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NEWS BRIEFS

SAARC body meets in Colombo Apr 27

A three-day special session of the SAARC standing committee will begin Monday in Colombo, an official here said Friday. The meeting, taking place in pursuance of a decision of the last SAARC summit, will consider proposals to make the 7-nation forum more dynamic to improve the socio-economic conditions of more than one billion people in the region. Foreign secretaries and senior officials of all member countries are due to attend the special session, reports UNB.

Tornado lashes Bbaria: 50 hurt

BRAHMANBARIA, Apr 24: At least 50 people were injured when a tornado swept over two villages in Sadar upazila of the district on Thursday night. The tornado with wind speed rising up to 80 kilometres per hour left a trail of devastation in village Kena and Shemra damaging more than 1000 dwelling houses and uprooting many trees, reports UNB.

IJO session starts Apr 25

The 17th session of the IJO (International Jute Organisation) committee on projects will be held here on April 25-28, according to an IJO press release. It will be followed by a 5-day meeting of the International Jute Council beginning here April 29, reports UNB.

Former Bulgarian PM arrested

SOFIA, Apr 24: The former Prime Minister of Communist Bulgaria, Georgi Atanasov, was arrested today on embezzlement charges, reports, Reuters.

Talks on Rohingya repatriation

Dhaka, Yangon form working group to draft modalities

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

The ministers of Myanmar and Bangladesh at their first round of official talks yesterday formed a 'working group' to sort out the details of repatriating the refugees.

The top civil servants of both the delegations will sit together to evolve a framework 'as per the guidelines' set by the two Foreign Ministers in their opening statements, sources said.

The working group is expected to finalise the proposals before the two sides sit for the final round of talks on Monday (April 27), sources added.

Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gyaw and his Bangladesh counterpart A S M Mustafizur

Rahman led their respective teams at the talks during a river cruise on the Buriganga on board a vessel, Kajol. The other members of Bangladesh delegation at yesterday's talks included Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury as alternate leader, State Minister for Relief Lutfur Rahman Khan, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, Home Secretary Lut-ullah Majid, Additional Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan, Additional Secretary, Relief M A Hakim and Bangladesh Ambassador to Myanmar Mostafa Faruq Mohammad.

The 14-member Myanmar delegation included Information Minister Myo Thant as

alternate leader, Ambassador in Dhaka Soe Myint, Director General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Aye, Director General, Emigration Department, Maung Aung and Director General, Relief and Resettlement, Saw Thein.

The three-hour talks, in two-phases, were held in a cordial and friendly atmosphere, said an official spokesman.

Prior to that, the five ministers of the two countries sat exclusively for one-and-a-half hours.

Officials of the two sides are to meet on Sunday before Monday's session.

According to sources, Bangladesh Page 12 Col 1

Yangon promises to free detenus, open dialogue

BANGKOK, Apr 24: The day after it changed leaders, ruling junta said it would free some political prisoners and meet with opposition leaders to discuss a new constitution, the official Yangon radio said today, reports AFP.

The radio, quoting a junta statement, gave no timetable and did not say if the amnesty would include Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest in Yangon since 1989.

It was the first time the junta, which calls itself the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), had announced it would open a dialogue with the opposition.

The junta has previously denied holding political prisoners, insisting that all those under detention — including Aung San Suu Kyi — have committed criminal acts.

The SLORC announcement today said it would free an unspecified number of political prisoners who were not considered a threat to society, the radio said in a broadcast monitored in Bangkok.

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Mojaddedi to head for 2 months 51-man council

PESHAWAR (Pakistan), Apr 24: Afghan resistance chiefs today agreed to form a 51-member council which will take over all political and military power in Afghanistan for two months, a guerilla news agency said, reports AFP.

It will be headed by a moderate, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, leader of the Jabha-Nejat-i-Milli faction, Afghan Islamic Press agency said.

After two months another council, identified as a 'leadership council' will be formed for four months headed by Burhanuddin Rabbani of Jamiat-i-Islami, it said.

The Prime Minister will be chosen from the Hezb-i-Islami faction of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the agency said. He will have three aides to help run day-to-day affairs. The Interior Ministry will be run by an aide belonging to Rasul Sayyaf's Ittihad-i-Islami. The Hezb-i-Islami faction of Yunes Khales will run the Education Ministry and Foreign Affairs will be looked after by an aide drawn from the National Islamic Front of Syed Ahmed Gilani.

Informed sources in Peshawar said the defence portfolio will be allotted to the Jamiat-i-Islami faction to which the top rebel commander Ahmed Shah Masood belongs.

The office of Supreme Court Chief Justice will go to the Harakat Inqilab Islami, which is headed by Mohammad Nabi Mohammadi, they said.

The agency said the decision to form the 51-member council was taken early today at a meeting attended by elders and representatives of all the main resistance parties.

The agreement was signed by Rasul Sayyaf, Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Yunes Khales and Syed Ahmed Gilani, the

agency added. It said Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who is in Afghanistan, did not attend the meeting but two of his representatives were present.

Another report says, Hekmatyar conditionally accepted an agreement reportedly reached in Peshawar today among at least six Mujahideen groups, his party announced.

A Hezb-i-Islami communiqué, given to AFP by spokesman Nawab Salim by telephone from Peshawar, said the party agreed with the formation of a leadership council and the appointment of a Prime Minister, but would not accept an interim council for the immediate transfer of power in Kabul.

Hekmatyar previously had demanded the immediate establishment of a strict Islamic state and had set a Monday deadline for the Afghan government to resign.

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Two batches of army off to join UNTAC

Two batches of army personnel left Dhaka Friday for Bangkok on their way to Cambodia, an ISPR release said, reports BSS.

They were seen-off at the Zia International Airport by senior army officers.

One of the batches comprises the advance party of an Infantry Battalion consisting of 25 army personnel including 11 officers led by Lt Col Khandoker Kamaluzzaman.

Bangladesh is sending the Infantry Battalion of the army who will join the military component of the United Nations Transitional Authority to Cambodia (UNTAC) following requests from the United Nations.

The other batch comprises 29 army personnel including five officers led by Major Nizam Ahmed. This group will work as a mine training team in Cambodia.

Bangladesh is also sending army officers who will join the military observers group of the UNTAC. The first batch of these officers left Dhaka on April 15 last.

Unity is need of hour: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday (Friday) emphasised on national unity for ensuring development and freeing the country from corruption and indiscipline left behind by the autocratic regime, reports UNB.

"A certain quarter is trying to mislead the people when unity is needed for building the country," she said while addressing teachers and newly elected union parishad chairmen and members of Nagarkanda upazila who joined BNP Friday evening.

Nearly 500 people of Nagarkanda upazila in Faridpur district, including newly elected chairmen and 144 members of 17 union parishads, came to meet the Prime Minister at her Sugandha office.

Without naming, Begum Zia said they are trying to divide the nation after 20 years of independence. "Those who do not want betterment of the country are involved in a conspiracy."

The BNP chairperson said that grassroot level leaders and workers would have to take responsibility of strengthening the party and uniting the people for the success of the development activities initiated by the government.

BNP's principles and ideology, she said, are based on relation with the soil and the people for improving the lot of commonman.

"Overall development of the country is not possible without ensuring the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, health and education," Begum Zia said.

Diarrhoeal situation remains unchanged

BARISAL, Apr 24: The overall diarrhoeal situation in southern districts has remained unchanged till today, reports BSS.

A total of 250 people including women and children died of diarrhoea and over 17,000 people attacked by diarrhoea in six southern districts till Friday, April 24, an official source said.

Meanwhile, Health Secretary, DG of Health Directorate and Secretary of Local Government and Rural Development visited the affected areas.

Sayeedi assaulted

JESSORE, Apr 24: Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedi was assaulted by some youths at the VIP lounge of Jessore airport today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said Sayeedi was hauled by the agitating youths when he was waiting for a flight to Dhaka. Police rushed to the spot and rescued him.

The Jamaat leader was returning to the capital after attending a party rally in Khulna.

The youths who roughed up him could not be identified but it was learnt that they had links with the Ghatak-Dalal Nirmul Committee.



First round of Bangladesh-Myanmar talks on the Rohingya refugees in progress on board MV Kajal on the river Buriganga yesterday. —PID photo

AL involvement makes BNP go tough with trial body

By Asiuzzaman

The apparently 'excessive involvement' of the Awami League in the Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee (or trial committee) forced the ruling party to take 'such a decision' on the Golam Azam issue, which went 'against' the committee, reliable BNP sources said Thursday.

"We cannot allow the AL to reap the benefits of such a movement," a BNP member of parliament told The Daily Star adding "The movement was started by the Gana Adalat men but later turned into an AL movement."

Another MP from a southern district said that most of the BNP ministers and MPs believed this and started working to resist it.

Citing examples he said that every programme of the Nirmul Committee was dominated by the banners and slogans of the Awami League. Nirmul Committee in many districts means AL committee, he added.

"Both the AL and the Jamaat are our political enemies and I like many other members, hate them but support the cause of independence and want Azam's trial," the MP requesting anonymity said.

He said that the government of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was still waiting for an opportune moment to 'expel' Azam from the country.

The government has already initiated the process of legal action against the controversial Jamaat chief and detained him in jail," the law maker said adding "AL will not be given any scope to correct its previous failure and fault."

On the other hand, when contacted, trial committee sources said "It is in no way a movement of the AL."

"We have already informed and assured some of the strongly anti-Jamaat ministers that it is a non-political movement and we simply want Azam's trial," the committee source said.

The source, an advocate, said that the committee also requested AL leaders to avoid describing their party policies in their speeches in any programme of the Nirmul Committee.

"Some of the leaders abide by our request but others do not," the source admitted adding "Hasina's letter on the day of trial was also unexpected."

The source said that the

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) is more involved than the AL and the committee is using JSD office as its permanent address but that nobody from the government side has raised any questions.

The source observed that before the fifth session of parliament it was presumed that the role of the ruling party would be softly critical about the 'people's court' but that it would not support the Jamaat or Golam Azam.

"We got the indication from a meeting of two left party leaders with the Prime Minister," he said adding "You know the decision in parliament and the committee is very unhappy over it."

The source said that the committee would continue its agitation and that a new course of action would be announced at the grand rally on Sunday.

A Jamaat source said that the party was happy over the stand of the BNP in parliament but was still observing the situation and would continue movement to free its leader.

Following the parliament session Jamaat leaders stopped attacking the Prime Minister in their public speeches.

Karachi Morning News suspends publication

From M J Zahedi, Star Special Correspondent
KARACHI, April 24: Morning News, claimed on its letterhead to be the oldest English newspaper in the Muslim world, has suspended publication.

Presently owned by the National Press Trust (NPT), a creation of Field Marshal Ayub Khan's martial law government, the paper did not come out yesterday although the staff and others had been told that it would appear today. But it did not.

The paper's printing was stopped by the management on early Thursday morning after it had been put to bed by the night shift workers. A circular issued later yesterday said that its publication was being suspended temporarily. But none among the staff believes it will happen.

Morning News was founded in Calcutta in 1942 as a weekly and its editor then was Abdur Rahman Siddiqui, an influential Muslim League leader, who later became Governor of erstwhile East Pakistan.

After partition, the paper was shifted to Dhaka by its managing director, Khwaja Nuruddin, brother-in-law and cousin of Khwaja Nazimuddin. It started as a weekly under

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Running Fenchuganj fertilizer factory beyond 1992 'risky'

By Staff Correspondent

Operating the 31-year-old Fenchuganj natural gas fertilizer factory beyond 1992 will be 'highly risky and dangerous,' according to a recent study conducted by the Japan Consulting Institution (JCI).

Facing closure of the factory after June this year, Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC), the parent company of the unit, has set up a 11-member committee of experts to 'analyse' the overall situation.

The committee will look into the possible steps required to keep the factory running and will also evaluate the socio-economic implications of the closure and is scheduled to submit its report soon.

Set up in 1961 at an initial cost of about Tk 25 crore with financial and technical assistance from Japan, the country's first fertilizer factory had an installed production capacity of 106,000 metric tons of urea per year.

Located about 20 miles away from Sylhet on the banks of the river Kushia, the factory uses natural gas from the nearby Haripur gas fields as

raw material. In 1969, an ammonium sulphate plant of 12,000-ton-per-year capacity was added to the unit to cater to the needs of the neighbouring tea gardens.

A Taka 28 crore balancing, modernisation, rehabilitation and expansion (BMRE) scheme was completed to restore the original production capacity of the factory in 1979 while another BMRE scheme was completed at a cost of about Taka 10 crore in 1986.

The options appears to be limited. A senior BCIC official pointed out that the "high and unknown risk" factors involved will not allow operation of the factory with small changes "here and there."

He said the high cost of production at the plant is another major reason why the plant cannot be operated under the existing condition. "The cost of production is much higher than the sale value of the fertilizer produced at the factory," he added.

A modernisation plan was initiated with a total outlay of Taka 200 crore jointly by BCIC and JCI in 1987. However, the

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Vegetables rotting as growers fail to reach buyers

By Staff Correspondent

SHINGAIR (Mantiganj), Apr 22: Fresh vegetables like brinjal and pumpkins are being used as cattle-feed by farmers in this nearly water locked upazila only a little over 30 kilometres away from the capital city of 70 lakh inhabitants.

Farmers in the area are even letting some vegetables rot in the fields because "There are no buyers and they cannot store the perishable vegetables," as the Chairman of Charigram Union, Fazlul Huq Khan, put it.

Wholesale traders supplying the markets in the metropolis are not interested in procuring these 'low cost' end-of-the-season vegetables as the transportation costs are extremely

high because of poor communication links.

Encircled by two rivers, on the north and east by the Dholeswari and the Kaliganga on the south and partially on the west, Shingair, a farming community of about 2 lakh people, is a major vegetable growing region which meets a significant portion of the city population's fresh vegetable requirements.

The region has only one feeder road linking the upazila headquarters with the Dhaka-Aricha Highway with a ferry, which remains inoperative most of the time, on the Dholeswari river near the Dhoila Ghat. There are no roads linking the eleven

unions with the main feeder road.

Thus, traders are compelled to transport their produce, purchased from the 22 hais or wholesale bazars scattered around the region, upto the river bank partially on pushcarts and on headloads. They move the produce across the river by boat where perishable items are then loaded onto trucks destined for the city bazars.

The 13-kilometre distance from Charigram, where there is a big wholesale market, upto the Shayampur Ghat could cost over Taka 50 to transport a maund of rice, points out Khan.

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Pumpkins and Brinjals are being used as fodder by a farmer in Charigram village of Shingair Upazila. —Star photo by Humayun Kabir Hiru