia Energy," said the Advisor of Energy Ministry, Mahmudur Rahman, in reply to the firm's protest note.

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Bikkhubdho Deshbashi, a pro-Liberation War organisation, brings out a procession with the national flag in hand from the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, demanding trial of the war criminals.

## REFORMS Bhuiyan to reply to Jalil's letter in a day or two

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan is expected to reply in a day or two to the letter of Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil on the prime minister-proposed joint committee to discuss opposition's reform proposals. As the prime minister is back from India, Bhuiyan is expected to apprise her of the latest developments today before replying to Jalil's letter. Jalil, in response to Bhuiyan's March 20 letter seeking names for the committee, wrote to him on March 22 seeking some clarifications. BNP policymakers are of the

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## Authorities asked to stop scrapping of toxic ship

**BSS, Dhaka**  
Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (Bela) yesterday urged the authorities concerned to take immediate action against the scrapping of MV Teem, a ship carrying harmful substances, without taking necessary protective measures. In a letter to the directors general of the shipping department and the Department of Environment (DoE), Bela demanded proper certification from the DoE as well as assurance that complete protective measures would be taken for the workers before they start cutting the ship along the Sitakunda coast of Bay of Bengal.

Messrs Arefin Enterprise of Chittagong bought a Mongolian flag carrier MV Lady Fatema from a ship-breaking yard of Mongolia and renamed it as MV Teem. They then took the clearance of the shipping department showing it as a ro-ro cargo, the letter said. The ship contains asbestos, which is harmful for the human body, it added. Bela also referred to the red alert issued by the Green Peace, a global organisation working for protection of environment, in February this year against another asbestos carrying Norwegian ship to prevent its entry into the Chittagong Port.

In the wake of the alert, Ministry of Environment and Forest prohibited the entry of SS Norway into the Chittagong Port. Bangladesh Bank also issued special order directing all banks not to open LC for import of that ship, Bela said.

It also demanded that the authorities concerned inform the association about the vessel's clearance and the amount of asbestos it is carrying.

## SHIP BUILDING 'Akbar to bear blame for price increase'

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
A parliamentary body, which has already questioned the 'mysterious' increase in the cost of building an ocean-going ship, yesterday warned the shipping minister that he will have to bear the responsibility if corruption takes place in purchasing the ship. As the parliamentary standing committee on shipping ministry discussed the issue for second time

at its meeting, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain argued with the committee members whether they have jurisdiction to discuss the issue. "The committee has no jurisdiction to discuss it. I haven't told anything about this before. I have the authority to purchase the ship," sources quoted the shipping minister as telling the meeting. In a quick reply to the minister,

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## POLITICAL LINKS Work ban on Judge Chunnu extended again

**BDNEWS, Dhaka**  
The High Court yesterday further extended for six weeks the injunction order on discharging of judicial functions by Rezaul Karim Khan Chunnu, a divisional special judge of Dhaka. After hearing a petition filed by the writ petitioner to extend the period of the earlier order, a division bench of the High Court comprising Justice Awlad Ali and Justice Zinat Ara passed the order.

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## China in accord with Russia on Iran

### Major powers fail to break nuke impasse

**REUTERS, AFP, Beijing/ New York**

China said yesterday, a day after Russian President Vladimir Putin left Beijing, that Beijing and Moscow are in accord on Iran's nuclear standoff with the West.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday criticised a draft UN Security Council statement aimed at pressuring Iran to stop enriching uranium, despite a

new offer of amendments by Western powers.

The next step is likely to be bilateral contacts among ministers of the council's five veto-wielding permanent members, the United States, France, Britain, China and Russia, diplomats close to the talks said.

A spokesman for China's Foreign Ministry, Qin Gang, said President Hu Jintao and Putin

discussed Iran during Putin's two-day visit.

"China and Russia exchanged views and both sides agreed the Iran nuclear issue should be resolved through diplomatic means," Qin told reporters.

Hu and Putin agreed that "all the related parties should display flexibility and patience," Qin added. "China supports Russia's

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## PHOENIX BUILDING HC orders Deen Mohammad to surrender Mar 27

**BDNEWS, Dhaka**  
The High Court yesterday ordered Deen Mohammad, owner of the Phoenix building that collapsed last month, to surrender before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court for bail on March 27. A division bench of Justice SK Sinha and Justice Zubayer Rahman Chowdhury also rejected his petition for an extension of the period to go before his surrender. Deen Mohammad, also a top official of a private bank, yesterday appeared in person before the High

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PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

**LURKING DANGER...** A plumber dangles half his body through a manhole to repair a leak in the water supply line on Motijheel-Kamalapur Road yesterday while co-workers hold him with their feet on his knees.

## US-UK forces rescue 3 Western hostages

### 32 Iraqis killed in spate of attacks

**AFP, Baghdad**

US and British forces yesterday rescued three Western hostages held captive in Iraq for almost four months, amid an explosion of violence that left at least two dozen people dead.

Insurgents targeted Iraqi police and Shias in a string of bombings, adding to sectarian tensions as US authorities pressure Iraqi politicians to quickly reach a deal on forming a government of national unity.

Three aid workers from the Christian Peacemaker Teams -- Canadians Harmet Sooden, 32, and Jim Loney, 41, and Briton Norman Kember, 74 -- were rescued in western Baghdad, US Colonel John Snow told AFP.

Their US colleague Tom Fox, seized with them on November 26, was slain two weeks ago and his body found dumped in the city.

"The three hostages Norman Kember, a British hostage, (and) two Canadian hostages, have been

released as a result of a multinational force operation which took place earlier today," British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said in London.

"British forces were involved in this operation. It follows weeks and weeks of very careful work by our military and coalition personnel in Iraq and many civilians as well," Straw added.

"I am delighted we now have a happy ending to this ordeal."

Their abduction was claimed by a group calling itself the Brigades of the Swords of Righteousness, which threatened to kill them unless all Iraqi prisoners were released.

Straw said Kember was in a "reasonable condition" and recovering in Baghdad's top-security Green zone where the British and US embassies and the Iraqi government are based. But he said the two Canadians needed hospital treatment.

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## BSF kills 1

**BDNEWS, Chapainawabganj**

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) yesterday shot a Bangladeshi dead at Durlavpur union of Shibganj upazila.

The victim was identified as Shahidul (20), son of Abdul Malek. He hails from Charpaka village.

Commander-in-charge of the 6 Rifle Battalion Major Alauddin said Shahidul died as the BSF members of the Thakurbari camp in India opened fire on him when he was working in the field adjacent to pillar no 13 of the border.

Later, BSF members took his body into the Indian territory.

The BDR, however, said the BSF members assured of handing over the body at 10:00am Friday following a protest letter from the BDR.

Prayer Timing		
March 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-55	5-30
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-20
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation