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390 shops gutted in three fires

By Staff Correspondent

At least 390 shops were gutted in three separate fires in Dhaka, Rangpur and Jamalpur on Sunday and Monday.

Eight shops were burnt at Khilgaon Chaudhurypara in the city Monday afternoon as a fire, originating from an electric short circuit, engulfed a marketplace.

The shops gutted were S S Engineering Works, Tista Restaurant, Rima Glass House, Bismillah Motors, Elena Traders, Famous Light, Links Motors and a grocery shop.

Fire brigade sources said four units from three fire stations rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control after a half-hour struggle at about 4 pm.

Our correspondent from Rangpur reports: A devastating fire broke out at Nababganj wholesale market in Rangpur town leaving 360 shops gutted on Sunday, Eid day.

Local fire brigade sources

said that the fire started from an electric short circuit. The market was closed for the Eid vacation.

Fire vans from Rangpur town, Lalmonrhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Nilphamari, Ulipur, Sayedpur and Domar rushed on the spot and brought the fire under control after a six-hour battle. The firemen took another 12 hours to extinguish the fire completely, fire brigade sources said.

Goods worth about Taka 50 crore were reportedly gutted in the incident.

State Minister for Relief and Rehabilitation Lutfar Rahman Khan visited the burnt market and talked to the affected people.

Our correspondent from Jamalpur reports: At least 22 shops were gutted as fire engulfed Jamalita area in Jamalpur town Sunday night.

In the incident goods worth about Taka 40 lakh were gutted.



Eid congregation at the National Eidgah in the city Sunday.

— Star photo

Donors' response

From Page 1 Col 7 that we can spend at least Taka 100 crore to help these projects take off the ground during the next fiscal year," he said.

Dissatisfaction of the donor agencies centred around the continued bad performance of the power, gas and jute sectors, the Finance Minister pointed out.

The World Bank was particularly unhappy about the continued high rate of system loss in the power sector even after the formation of the Dhaka Electric Supply Authority last year to curb the loss, Rahman said.

The WB was also critical of the delay in the implementation of the second gas development project. "It is useless to carry out development projects in other areas unless the gas development project is completed soon and the power sector system loss is curbed," the Finance Minister quoted WB officials as saying.

However, he noted that appreciable improvement had been achieved in these sectors during the past one month. Even a slight improvement can resolve the problem with the donor agencies and fundings can be reactivated for the sectors," he added.

The situation in the jute sector was termed as "very bad" by the donor agencies because of the excess labour and low rate of productivity of the sector.

The Finance Minister said that the WB called for curbing "politicised labour militancy" in the industries and also urged the government to "get out of business."

The donor agencies were also dissatisfied with the slow pace of the privatisation process. "They want it to be faster," the Minister said, adding "But improvement in the management of the industrial units is essential before they are privatised under the public sector disinvestment programme."

Executives of the donor agencies, Rahman noted, appreciated the overall handling of the economy by the finance ministry.

However, he said, there was some "misunderstanding created locally" about the implementation of projects. He added that project aid disbursement was "good" and implementation of projects picked up significantly during February and March.

The Finance Minister said that the conditionalities imposed by various donor agencies on aided projects also came up for discussion.

He pointed out that the conditionalities can at times delay the implementation of projects.

He pointed out that implementation of projects can be delayed because of the conditionalities, problems in the implementing ministry and

because of faulty planning of the projects in which the actual period for implementing the project is not taken into account.

He pointed out that the project on the road improvement sector has been stalled as the WB has withheld the approval of the final list of contractors for the project. "It has been processing it for two years and that is an awful lot of time to process a list."

The Finance Minister noted that co-financing of aided projects can also cause delays in launching and implementation of the projects and thus co-financing of projects "should be avoided."

He said that the 600 million US dollar fourth health and population project is being delayed as two minor financiers are yet to give their approval although a majority of the other co-financiers have already given their approval of the project.

Referring to the problems in the ministries, the Minister noted that the WB funded on-going Mass Education Project was stalled because of "some sort of weaknesses in the line ministry". However, the bank has agreed to increase the "safe account" of the project as the situation has improved recently, he added.

Faulty project planning can also cause delays in implementation, he said. The Minister pointed out that many projects are planned without taking the actual "time horizon" to implement the projects into account.

Rahman noted that the recently initiated National Minor Irrigation Project is one such example. He said that the project planners did not take the actual implementation period into account and thus the 100 million US dollar project cannot be completed within the stipulated time frame.

The Finance Minister said that the level of assistance for the next fiscal year also came up for discussion with the donor agencies, who assured him that funding of projects will not face any problems.

However, Saifur Rahman said that the government prefers qualitative rather than quantitative foreign aid. "We want to get out of this habit of foreign aid addiction."

"A good element of government and good management is needed to go progressively for a self-reliant economy," he added.

3 activists

From Page 1 Col 8 Meakundu in Sadar upazila last week.

The victim Shawkat was allegedly slaughtered by a group of armed miscreants on April 1.

All the bodies were sent to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital for autopsy. Three separate cases were filed with respective police stations.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia exchanging Eid greetings with Cabinet members, diplomats, political leaders, high civil and military officials and the elite at Sugandha in the city Sunday.

— PID photo

One lakh public sector workers to be retrenched with benefits

The government has started a process of retrenching an estimated 100,000 redundant public sector workers, giving them their due benefits, to ease the heavily strained national exchequer, reports UNB.

"The government can't anymore afford to pay one lakh workers who are virtually doing nothing", Finance Minister Saifur Rahman today (Tuesday) said.

He warned that things will come to a "grinding halt" if there is no improvement in the near future.

Rahman was talking to reporters after his return on Monday from Washington where he discussed with the World Bank and IMF officials about government's economic

reforms and aid prospects. "I've been highly concerned about excess workers who are eating up the government revenue we are collecting with great difficulties", he said.

Without elaborating on where the process of retrenchment started, Rahman said the World Bank will supplement the government resources in giving financial benefits to the excess workers which will run into billions of Taka.

He, however, preferred to describe the retrenchment "an early retirement with all service benefits to the workers".

The retrenchment, seen as a compelling necessity for a viable economy, is however expected to add to the already

existing problem of unemployment, unofficially estimated at two crore.

The Finance Minister was bitter about functioning of some public sector agencies like BADC, PDB, BJMC and the Railways which are heavily subsidized to keep them running.

BSS adds: The Finance Minister called upon all including political and labour leaders to cooperate with the democratically elected BNP government for resolving the excess labour problem in the sector corporations to help build a self-reliant Bangladesh.

He was talking to newsmen at his Secretariat office yesterday afternoon after a week-long visit to Washington.

Compulsory primary education

From Page 1 Col 7 to send his or her children of 6 years old to a primary school. They will not be spared from the obligations without showing reasonable grounds and for failing to send children to a school any guardian may be fined an amount of Taka 200.

The objectives of CPE are total enrollment of school-aged children, their retention and completion of the primary course of education.

In the backdrop of the high rate of drop-outs in primary and the increasing rate of illiteracy CPE is considered as the way out for a country like Bangladesh.

The law on CPE also provided for the formation of ward committees with representatives from different walks of life who would work for creating awareness and supervise and monitor the regular attendance of the students in the schools.

Surveys made by The Daily Star in Savar and Narayanjan upazilas show that not more than 75 per cent children have been enrolled. Incidentally, the rate of enrollment in primary schools has so far been officially stated to be around 80 per cent.

The Upazila Education Officer of Savar told this correspondent that 72.52 per cent children of 6 years were going to school, the number of which is 18,496.

The headmasters of Savar

Government Primary School, Manikchara Primary School, Lalrtek Primary School confided to this correspondent that expected enrollment under CPE was not achieved. They attributed the reasons to shortage of classrooms, teachers and poverty.

The headteachers of different primary schools of Narayanjan said that because of poverty about 25 per cent children could not be brought to the schools. The situation in rural areas of Narayanjan is bad compared with that in the town.

CPE monitoring unit sources said that the formation of ward committees has been delayed because of the elections. Now that the elections are over, the newly-elected ones are yet to assume responsibilities and there may be further delay in forming the committees, the source said.

The ward committees will have representatives from the union council, headmasters of the primary school of the ward and persons interested in education.

Monitoring unit sources further said the survey done in December last to assess the number of school-aged children did not reflect the exact number of children. The list includes children of 6 to 10 years of age and hence the number of children supposed to go to Class 1 looks inflated.

Eid-ul-fitr

From Page 1 Col 8

and prosperity of the country and the Muslim Ummah.

The main Eid congregation in the city was held at the National Eidgah Maidan where President Abdur Rahman Biswas offered his Eid prayer.

Ministers, political leaders, members of parliament, diplomats and high officials also offered Eid prayers at the national Eidgah.

In Dhaka, main Eid congregation of the Bangladesh Army was held at the Garrison Mosque where Chief of Army Staff Lt. General Muhammad Nooruddin Khan, principal staff officers and other senior army officers offered their Eid prayers.

Chief of Naval Staff Rear Admiral Muhammad Muhtasimul Islam offered Eid prayers at the BNS Haji Mohsin. Senior naval officers including principal staff officers also offered their Eid prayers there.

The main Eid congregation of the Bangladesh Air Force was held at the BAF Central Mosque at Kurmitola where Chief of Air Staff Air Vice-Marshal Altaf Hossain Choudhury and other senior BAF officers including principal staff officers offered their Eid prayers.

Eid congregations were also held at different Army Garrisons, Naval Ships and Establishments and Air Force Bases throughout the country.

Four congregations were held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. Eid congregations were also held in different mosques and maidans in the city.

The government declared a three-day holiday from Saturday on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television put up special programmes highlighting the significance of the day. National dailies brought out special supplements on Saturday.

National flag was hoisted atop all public and private buildings.

The city was a festive look as the main thoroughfares and traffic islands were decorated with miniature flags and colourful festoons inscribed with "Eid Mubarak".

Improved diets were served in hospitals, jails, orphanages and vagrant homes.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas and Begum Biswas Sunday held an Eid reception at Bangabhaban.

The President exchanged Eid greetings with dignitaries including Former Presidents, Ministers, Members of Parliament, Judges, Chiefs of three Services, leaders of different political parties, journalists and high civil and military officials.

Earlier, the President exchanged Eid greetings with the members of diplomatic corps and representatives of international organisations and their spouses at the Bangabhaban.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Sunday hosted a reception on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr at her Sugandha office.

Ministers, Members of Parliament, Judges, Chiefs of three Services, leaders of different political parties, journalists and high civil and military officials, among others, attended the reception.

The Prime Minister exchanged Eid greetings with the dignitaries who attended the reception.

The Midnight File

US recognises three Y'slav republics

WASHINGTON, Apr 7: The United States today recognised Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina as independent states, following recognition by the European Community.

"The US today is recognising Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia as sovereign and independent states and will begin immediately consultations to establish full diplomatic relations," President George Bush said in a statement read by a White House spokesman, reports AFP.

Iran pledges to increase food aid to Afghanistan

TEHRAN, Apr 7: Iran today pledged to increase its shipments of food aid to Afghanistan after a UN mediator described the situation in the country as "deplorable".

The commitment was made by Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati during a meeting with United Nations Afghanistan envoy Benon Sevan, Tehran radio reported, says AFP.

Holiday mood

From Page 1 Col 5 home or staying at home to enjoy another day off," said the official who preferred anonymity.

It is not clear whether all the absentee officials and employees of the Secretariat and other government offices enjoyed optional holiday Tuesday.

City markets and other shopping centres, barring the fish and vegetable markets, looked lifeless as the traders closed down the shutters of their shops to take breather after the shopping spree before Eid.

Prices of vegetables and other foodstuffs remained high as supply to the wholesale markets at Sadarghat and Swarighat from across the country was inadequate.

Commuters including buses, minibuses, rickshaws and autorickshaws were sparse in the capital Tuesday. There was no indication that rickshaw fare, which went up because of Eid, would come down.

Movement of people in Dhaka increased in the afternoon on Tuesday as the sweltering heat of the day cooled down. People went to movies, the zoo and other places of recreation. Ice cream parlours and soft drink shops were considerably crowded.

Myanmar FM

From Page 1 Col 2

There is no firm date for the visit. But it's certain that our Foreign Minister will come to Dhaka later this month," said the official reached by phone. He can not be identified under briefing rules.

Bangladesh Foreign Office sounded cautious about Gyaw's planned visit.

"We have heard about the visit. But we have not yet received any official communication from Myanmar," a Foreign Office official said.

The Myanmar change of heart seems to have taken place following the United Nations' intervention into the problem of nearly 200,000 Rohingya Muslims who have taken refuge in Bangladesh.

The announcement on Gyaw's visit comes a day after special United Nations envoy Jan Eliasson left for New York ending a five-day visit to Myanmar when he investigated allegations of military persecution of minority Muslims in Myanmar's western province of Arakan.

Eliasson, who visited Bangladesh before going to Myanmar, is expected to report his findings to UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali in a day to two, diplomatic sources in Dhaka said.

Bangladesh took the issue to the UN Secretary General after Myanmar poured cold water on Dhaka's efforts to resolve the refugee problem through bilateral talks.

Besides failing to return Mustafizur Rahman's November visit to Yangon, Myanmar attacked a BDR outpost on Dec 21 that left one BDR jawan and a Bangladesh civilian killed and another 22 wounded. Myanmar also increased to nearly 90,000 its troops along the 175-mile border with Bangladesh heightening tensions.

Overburdened with the refugees Bangladesh has sought international aid and received a positive response. Despite the international support Bangladesh insists that the problem should be resolved through peaceful bilateral negotiations.

In pursuance of this policy Bangladesh has kept on submitting list of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar Embassy in Dhaka. With names of another 5,254 refugees submitted on Tuesday, the list has expanded to 52,277 with officials saying more names will be given once they are registered.

Md Shahjahan dead

Sports Reporter

Md Shahjahan, a renowned footballer of the sub-continent in pre-partition days, breathed his last at the Gulshan Clinic just before midnight last night. He was 72.

A former captain of Calcutta Mohammedan Sporting Club, Md Shahjahan was admitted to the clinic following a massive heart attack about five days ago. He is survived by his only daughter.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held at the Gulshan Central Mosque — after Asr prayers today and he will be buried at the Banani graveyard.

Recipient of the National Award for football, Md Shahjahan was associated with various sporting and socio-cultural bodies. He was president of the Gulshan Club, the Gulshan Shooting Club and also served the Bangladesh Olympic Association.

Three killed, 10 hurt in road mishaps

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 7: Two passengers were killed and 10 others injured when a Chittagong-bound bus fell into a roadside ditch at Hathazari bus stoppage this morning.

Police said that Abdul Salam (38) and Sekander Hayat (35) were killed when the bus from Nazirhat skidded off the road. The accident took place due to rash driving, they said.

Our Gopalganj Correspondent adds: A lance nayak of the Bangladesh Army, Moniruzzaman Selim, was killed Tuesday morning when a Gopalganj-bound bus ran him over near Haridaspur bus stop in Gopalganj Sadar Upazila.

Eliasson

From Page 1 Col 5

tuation. Eliasson was to meet the UN chief today in Geneva.

Asked if he had found evidence that the reports of atrocities against the Muslims were true, he said only that he had "formed an impression".

Myanmar ruling junta has denied its forces have persecuted the Muslims, known as Rohingyas. It insists that the people who have crossed into Bangladesh are illegal immigrants fleeing to avoid routine checks.

But the government last week flew Yangon-based diplomats to the border area and a local villager secretly slipped a letter to one of the diplomats that said Muslims were being murdered and raped, and some of their villages had been burned down.

UNB adds: Twelve camps have been set up till date in Cox's Bazar district accommodating 191,628 of the Rohingya refugees streaming into Bangladesh.

According to official figures compiled till March 30, the influx of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar continued at a rate of about 4,000 to 6,000 a day.

Due to normal causes like old age complications, heart attacks and high fever, about 177 refugees died till March 30, according to an official report obtained here Tuesday.

About 23 medical teams are providing medicare to the refugees registered so far. More than 2 lakh Myanmar minority Muslim nationals are estimated to have crossed to Bangladesh to escape repression.

Beside government activity, six non-government organisations (NGOs) and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society are engaged in distributing relief material and services in the camp areas.