

Saarc Council of Ministers meet begins today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The 27th Saarc Council of Ministers meeting begins in Dhaka today to approve the guidelines concerning the association's observers and guests, new observers and other recommendations of the standing committee.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the meet at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel in the afternoon. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan will chair the council session to be attended by the foreign ministers of the seven member states of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc).

Afghanistan, the newest member of the grouping, will be there as the special guest to have an idea of the Saarc process. Afghan Foreign Minister Ranganee Dadfar Spanta is attending the event at the special invitation of the Bangladesh government, the current chair of Saarc.

Afghanistan will formally join the Saarc family as a full member at

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60 lakh apply for voter enrolment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 60 lakh people applied for registering as voters after beginning of the task for updating the voter list, the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat said yesterday.

The field level staff have received four lakh applications for deletion of names from the existing voter list that was prepared in 2000, it said.

There are 7.64 crore voters on the list while the draft of fresh voter list of this year which was declared illegal by the Supreme Court listed about 1.50 crore new voters.

The existing voter list update task began on July 1 with officials concerned sitting at offices.

However, the EC's temporarily recruited staff started visiting door to door on July 21 for getting the task done within August 10, the time limit set by the EC.

The time limit might be extended if necessary, Secretary to the EC Secretariat Abdur Rashid Sarkar yesterday said, adding, "It

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Govt signs Feni gas sale deal with Niko

UNB, Dhaka

Niko Resources yesterday entered into an initial deal with the government on the sale of its gas from Feni gas field.

As per the initial deal signed ahead of the Gas Purchase and Sales Agreement (GPSA) with the state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (Bapex), the government will purchase gas from Niko's Feni gas field at \$ 1.75 per 1000 cubic feet (mcf).

However, the signing of the final GPSA is subject to getting the energy ministry's nod and the completion of vetting by the law ministry.

Niko Country Manager Brian Adolph, Bapex Managing Director Jamaluddin Ahmed and Senior General Manager of Petrobangla Jahangir Kabir initialled the deal on behalf of their respective sides at a function at Petrobangla office.

Petrobangla Chairman Mosharrar Hossain Bhuiyan and

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73 more back home from Lebanon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seventy-three more Bangladeshis, who got stranded following the Israeli attacks in Lebanon, returned home yesterday morning with the financial assistance of International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

With them, the number of returnees stands at 205. On Sunday, two batches comprising 132 Bangladeshis returned home from war-torn Lebanon.

Officials of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and Qatar Charity received them at Zia International Airport (ZIA).

On their arrival at ZIA by Etihad Airways, Qatar Charity donated

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PHOTO: STAR

Students of Buet leave the dormitories as the authorities closed the institution for an indefinite period asking them to vacate the dorms by 5:00pm yesterday.

Buet closed indefinitely

Students vandalise teachers' cars, houses demanding exam deferment

DU CORRESPONDENT

Authorities of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) in an urgent notice yesterday announced the university closed sine die following a violent student movement demanding deferment of examinations.

The authorities also directed the students to vacate all the dormitories by 5:00pm yesterday to ensure security of life and property and to bring back a congenial atmosphere of education on the campus.

The notice came from an hour-long emergency meeting of teachers yesterday.

At least 30 people were injured when the students demonstrating for deferment of examinations clashed with police on Buet campus Sunday night.

Hearing the authorities' decision, angry students vandalised two dormitories yesterday noon. But they left the campus by the deadline for evacuation.

However, they vowed to continue with their new demands - resignation of the vice-chancellor (VC) and the director of students' welfare (DSW) - when the university reopens after the unscheduled closure.

Demonstrators on late Sunday night demanded resignation of the VC and the DSW for their failure to maintain law and order on the campus, keeping four teachers confined at Suhrawardi Hall, who were let go at about 3:30am yesterday.

In a written statement signed by Buet Registrar Md Shahjahan, the authorities accused the demonstra-

tors of vandalising about 15 cars of teachers and their houses at teachers' quarters on Sunday night.

The authorities said the students began demonstrating unreasonably on the campus from July 29 demanding deferment of examinations scheduled to begin on August 1, locked the main entrance of Buet and spoke ill of the authorities.

The authorities also said the VC wanted to talk to the students about their demands but they did not sit with the administration and rather vandalised university property.

The scheduled examinations were to begin from May 28 but as the students demanded that the authorities defer the exams for World Cup Football, the authorities complied and announced a fresh schedule for the examinations from August 1.

Sources in the university administration said the authorities will take 'disciplinary actions' against the students who are responsible for 'making the campus unstable'. However, the authorities have yet to form any committee to identify the responsible.

Yesterday noon, VC Prof M Alee Murtaza and some teachers visited the teachers' quarters and the dormitories, where the students carried out vandalism during the clashes with police. Talking to journalists during the visit many teachers expressed their resentments over the students' 'ferocity'.

"The authorities will form a

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TONGI POWER PLANT

Builder's faults cost PDB Tk 43cr in a yr

SHARIEF KHAN

The Power Development Board (PDB) had to swallow a loss of Tk 43 crore between May last year and June this year due to frequent shutdowns of the 80 megawatt Tongi Power Plant triggered by technical glitches and sub-standard machinery.

According to data of the PDB and Power Grid Company of Bangladesh (PGCB), the grossly flawed Tk 360 crore Tongi plant remained out of operation for 2,231 hours exclusively due to the plant's incompetent Chinese builder Harbin's faults.

Experts say the shutdowns alone deprived the PDB of Tk 42.83 crore in revenue.

Power generation at the plant

remained suspended for around 1,000 hours more due to low gas pressure or non-availability of gas.

The plant saw a total of more than 80 rounds of shutdowns in 14 months till June with 45 of those attributed to builder's faults. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurated commercial operation of the plant on September 3 last year and it tripped within a few hours.

The builder's faults include installation of sub-standard equipment like gas booster compressor (GBC) and gas compressor, air compressor, mist eliminator motor, gas relief valve and different types of filters etc.

Sources said the GBC is a costly device but the ones supplied by Harbin is inappropriate for the plant. This is the biggest reason for its

poor performance. Harbin has been repeatedly asked to replace the GBC but it is yet to do so.

Poor implementation of the project by the builder is evident from shutdowns caused by loose control cable connection at the plant's junction box and leakage of hot gas through expansion joint of exhaust plenum etc.

Though Harbin supplied poor machinery in violation of the contract, the PDB has so far taken no effective steps to penalise the Chinese company.

The plant is currently undergoing a two-year guarantee period, meaning Harbin is subject to penalty if found responsible for the plant's faults till September next year. But the company, in

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Ershad warns rebel voices in party

Says his decision to join coalition not finalised yet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said he will not tolerate anyone in the party ranks defying his decision on whether to join the ruling coalition.

He voiced the warning at a view-exchange meeting with grassroots level leaders from Comilla, Chandpur and Brahmanbaria districts.

On the issue of joining the four-party alliance, the former president said, "I only have shared my views with the BNP high-ups and it has yet to be finalised. However, I hope we will be able to reach a consensus."

Many of the JP rank and file, meanwhile, said they will back the party chairman in whatever

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It's not possible to drop cases against Ershad

Says Moudud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday ruled out the possibility of withdrawing corruption cases against the deposed dictator HM Ershad by saying "The judiciary would follow its own course".

Moudud made the remark at a press conference at Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs ministry in reply to a question about the speculation that the government reached an understanding with Ershad to withdraw the corruption cases against him if he joins the ruling alliance.

Moudud termed the question a hypothetical one and said that he

was unaware of any such understanding. "I do not think there was such an understanding with him".

However, he added that if it were a political decision to withdraw the cases, the ministry would do the needful. "But no such decision has been made so far," confirmed the minister.

When asked about the legal jurisdiction over withdrawal of corruption cases, Moudud said the Anti Corruption Commission (ACC) would be the authorised body to withdraw any corruption cases.

The press meet was organised

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ELECTION FRAUD

Lingering stay order saves Sayedee's JS membership

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee, whose membership of the parliament was cancelled by a High Court judgement in 2003 on grounds of election fraud, is continuing as a lawmaker while the tenure of the current parliament is scheduled to expire on October 27 this year, thanks to a stay order by the Supreme Court.

Effectiveness of the historical judgement of the High Court (HC) passed on September 14, 2003 has ostensibly been lost due to the death of the petitioner Shudangsu Shekhor Halder, who contested

against Sayedee from the parliamentary constituency of Pirojpur 1 in 2001 election. Halder died in September 2004 after a year of bout with ill health.

The HC Division stripped ruling Jamaat-e-Islami leader Sayedee of his membership of the parliament (Jatiya Sangsad) for submitting a false statement on his poll expenses and for violating other election rules.

It declared Sayedee's election from Pirojpur-1 constituency null and void for corruption, illegal practices and violation of the Representation o

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Dhaka shocked at Lebanon carnage

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has expressed deep shock at the death of 54 innocent Lebanese, including 37 children, in an Israeli air strike on the village of Qana on Sunday.

"This wanton act was perpetrated in gross defiance of all norms of international law and civilized behavior," a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

It deserves outright condemnation by the entire international community, he added.

The spokesman observed that the invasion of Lebanon and the spiraling escalation of bombings and artillery attack by sea, air and land are clearly, if not overwhelmingly, disproportionate to the act that triggered the Israeli response.

He said Israel's militaristic action stands exposed, above and beyond its brutal occupation of Palestine and Arab lands.

"Such reckless attacks on civilians remain on record as a crime against humanity," the spokesman said.

Israel resumes air strikes after brief lull

AP, Jerusalem

Israeli warplanes carried out airstrikes in southern Lebanon yesterday, hours after agreeing to temporarily halt raids while investigating a bombing that killed nearly 60 Lebanese civilians, mostly women and children seeking shelter.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert agreed to a 48-hour halt in the airstrikes beginning at 2am yesterday while the military concludes its inquiry into the attack on the south Lebanese village of Qana.

But Israel left open the option it might hit targets to stop imminent attacks or if the military completed its inquiry within 48 hours.

Yesterday's airstrikes near the village of Taibe were meant to protect ground forces operating in the area and were not targeting

anyone or anything specific, the army said.

In a second airstrike around the port city of Tyre, Israel accidentally killed a Lebanese soldier when it hit a car that it believed was carrying a senior Hezbollah official, the Israeli army said. Lebanese security officials said the soldier was killed by a rocket strike from a drone aircraft.

The Israeli army justified the action, saying the leader believed to have been in the car was a threat to Israel. Instead, the car was carrying a Lebanese army officer and soldiers.

"They were, of course, not the targets and we regret the incident," the army said.

Meanwhile, Hezbollah guerrillas attacked an Israeli tank in southern Lebanon, wounding three soldiers, the military said. The attack

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PHOTO: AFP

Three-year-old Aya wounded by Israeli rocket strike sits next to her father Ahmad Khalil Ali on a hospital bed in Beirut yesterday. Ali's both legs were amputated after an Israeli rocket hit his shelter wounding his wife and their five kids.

49 more end up with dengue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Forty-nine more dengue patients admitted to city hospitals and clinics yesterday, raising the number of infected people to 866, according to sources at the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

With no confirmed report on dengue outbreak available in other cities, doctors fear that the number of dengue patients across the country would be no less than 3,000.

The DCC, however, asked city dwellers not to be panicked as it continued to fog and spray larvacides within 500 yards of the houses where dengue infection was reported.

It also appealed all to keep houses and surroundings clean to help stop spread of Aedes mosquito.

HC rules on age edge for admission to colleges

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday issued a rule on the government and education boards to explain in one week why they should not be directed to allow admission of students at colleges on the basis of marks instead of their date of birth.

The court also asked them to show cause why the new rules (sub-clause 6 of clause 4 of the HSC admission policy 2006) introduced by the education ministry to consider the students' date of birth during college admission should not be declared illegal.

The HC rule came following a writ petition filed by Uttara Dev Chowdhury, a lawyer from Chittagong Judge Court, challenging the new policy.

The sub clause provides for consideration of the admission

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