

July 20, 2006

## BSP, Noab urge PM to cut import duty on newsprint

**BSS, Dhaka**  
The representatives of Bangladesh Sangbadpatra Parishad (BSP) and Newspaper Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab) yesterday urged Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to reduce the import duty on newsprint paper and increase the rate of government advertisement and its budget.

The prime minister however said the matter would be reviewed at the appropriate level.

She was speaking to representatives of BSP and Noab who called on her at her office yesterday. President of BSP Mainul Hossain, Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Editor of Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman and Editor of Jugantor Golam Sarwar were members of the delegation.

During the meeting, they discussed issues of newspaper SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

## CORRUPTION AT COMMUNICATIONS MINISTRY 1 contractor for each 140m road work

Tk 192cr project inflated to Tk 349cr, land price hiked 300pc over three years

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON**

To siphon off huge development fund, the communications ministry inflated a Tk 192 crore road construction project to Tk 349 crore by manipulating all components of the scheme, revealed a government investigation.

The ministry hired 429 contractors for the earth-filling work of the 61km road construction project from Joydevpur to Madanpur of the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway through Debragram, Bhulta and Nayapur Bazar, meaning each contractor had to fill only 140 metres

land.

The move led to lack of competition among the contractors as well as dominance of incompetent contractors and wastage of resources.

Consequently, the quality of the road has been very poor, said the investigation conducted by the Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Department (IMED).

Awarding such a task to so many contractors was in violation of the government rules in the first place. The IMED found that the biggest manipulation in the scheme took place in the case of land acquisition.

In the original project, the ministry sought Tk 18 crore for land acquisition but revised it to Tk 48 crore by showing prices of per hectare land 300 per cent higher than in the original project.

"The three- or four-fold hike in land price within only three years of conception of the project is in no way logical," said the IMED report filed at a meeting of the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecne) chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday.

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**DRAFT VOTER LIST**

## EC makes fresh bid to justify its earlier move

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday made a fresh bid to justify its earlier move for publication of the controversial draft voter list prepared in violation of the High Court directives.

The EC cited the opinions of its counsel and the attorney general to explain its stand in a working paper for a meeting.

It however did not refer to the issue of law minister's approval of the attorney general's views. "Council for the Election Commission and the attorney general opined that there is no bar or prohibition to initiate steps for preparing the voter list. Depending on the opinion, time limit for related activities including publication of the draft voter list has been fixed," the EC claimed in a working paper for a meeting with

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## EC, finance at loggerheads over voter list budget

Saifur wants explanation on previous fund use, refuses to allocate fresh money

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Election Commission (EC) and the finance ministry are now at loggerheads over allocation of budget for the task of updating the existing voter list, making smooth start of the task tomorrow uncertain.

Mystery also hangs over the much-talked-about budget as neither the EC nor its secretariat agreed to disclose the total amount or any details of the budget sent to the finance ministry.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz said yesterday the government is bound to provide the EC with whatever amount of money is needed to discharge its responsibilities, including preparation of a voter list.

But still rigid on his position, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday put some conditions for fresh allocation, saying it is his duty to see how public money is being spent. Saifur on Tuesday asked about the EC expenditure of the previous fund and refused to allocate fresh fund for the task of updating the voter list.

Apparently annoyed by the finance minister's repeated refusal, the CEC said the EC is a constitutional body and preparation of the voter list is its constitutional duty.

"As per rules, we sent our budget proposal to the government, not to any person. The government must allocate the money needed by the Election Commission, no matter whatever the amount," Aziz told

reporters. The CEC declined to specify the amount in the proposed budget but said, "Of course, we will get the money, otherwise how will the task be done?"

The finance ministry earlier allocated about Tk 60 crore for the preparation of the voter list. The EC on May 3 published its controversial draft voter list spending Tk 43 crore. The Supreme Court later declared the draft electoral roll illegal.

There are allegations of misusing the allocated fund.

"The Election Commission will have to justify the money allocated earlier. No money will be disbursed unless it provides accounts to the point about the expenditure,"

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## Dhaka seeks help to evacuate Bangladeshis from Lebanon

**AFP, Dhaka**

Bangladesh has sought help from the Geneva-based International Organisation for Migration to evacuate more than 10,000 of its nationals from conflict-stricken Lebanon.

"The Bangladesh government has formally requested us to evacuate around 10,000 Bangladeshis now living in Lebanon," Dhaka chief of the organisation Shahidul Haque told AFP.

The inter-governmental organisation deals with migrants, cross-border trafficking and migration-related issues and has offices worldwide.

"We have a team in Beirut and they will help evacuate Bangladeshis from Beirut to Damascus by road, and from Damascus, they will be brought back to the country by air," he said.

There are an estimated 10,179 Bangladeshis in Lebanon, which has been under attack from Israel for the past week. Most of them are migrant workers engaged in construction and textile sectors.

Countries worldwide are working to evacuate nationals from Lebanon. Almost 300 people have been killed since Israel unleashed a massive military offensive it says aimed at destroying the Hezbollah guerrilla group after the capture of two soldiers eight days ago.



PHOTO: AFP

A bulldozer clears the rubble following an Israeli air raid on the four-storey building in the village of Nabi Sheet, near the ancient city of Baalbek, in Lebanon yesterday. The attack left 11 civilians dead.

## 55 killed in Lebanon blitz, foreigners flee 7 Palestinians die as Israel pushes back into Gaza

**AFP, Beirut**

At least 55 civilians were killed yesterday as Israeli jets and gunboats pummeled towns and villages across Lebanon and tens of thousands fled an increasingly bloody conflict both sides defiantly warned would have no limit.

Israeli ground troops headed back across the border to strike Hezbollah outposts as another volley of rockets fell on northern Israel on the eighth day of an offensive that the international community has so far done little to end.

Streams of Lebanese were fleeing their homes to find safe havens and thousands of foreigners, mainly Westerners, were being evacuated by sea to the neighbouring Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

Meanwhile, seven Palestinians were killed yesterday as Israeli troops moved into a Gaza refugee camp, pushing a campaign to rescue a teenage soldier and stop rocket fire into a fourth week.

Israeli helicopters fired rockets on a residential Christian district in Beirut, the first direct strikes in the centre of the capital, raising concerns about the evacuation operation underway at the nearby port.

"The security cabinet met this morning and decided on the continuation of the offensives in Lebanon and Gaza with no time limit," an Israeli official said, describing the military's action as an "intensive war against Hezbollah."

The Shiite Muslim militia retorted that its guerrillas can continue to strike Israel with "an arsenal of rockets for long months, and not just days or weeks."

More than 300 people have been killed in Lebanon since Israel unleashed a massive military assault it says is aimed at destroying Hezbollah after the capture of two soldiers eight days ago in attacks that left another eight dead.

The United Nations is drawing up plans for an international force to try to restore calm in Lebanon but US President George W. Bush -- who says Israel has the right to defend itself -- insisted that Hezbollah and Syria had to be reined in before there could be peace in the region.

And Israel pressed on with a deadly new wave of attacks against southern and eastern Lebanon on

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## 2 JMB men get 48yrs in prison

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha**

A special tribunal court in Gaibandha yesterday convicted two Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) Ehsar members in an August 17 bomb blast case, sentenced them to 48 years of rigorous imprisonment, and fined them Tk 7,000 each.

The convicts are Ziaur Rahman Badal also known as Reaz and Abdul Quyum. Harun-ur-Rashid, also an accused in the case, was acquitted.

Judge Md Mohsin Mollah of Special Tribunal-2 handed down the verdict amid tight security in side the courtroom. The two accused were found guilty in the case filed under Explosive Substances Act.

According to the prosecution, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel arrested Ziaur Rahman Badal at Ansari Mosque near Gaibandha Circuit House on January 22 this year with two live bombs and five books on jihad in their possession.

Following Reaz's confessional statement, Rab later arrested Abdul Quyum and Harun-ur-Rashid. Two cases, one under Explosive Substances Act and the other under Special Powers Act, were filed in this connection.

After investigation, the investigation officer sub-inspector Abu Farhad submitted a charge sheet against them on February 20.

## Correction

In our story headlined "BD Foods' Heroin Smuggling: Investigators trace Hundi operation" published yesterday, it was mentioned that the investigators found that "BD Foods Ltd had brought Tk 80-90 lakh since 1995 up to March 2005..." It should actually read "BD Foods Ltd had brought Tk 80-90 lakh every month since 1995 up to March 2005..."

We regret the inadvertent error.

## RMG workers, owners at odds over wage

They meet today to discuss the issue

**MONJUR MAHMUD**

Garment owners and workers are at loggerheads over fixing a minimum wage for employees as the BGMEA is pursuing Tk 1,230 a month while the workers are demanding Tk 3,000.

A six-member board formed by the government last month has already held a series of meetings to re-fix the minimum wage for the workers and will sit again today to settle the issue. The board will have to recommend a new pay scale for the workers in 90 days.

The government and factory

owners agreed to re-fix the wage structure for the garment workers following a labour unrest. Minimum wage for the workers is now Tk 950 set around 12 years ago.

"We would like to give the workers more but we have to consider the financial abilities of the factories. Proposed Tk 1,230 scale will take the total salary of an unskilled worker to around Tk 2,000 whereas minimum salary of Tk 3,000 will make it nearly Tk 5,000," said Anisul Huq, who is representing Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters

When the police team reached

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## Top outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A top outlaw was killed in 'crossfire' during a shootout between his cohorts and the police at Shrirampur in Alamdanga upazila of Chuadanga district early yesterday, police said.

The dead was identified as Siraj, alleged second-in-command of Gono Bahini, an outlawed party. Chuadanga police said they had arrested Siraj in Lalbridge area of Alamdanga Tuesday night.

Following his confessional statement, police took him to Shrirampur to arrest his accomplices and seize hidden firearms.

When the police team reached

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## MUHURI MURDER CASE

# HC upholds death sentence of four

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The High Court (HC) yesterday upheld a lower court verdict awarding capital punishment to four convicts in the sensational Muhuri murder case of Chittagong.

A death reference bench of the HC also confirmed life imprisonment of two of the four persons in the case and acquitted two.

The HC also upheld the lower court acquittal of four of the accused persons.

The convicts with death penalty are Nasir alias Gittu Nasir, Shafiq Azam, Alamgir Kabir alias Baitta Alamgir and Taslimuddin Montu.

Of the four, Gittu Nasir was killed in crossfire with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) on March 2 last year and the others are in jail.

The two given life-term are Mohiuddin alias Mohiuddin and Habib Khan, both absconding.

The other two, whom the lower court had awarded life-term but the HC acquitted, are Saiful Islam alias

Chhoto Saiful and Mohammad Shahjahan. Criminals killed Saiful on 29 June, 2004, at his house.

Four others acquitted are Prof Mohammad Idris Miah Chowdhury, Prof Mohammad Zahurul Haq, Prof Tofazzal Ahmed and Nasir alias Shibir Nasir.

Complainant of the case Uma Muhuri had earlier appealed to the HC against the lower court acquittal of these four persons. Of them,

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## FACTIONAL CLASH Sylhet BNP MP gets 'threat' over phone

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet**

Ruling party lawmaker Syed Mokbul Hossain claimed that he has received several threats over mobile phones in the last two days following the death of a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) man in Golapganj upazila.

"There may be an attack on me any time," Mokbul said at a press conference at the Sylhet Press Club yesterday afternoon.

He alleged that the activities of Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury have badly hit the BNP's image in Golapganj-Banibazar constituency.

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## Tsunami body count tops 520

Another undersea quake hits Indonesia

**AFP, Jakarta**

Rescuers dug with bare hands yesterday in a grim search for more bodies after more than 520 people were confirmed killed in the second tsunami to strike Indonesia in as many years.

The three-metre (10-foot) tsunami lashed the densely-populated south coast of Java island on Monday, sparking memories of the 2004 catastrophe that left 220,000 people dead across Asia, 168,000 of them in Indonesia's Aceh province.

Soldiers in Pangandaran, a resort area that suffered some of the worst damage, lacked heavy equipment to move debris and resorted to digging through the

wreckage with their bare hands.

"We are looking for people who are still missing or buried under the rubble as well as clearing the debris," army officer Deden Rajab, who led a group of 27 soldiers at work here, told AFP.

Wasdi bin Umri, a spokesman for Ciamis district which includes the area, said however that enough heavy equipment for the relief work was being used.

Bodies which remained unidentified or unclaimed were to be buried in separate graves starting Wednesday afternoon and would be photographed so that their families can identify them later, he told AFP.

With nerves still on edge, rumours of a fresh tsunami in

Pangandaran triggered panic Wednesday when four strong quakes of magnitudes measuring 4.9 to 5.4 rattled the area.

They were among 52 strong aftershocks to have hit since Monday's 7.7-magnitude undersea quake unleashed the tsunami, a meteorology official said in Jakarta. Frightened residents in Pangandaran jumped on motorbikes or in cars, almost causing traffic accidents as they tried to reach higher ground.

Crying women and children ran towards the town's main mosque and even soldiers and police were seen fleeing the beach area, witnesses told AFP.

"There was a rising tide, but we

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PHOTO: STAR

A mobile court led by Magistrate Rakan-Ud-Doula checks emission level of an oil tanker on Pragati Sarani in the capital yesterday as part of a drive to reduce toxic emission in the city.

## 3 injured in bomb blast in Jessore

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore**

Three people were injured yesterday when a bomb went off in a den where bombs were being made at Siddhipasha under Abhaynagar upazila in Jessore.

The place of the blast is also the residence of Arif -- who belongs to an outlawed outfit.

The injured are Dilip Bairagi, 35, of Narail; Lattu, 32, of Khulna and Arif, 30, of Abhaynagar upazila in Jessore.

Dilip and Lattu were rushed to Jessore General Hospital in critical condition and were later referred to Dhaka for better treatment.

The third criminal, Arif, though injured, managed to flee the spot.

The police recovered four bombs from the spot.