

Man 'commits suicide' in police custody

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A leader of a criminal gang allegedly committed suicide while in police custody at Harinakunda Police Station in Jhenidah yesterday.

The dead, Mihir, 35, is the son of Khorshed Ali of Laxmipur in Alamdanga upazila.

Police claimed Mihir, accused in a double murder case, committed suicide by hanging himself with his own shirt inside the police station's toilet.

They said locals of Sreerampur village of Harinakunda upazila

2 lakh tonnes of fertiliser to be imported for Boro season

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to import two lakh tons of fertiliser on an emergency basis to ensure smooth supply during the next Boro season.

"The local factories failed to produce fertiliser as per capacity and a huge production deficit is looming this year due to disruption of gas and power supplies," said Law, Justice and Parliament Affairs

BSF kills 2

STAR REPORT

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead two Bangladeshi nationals and seriously injured another in separate incidents of firing in Kushtia on Saturday night and Naogaon yesterday.

Farmers Bulbul, 32, and Bullet 38, went to watch their paddy at Challishpara field on Daulatpur upazila border when a BSF team fired on them at about 8:30pm on Saturday, reports our Kushtia correspondent referring to 9-Rifles Battalion of BDR.

Bulbul died on the spot while Bullet got serious injuries.

Deceased Bulbul Hossain was the son of Banez Ali of Mirerpara

BB sees 7.1pc GDP growth this fiscal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) yesterday forecast an overwhelming 7.1 percent growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) for the current fiscal against the donor agencies' 6 percent projection considering pre-election political unrest.

Defending the higher growth fixation, the central bank consultant Syed M Ahsan said they forecast such higher rate mainly due to well performances by the industrial and agriculture sectors.

However, he said the projected growth could not be achieved if hartals, strikes and power shortage continue in future.

Earlier, the Asian Development Bank in its Quarterly Economic Update for Bangladesh, released in September 2006, said the GDP growth rate may stand at 6 percent during the FY07 as the country is

facing several problems including pre-election political disruption, power shortage and infrastructure constraints.

"It is seen that the aggregate GDP growth projection for the current FY07 is in the range between 6.6 percent and 7.1 percent," stated the central bank's Monetary Policy Review released yesterday. The BB's Policy Analysis Unit prepared the review.

According to the BB consultant, the central bank last fiscal projected a growth rate of 6.3 to 6.8 percent, which was near to the provisional estimate of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics of 6.7 percent.

The central bank review also recommended further raise in petroleum price even if it remains unchanged in the international market. It observed that the hike might help stop petroleum smug-

gling to India. "The government should increase the petroleum price as soon as possible," the BB consultant said replying to a query.

The review said the pricing issue assumes even greater importance due to the continuing accumulation of debts of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation and the other state-owned enterprises, which are not only jeopardising their financial solvency but also making the lending commercial banks (mainly the nationalised commercial banks) vulnerable.

The review projected that the industrial sector is likely to grow in between 9.5 and 10.5 percent, service sector in between 6.6 and 6.8 percent and the agriculture sector is likely to yield 2.8 to 3.4 percent growth rate during the current fiscal.

Jute mill workers agitate for arrears

STAR REPORT

Jute mill workers in Khulna, Jessore and Narsingdi yesterday disrupted road and rail communications while demonstrating for realisation of their arrears and other demands.

Khulna regional unit of Patkal Sangram Parishad yesterday observed daylong siege programmes at different industrial areas in Khulna and Jessore to press home their eight-point demand, our Khulna correspondent reports.

The jute mill workers in Khulna blockaded different areas including Atra industrial area and Khalishpur New Road intersection. Workers in the Rajhat industrial belt in Jessore also observed similar programmes.

Transport services on the Khulna-Jessore highway and train services remained suspended due

to the siege programme. Convenor of the Parishad Sarder Molaharuddin threatened with tougher nationwide movements for an indefinite period from Tuesday unless their demands were met by today.

Their eight-point demand include payment of all arrear salaries including Eid bonuses, reinstatement of laid off employees, reopening of closed jute mills and allocation of fund for purchasing rawjute.

In Narsingdi, traffic on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway was disrupted for an hour yesterday morning as jute mills workers barricaded the highway for realising their demands, reports UNB.

Police charged batons on the agitating workers that left at least 10 workers hurt. The injured were admitted to the sadar hospital.

Politics becomes 'if not with us, you're our enemy'

Ex-adviser Shafi observes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The politics of Bangladesh is going along the line of 'if you are not with us, you are our enemy,' former adviser to the current caretaker government CM Shafi Sami has observed.

"The political personalities do not have the least sense of morality in most cases. And those who try to restore their commitment of impartiality, face tremendous pressure," he said yesterday while addressing the final programme of the BDF National Debate Championship as the chief guest. The programme was held at the BIAM auditorium in the city.

The country's politics has become so degraded that the parties here take the opponents as enemies rather than as competitors, he observed.

Sami also regretted the political leanings of the important institutions and said, "Caretaker



Supporters of the BNP-led four-party alliance gather in front of the Election Office at Segunbagicha in the capital yesterday as the party candidate submits nomination paper.

Iran refuses to cease uranium enrichment

Says Security Council would regret voting for sanctions

AP, Tehran, Iran

Iran vowed yesterday to push forward efforts to enrich uranium and to change its relations with the international nuclear watchdog after the UN Security Council imposed sanctions designed to stop the country's disputed nuclear program.

Iran's hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said the Security Council would regret voting in favour of the sanctions, saying he was sorry the West lost its chance to make amends with Iran.

"I am sorry for you who lost the opportunity for friendship with the nation of Iran. You yourself know that you cannot damage the nation of Iran an iota," the state-run news agency, IRNA, quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

Ahmadinejad also said the

United Nations must accept Iran's nuclear program and warned that sanctions would not harm his country.

"You have to accept that Iran has the technology of producing nuclear fuel. And it will celebrate it in coming anniversary of the 1979 Islamic revolution in February," Ahmadinejad was quoted as saying.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini said Iran pledged to change its relationship with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Association.

"We are not obliged and it is not expected that cooperation with the IAEA continues at the same former level," Hosseini told reporters. He did not provide details about what would change.

Iran's parliament on Sunday

voted to urge the country's administration to revise its cooperation with the IAEA but did not set a timeline or provide further details. Many legislators chanted "Death to America" after the vote.

"The government should seriously and strongly continue the important issue of peaceful nuclear technology with prudence and foresight. It should never accept such illogical pressures," more than 200 legislators said in a statement read on state-run radio. The UN Security Council resolution the result of two months of tough negotiation orders all countries to stop supplying Iran with materials and technology that could contribute to its nuclear and missile programs. It also freezes the Iranian assets of 10 key companies and 12 individuals

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5 leaders quit LDP over grand alliance with Ershad

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Five leaders of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) yesterday resigned from the party protesting the formation of grand alliance with former dictator HM Ershad and practice of dynasty culture in the party.

They are -- party Joint Secretary General Naim Jahangir, member of

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Top businesses hail AL decision to join polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top business leaders yesterday welcomed the Awami League-led grand alliance's decision to take part in the election saying it would benefit the country's economy.

"We always want a free, fair and neutral election as it is the vital process of power handover in democratic process," Federation of

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30 injured in Shibir attack at CU

CU CORRESPONDENT

Armed Islami Chhatra Shibir activists at Chittagong University (CU) yesterday attacked and injured at least 30 activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) and Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU).

In protest at the attack, BCL activists barricaded several streets in Sholoshahar area of the city and the Chittagong-Rangamati road for hours.

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Table with Prayer Timing for December 25, including Azan and Jamaat times for Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib, and Esha.

Faint hope for ME peace as Abbas, Olmert meet

Tel Aviv agrees to release \$100m Palestinian cash

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas sparked hope for the stalled Middle East peace process yesterday by meeting for the first time in six months, but observers warned against expecting too much from the encounter.

The two leaders met at Olmert's residence in Jerusalem late Saturday, kissing and warmly shaking hands after a two-hour dinner followed by one-on-one talks.

"The two leaders expressed their will to cooperate, as true partners, in an effort to advance the peace process" and reiterated support for reaching "a solution of two states living side by side in peace and security," Olmert's office

said in a statement late Saturday.

The two leaders' long-awaited encounter -- their first since an informal meeting in Jordan in late June -- sparked hope that the peace process could be nudged from the slumber in which it has been for the past six years.

"Our intention is to begin ongoing negotiations in order to advance the peace process that we want so much," Olmert said Sunday before going into a weekly cabinet meeting.

"The ice has been broken," Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said. The meeting "again opened the way to negotiations... there will certainly be more such meetings in the future."

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Home ride for Eid gets 70pc costlier

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Private road and river transport owners have declared 40 per cent to 70 per cent increase in the fare on different long distance routes including the Barisal-Dhaka-Barisal route for 10 rush days before and after the Eid-ul-Azha.

The increased fare will be effective from December 26.

The special services arranged by state-owned Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) and Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC)

seem too insufficient to tackle the 'Eid rush' of passengers.

The ticket and reservation for the launch cabins have already started selling on the black market.

The one-way fare per passenger on Barisal-Dhaka-Barisal route has been increased from Tk 700 to Tk 900 for a double seated cabin, from Tk 350 to Tk 500 for a single seated cabin, from Tk 1200 to Tk 2000 for a VIP cabin, from Tk 200 to Tk 300 for a sofa, from Tk 100 to Tk 150 for a deck seat, sources said.

The one-way bus fare on the

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