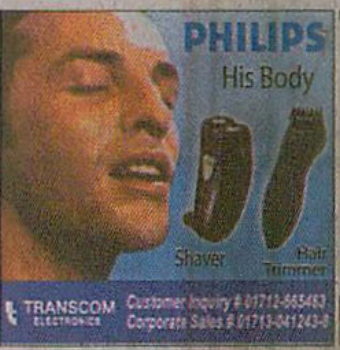




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61 schoolgirls killed in Lankan airstrike

15 more die in raid on church; Pak envoy escapes convoy blast

AFP, REUTERS, Colombo

Tamil Tiger guerrillas said yesterday that 61 schoolgirls at an orphanage and 15 civilians huddled in a church have been killed in air and artillery attacks by Sri Lanka's military.

Air force jets hit a "Senchcholai" orphanage run by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in the northeastern region of Mullaitivu, the Tigers said in a statement.

The government denied the attack and said the air force had only targeted an LTTE training facility in Mullaitivu.

The Tigers said the victims were students aged between 15 and 18 who were taking part in a two-day seminar on first aid.

"The number of children killed in the Sri Lankan air force bombing on students participating in a first aid seminar has increased to 61, with many fearing that the number killed is higher," the LTTE said in a statement.

About 150 children were seriously wounded, it said, adding that the victims were being taken to hospitals in Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu, both in rebel-held territory in the north.

The LTTE's website showed

pictures of some of the children killed in the attack.

"It is a lie to say that school children were targeted," government spokesman Chandrapala Liyanage said. "The air force had bombed a LTTE training centre. We don't know if they had moved child soldiers there."

Military officials confirmed that the air force was keeping up attacks in support of ground troops resisting a rebel advance on the Jaffna peninsula, further to the north of the island.

The Swedish-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said they

Over 7cr voters not to age in 6 years!

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Believe it or not, over seven crore voters in the country will remain as old as they were six years ago and their profession and other particulars will also remain unchanged!

The Election Commission (EC) is going to make this possible, at least in black and white.

Particulars of voters on the existing list prepared in 2000 are not being revised while updating the voter list going on now. So, once the task is completed, particulars of these voters in the updated list will remain the same as in the past.

The updated list will however contain the latest particulars of voters registering their names fresh.

Sources pointed out that voters aged 25 in 2000 will continue to be 25 now and their profession will also remain the same. A female voter, even if she is divorced and remarried in the last six years, will have the name of her husband unchanged.

RMG workers block busy Airport Road for pay hike

50 hurt as cops chase out demonstrators; commuters suffer for hours in miles long tailback

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 50 people were injured as police clashed with several thousand garment workers blockading the city's Airport Road yesterday demanding a pay rise and end to 'inhuman treatment'.

The demonstrations by the workers of four garment units of NASA Group went on for three and a half hours at Khilkhet intersection, forcing hundreds of vehicles to be stranded on either direction along the busy thoroughfare during the morning rush hour.

Vehicular movements came to a standstill on the road stretching

from Mohakhali to Khilkhet while on the other side, thousands of commuters from Uttara and beyond were stuck in a miles-long tailback from 8:30am till 12 noon.

As the police clubbed the demonstrators to clear the road, a clash broke out between them and the garment workers. At least 10 tear-gas shells were fired to disperse the agitators who retaliated by throwing stones at the policemen.

The garment workers also damaged around 20 vehicles during the demonstration that escalated into a pitched battle leaving 50 of them injured.

Similar traffic congestion was

seen on the Pragati Sarani and lanes and by-lanes leading to the Badda-Kuril Bishwa Road.

Many people bound for the Zia International Airport had to walk to the destination with their luggage in hands. Besides, the guardians took their children to schools on foot.

Workers began to gather at the Khilkhet intersection from 7:45am. Soon hundreds of garment workers from Kimia Apparels, Kimia Garments, Sunseed Apparels and Eden Apparels crowded into the place.

They allowed vehicular movement till 8:30am, and later when

some buses and cars tried to move along the road, the agitating workers damaged a number of vehicles.

At this stage, police beat up some female workers, causing the agitators to fly into a rage.

At around 11:45am, police managed to push the workers to the roadside and allow the stranded vehicles to ply.

But some workers started throwing stones at the vehicles, prompting the police to go into action that continued for 15 minutes.

"During the clash, police chased some workers down and beat them

ZAKIGANJ BORDER BDR, BSF start pullout

BISHWAJIT DAS from Zakiganj, Sylhet

Border guards of both Bangladesh and India started pulling out their additional troops from Zakiganj border area yesterday following the agreement at sector-commander-level flag meeting on Sunday.

Meanwhile, villagers started returning to their homes, five days after the 14-hour firefight between Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) on Wednesday.

While visiting Uttarkul and

BSF kills 2 more Bangladeshis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Border Security Force (BSF) of India gunned down two more Bangladeshis and injured another on Boichuna border under Pirganj upazila of Thakurgaon district yesterday morning, according to Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources.

The dead were identified as Md Saiful Islam, 30, son of Tahiruddin of village Kurumia, and Shukumar



Garment workers barricade the Airport Road at Khilkhet for hours yesterday demanding pay raise and end to 'inhuman treatment' at their workplaces.

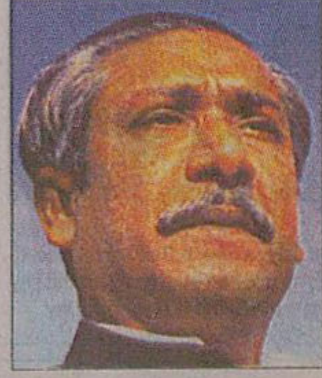
Homage to Bangabandhu

AL calls 6-hr hartal to observe mourning day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation today observes the 31st death anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding father of Bangladesh, amid a long drawn uncertainty over the trial of his killers.

On this day in 1975, Bangabandhu and his family members excepting two daughters -- Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana -- who were abroad at the time, were brutally killed by a splinter group of the armed forces.



Sheikh Mujib played the pioneering role in the country's struggle for independence. His fiercest speech and final call for freedom on March 7, 1971 -- 'Ebarer sangram amader muktir sangram, ebarer sangram swadhinotar sangram' -- inspired and united the entire nation for the Liberation War.

Two months and 18 days after the assassination of Bangabandhu, the same disgruntled army men gunned down four close associates of the great

Nepal hold Bangladesh

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

A last gasp penalty helped Nepal snatch a point from Bangladesh as the two sides shared a 1-1 draw in the third match and last match of the opening day of the 10th South Asian Games football competition at the Sugathadasa Stadium on Monday.

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Poet continues to slip away

RAFIQ HASAN and SHAHEEN MOLLAH

The whole nation has been anxiously waiting for the latest information about the health of poet Shamsur Rahman who has been fighting for life for over a week at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University and Hospital (BSMMUH).

Senior ministers, political leaders, government high officials, poets, social activists, admirers and well-wishers have been visiting the ailing poet at the BSMMUH.

The condition of poet Shamsur Rahman has deteriorated further, said a BSMMUH press release yesterday, adding that the

Bid to foil mourning day programme

Suspect caught as he cut cables in building adjacent to Bangabandhu Museum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Security guards of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in the capital yesterday caught a youth who allegedly tried to foil today's 31st death anniversary programme of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

His cohort was also captured later along with his parents and handed over to the police.

Workers at the museum spotted Nurunnabi, 18, around 11:30am when he, wearing panjabi, pajama and a tupa, was cutting cables at the electric-metre room of an under-construction building of the museum housed in Bangabandhu Bhaban.

According to employees of the museum, three youths entered the museum after buying visitors

JP gives list of 50 to PM for nomination

Roushan discusses ways to drop cases against Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiya Party (Ershad) presidium member yesterday met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and handed over a list of names of 50 persons seeking nominations in the next parliament election. In another move Ershad dissolved the post of his political adviser and the entire central committee of JP's student front Jatiya Chhatra Samaj.

Sources said JP leader Roushan

Ershad met the prime minister to discuss about the cases filed against the deposed dictator HM Ershad, and the easiest way to dispose of those cases. The judgement in a case against Ershad is scheduled to be pronounced on August 17.

Roushan, wife of Ershad met the prime minister at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday afternoon and discussed the present



Daughter of Shamsur Rahman recites from the Quran as the ailing poet lies on a bed at the intensive care unit of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital yesterday.

Forgotten gas deal

Bangladesh in its best ever deal bought gas fields worth \$130b for £4.5m in 1975

SHARIER KHAN

On August 9, 1975, Bangladesh government made a deal with the world's oil giant Shell Oil that turned out to be the best deal the country has ever made, long forgotten documents show.

For a meagre 4.5 million pound sterling, the country that day purchased from Shell Oil the gas fields of Bakhrabad, Habiganj, Kallastila, Rashidpur and Titas with 65 per cent of the discovered recoverable gas reserve of the country.

In terms of today's oil price (\$70 per barrel), gas reserve of these five major fields would be worth around \$130 billion, experts say.

In terms of on-shore gas price paid to international oil companies at the rate of \$2.65 per thousand cubic feet, the reserve is worth around \$35 billion.

Again, the government paid this negligible sum to Shell Company of Pakistan (Scop) in instalments

from 1975 to 1985. And it took over these fields under Bangladesh Industrial Enterprises (Nationalisation) Order 1972.

The agreement never drew public attention due to political turmoil that began with the coup and killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975. The gas field operators themselves are unaware of how they came to own these fields, sources said.

Shell Oil that explored and developed these fields in the sixties owned these even after the independence of the country.

An official of Petrobangla told The Daily Star that Shell oil did not see the gas market potentials in Bangladesh and it just wanted to leave the country. Back at that time, the country barely consumed a couple of hundred million cubic feet per day (mcfcd) gas.

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