

Fenchuganj Fertiliser to be shut in June

Authorities have decided to close down country's first fertilizer factory at Fenchuganj in June this year.

Official sources told UNB yesterday that the decision was taken at a meeting chaired by the Industries Secretary Iqbal Sanyal.

The decision was prompted by findings that the economic life of the factory, set up three decades ago, has expired and further continuation of its operation will involve risks.

Plans have been made to absorb its more than 1,000 workers in other fertilizer units. Provisions for retirement with economic benefits to workers above 50 years of age have also been kept.

The Ministry of Industries will find ways of dismantling and turning into scraps the multimillion-Taka factory, known as Natural Gas Fertilizer Factory.

A joint study by Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) and Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) found that the Fenchuganj factory supplied 6.2 per cent of total fertilizer demand of the country and its closure will not affect supply.

"Supply of Urea fertilizer in the country will not be hampered by closure of the factory, but any continuation of its operation will lead to huge increase in operational cost," a concerned official said.

A Tk 200 crore Balancing, Modernisation, Rehabilitation and Expansion (BMRE) project for the factory, planned in 1987, could not be implemented due to failure in obtaining foreign funds.

Later, BCIC conducted a study entitled "scrap and build" and suggested extension of its economic life by another 20 years with an estimated cost of Tk 290 crore.

But another joint study by BCIC and OECF of Japan suggested that any modification of its existing setup at a huge cost would be unprofitable.

If the factory is run another year, its maintenance cost will stand at Tk 10.5 crore and production cost per ton will rise to Tk 1,108, officials said.

An 11-member BCIC committee will submit its report shortly on social and political repercussions for its closure, sources said.



Sheikh Hasina talking with senior journalists at an iftar party organised by the AL at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in the city yesterday. —Star photo

Awami League

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her party's model of free economy as "welfare-oriented", saying the draft economic policy propounds proper management of the public sector, free and spontaneous enterprises in the private sector and voluntary endeavours in cooperatives.

Efforts will be made to make the public sector enterprises profitable by removing inefficiency and losses, by increasing production under skilled management and competitive market system.

The Awami League policy places main thrust on acquiring a high GDP growth, equitable social distribution proportionate to the GDP, participation of people in developmental activity and attainment of self-reliance.

In the agriculture sector, annual development expenditure will be made on priority basis.

In light of a programme for modernisation of agriculture, a policy for an effective distribution system, subsidised procurement-market and storage will be adopted to ensure adequate supply of agricultural input and striking balance between prices of farm output and input.

In industrial sector, importance has been attached to the role of a strong private sector with genuine entrepreneurs.

The industrial policy will put stress on running the public sector by skilled management and flourishing of the private sector by efficient and genuine entrepreneurs.

Export-oriented industrial undertakings will be treated as emergency sector to boost volume of exports as well as attract foreign investors.

Entrepreneurs of small and cottage industries will be provided with adequate financial and technological supports.

Minimum wages for the workers will be guaranteed. The new policy of AL emphasises useful utilisation of foreign aid by maximum mobilisation of international resources. Revenue and tax policy will be recast.

According to the policy guidelines, steps will be taken to make the financial institutions effective to encourage savings and investment. A correct monetary policy, interest rate and its structure will be framed, removing discrepancy between the interest rates of short and long term credits for creating a congenial investment climate.

Their discussion was mainly concentrated on the disaster preparedness programmes, being undertaken in Bangladesh.

No procession at DU during admission test

By DU Correspondent

Leaders of the major student organisations have decided not to bring out any procession during the first year Honours admission tests which begins today (Friday).

The decision was taken at a meeting of provosts, proctors and the leaders of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Awami League backed Chhatra League (S-A), Ganatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO) with Vice Chancellor Prof Maniruzzaman Miah in the chair.

The Honours admission tests will be held on March 20, 23, 25, and 28.

The meeting also discussed the present situation prevailing on the campus.

The VC Prof Miah called upon the leaders for united efforts to restore congenial academic atmosphere on the campus.

Curfew in Ludhiana

LUDHIANA (India), Mar 19: A curfew was imposed here Thursday after rock-throwing Hindus took to the streets of this Punjab city, angered by the overnight massacre of 18 people by Sikh separatists, police said, reports AFP.

The protests coincided with a militant ambush on a group of policemen jogging at a Ludhiana public park which left two constables dead and an officer and a constable wounded.

Slogan-chanting protesters clashed with police, attacked vehicles and commercial and government buildings in the old quarters of Ludhiana, prompting the curfew in four tense neighbourhoods of the city, police and witnesses said.

Hundreds of citizens chanting "death to the police" and "save Ludhiana" assembled at a government hospital where the bodies of Wednesday night's victims were taken for post-mortem, hurling stones and damaging the building.

Barring two Sikhs, all victims of the massacre were Hindus, police said.

The protests erupted amid a general strike which shut all commercial establishments and factories in Ludhiana, a city of 1.6 million people and home to the Northern state's new Chief Minister Beant Singh.

Shibir killed Pitu, Five-party leaders allege

By Staff Correspondent

Leaders of the Five-party alliance have alleged that Yasser Arafat Pitu was killed by the Shibir activists on the Rajshahi University campus Tuesday.

Briefing newsmen on their return from an on-the-spot investigation at the Rajshahi University, the leaders demanded judicial enquiry into the March 17 incidents on the campus.

Rashed Khan Menon MP, Hasanul Huq Inu and Khalequzzaman Bhuiyan went to Rajshahi University on Wednesday and returned to the capital Thursday evening. They were speaking at the Taher Auditorium of Jatiya Samjtantrik Dal office at Gullistan.

The Five-party leaders expressed their surprise at the government press note which stated that the Ganatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO) activist was killed in a police firing.

They alleged that the Rajshahi University incidents had taken place within the knowledge of the higher authorities.

Both the Education Minister and the Home Minister, despite being informed of the incidents, did not take any step to check violence, they said.

Giving an account of their findings during the visit, they said the violence unleashed by the armed activists of the Islamic Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami had outshone the barbarism of the al-Badr forces during the country's 1971 War of Independence.

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RUTA blames Shibir for Pitu murder

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAH, Mar 19: Members of the Rajshahi University Teachers' Association (RUTA) at a meeting here today held Bangladesh Islamic Chhatra Shibir (BICS) responsible for Tuesday's incident on the RU campus.

They claimed that Shibir activists ransacked and set fire to a number of rooms of RU residential halls, and demanded expulsion of those involved.

Accusing Shibir activists of killing Pitu, a worker of JSD (N-S), the meeting demanded judicial inquiry into the incident.

The teachers' meeting also urged Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina to visit Rajshahi University to review the situation arising out of the recent clash.

Presided over by Prof Shamsur Rahman, the meeting was addressed among others by Prof Ali Anwar, Hasan Azizul Haque, Shahidul Islam and Monwar Hossain.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi University Central Students Union (RUCSU) Assistant General Secretary Alamgir Hossain yesterday lodged a case with Boalia police accusing 68 Shibir activists, including the President and General Secretary of Shibir's university unit, for ransacking and setting fire to the hall rooms.

At a press conference held Thursday at its central office, BICS demanded that Rajshahi University be opened immediately and urged the RU authorities to restore congenial academic atmosphere on the campus.

It also demanded the immediate arrest and punishment of those responsible for the attack on some Shibir activists on the DU campus Wednesday.

BICS leaders condemned the government for not taking any action against the killers of its RU unit leader, Shaiful Islam, who was allegedly shot dead by some activists of the JSD (Inu) backed Chhatra League (N-S) and Chhatra Moitree in a procession of Shibir in 1989.

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The Midnight File

World Bank Chief, IMF MD call on Khaleda

WASHINGTON, Mar 19: World Bank President Lewis Preston and Managing Director of International Monetary Fund (IMF) Michal Camdessus called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia separately at her hotel suite here today. Preston appreciated the achievement of the government of Begum Khaleda Zia during the short period in the face on many difficulties. Both Preston and Camdessus assured Begum Zia of continued and increasing support to her government, reports BSS.

Pakistan to increase defence allocation

ISLAMABAD, Mar 19: Pakistan proposes to increase its budgetary allocation on defence by Rs 13 billion from the current year sanction of Rs 72 billion, the Finance Minister, Sartaj Aziz has said, reports PTL.

Japan undecided

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we talk about the future of the Japanese investment in Bangladesh, the labour factor will remain as a major incentive to the investors.

On KAPCO, he said: "It is, I believe, a good signal for the prospective foreign investors who have been watching the matter as a test case," he said, adding "I am not sure whether the resolution of the KAPCO problems could finally dispel their concern and anxiety as it is yet to be seen, and all depends upon the future development of KAPCO."

He said that it was important for Bangladesh to make the success of KAPCO "solid and sure" as the success of the largest ever foreign investment in Bangladesh involving investors from 12 nations was the "best guarantee" to foreign investors.

Presided over by ATM Rafique, President of the Lions Club of Dhaka Solidarity, Ambassador Saiki was introduced at the meeting by Lion Jahanzab Rashid Choudhury.

Noting that Japan was one of the first countries to recognize Bangladesh in 1972, Ambassador Saiki said that during the last 20 years the total amount of Japanese ODA to Bangladesh had accumulated to about 4.5 billion US dollars.

Japan's ODA aims at providing developing countries with basic infrastructures, as well as assisting human resources development, indispensable to economic development.

Terminating the Jamuna Bridge project as a "grandiose" one, he said "careful considerations" would be necessary for Japan to fund the project.

The final decision on Japanese participation will yet have to be taken in Tokyo, but upon taking any decision, due regard will be paid to the long-standing national priorities and aspirations on the part of Bangladesh to unite the motherland geographically separated by the river, alongside economic viability and afford ability of the project itself," he explained.

Anwarul Hossain Khan Choudhury, MP, and a member of the Club, read out a note of thanks to Ambassador Saiki for presenting the paper.

However, he said that Japanese investors setting up industries in the Chittagong EPZ have recently shown "encouraging signs".

The total Japanese investment approved by the Export Processing Zone authorities stands at about 42 million US dollars involving 17 companies out of which eight are in operation.

Ambassador Saiki pointed out that Japanese investors in the CEPZ were not large enterprises and were mostly small-scale companies, which came to Bangladesh after facing labour shortage in Japan.

This is a reflection of the current problem in Japan and, if

Jamaat leader assaulted

By Staff Correspondent

A leader of Jamaat-e-Islami was assaulted by some people at Adamjee Thursday evening.

Mohammad Abdul Baki, Naib-e-Ameer of Siddiqanj thana Jamaat, came under sudden attack near Baitul Nur Jame Masjid, Siddiqanj OC. Abdur Razzak told UNB.

A cracker was also exploded during the attack. Identity of the attackers was not known. None was arrested.

UNHCR

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agency's role is to assist the government in its efforts to provide the refugees with shelter, food and basic necessities until such a time as a solution is reached.

The UNHCR press release said that till Thursday 10 camps were built to accommodate more than one third of an estimated one lakh and 75 thousand refugees who took shelter in Bangladesh to escape persecution in Myanmar.

It said that the health situation in the refugee shelters remained precarious, as the area is becoming overcrowded, though every effort is being made to build shelter as rapidly as possible.

Spread of measles has not reached to dangerous proportions, but the UNHCR and the government were continuing their immunization programme, with the assistance of the non-government voluntary organisations.

The high risk section of the refugee population (children under ten years) would be entirely immunized within month, the UNHCR press release stated.

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Hindu women weep for this dead after Sikh separatist opened fire at random in Ludhiana, Punjab, Thursday killing 18 people. — AFP photo