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Dhaka-Yangon talks resume today

Warning against bid to foil repatriation

COX'S BAZAR, May 24: Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury said here today that the quarters trying to foil repatriation of the Myanmar refugees would be seriously dealt with, reports UNB.

Talking to reporters at the local circuit house, the Minister warned that action under the law of the land will be taken against the trouble-makers whoever they may be.

Bangladesh, with its limited resources, has given shelter to the Rohingyas on humanitarian ground. But it cannot bear the burden of "a long-term refugee problem," the Minister said.

Repatriation of Rohingyas was delayed because completion of details of repatriation process was taking time, he said. The security of the Rohingyas would be ensured and that the refugees would not be pushed into uncertainty, he added, reports BSS.

He also called upon all concerned to encourage the refugees to go back to their homes in Arakan, Myanmar.

Chowdhury addressed a meeting of the representatives of UNHCR and NGOs at the Circuit House calling upon them to help repatriate the Rohingyas smoothly.

Meanwhile, the officials of Bangladesh and Myanmar will meet again tomorrow (Monday) at the Myanmar frontier town of Muangdaw to work out physical arrangements for the repatriation of the Rohingyas refugees, according to UNB.

Officials designated to the respective camps of the two countries will have talks on ways and means to hasten the repatriation.

Bangladesh has opened 10 transit camps while Myanmar 5 reception centres to facilitate the return of the Rohingyas.

They last met at Teknaf in Bangladesh on May 17.

The repatriation, which was scheduled to begin on May 15 under a bilateral agreement signed last month, is being delayed as physical arrangements are yet to be completed.

Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman has expressed the hope that the refugees would return home shortly.

Meanwhile, influx of refugees still continued—though on a reduced scale and to date the number of Rohingyas who crossed into Bangladesh has swelled to more than 2,60,000.

Editorial on Page 4

News Analysis

India looks at visit of Begum Zia in an upbeat mood

Kuldip Nayar, The Daily Star Guest Columnist, cables from New Delhi

With the stage set to accord Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia a warm welcome on her first-ever state visit to India, starting tomorrow, officials here appear ready to discuss the whole range of bilateral issues in Indo-Bangladesh relations, in an atmosphere of goodwill and understanding.

However, while they recognise the differences between the two sides on most of these issues, they acknowledge that Begum Zia's return to Dhaka without any assurance from New Delhi on water may have adverse political fallout. As the first democratically elected

Prime Minister of Bangladesh, after Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she has succeeded in restoring the people's rule to her country once again. The failure of her visit can "tell upon the process," as an analyst here puts it.

As seen from here, Dhaka's current "obsession," as some observers describe it, is the water from the Ganges. To a large extent, it is understandable why it blames New Delhi for its ills because not enough water is being let through the Ganges for use in Bangladesh. Nearly 30 million

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Nazrul's birthday today
 By Staff Correspondent

The nation today celebrates the 93rd birth anniversary of the national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam.

Separate functions at national level have been arranged Comilla and at Daritampur in Mymensingh district to mark the day.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia

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Little chances of smooth repatriation

By Nadeem Qadir, Guest Correspondent, back from Cox's Bazar

As Bangladesh and Myanmar continued their talks on repatriating more than 250,000 Rohingyas crammed in 14 camps, the process itself seems to have little chances of succeeding under present conditions.

The major obstacle is Yangon's stand not to permit the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be present on the Myanmar side of the border during repatriation in an effort to build confidence among the Rohingyas that all is safe and well at home.

In Geneva, the UNHCR on May 15 reiterated its refusal to support any repatriation of the refugees in Bangladesh until it is allowed onto Myanmar territory.

Spokeswoman Silvana Foa, according to reports reaching here, said so far the Myanmar authorities have said they would not be calling upon the refugee organisation unless they feel a need to.

The UNHCR is telling the refugees that it is not present in Myanmar and that it would inform them when it is safe to return, she added.

On the other hand, most of the 250,000 refugees have shown little interest in going back home and instead continued to demonstrate against repatriation plans.

"We are ready to die here, but we will not go home without safety guarantees," Abul Khair, a 50-year-old refugee from Myanmar's Maungdu township and now sheltered in Balu Khali camp said.

Balu Khali saw the first violent clashes between refugees and Bangladesh officials on May 14 and the camp continued to remain tense amid tightened security. The incident left one refugee dead.

Versions of the incident

Refugee roundup

various with two sides blaming the other, but the crux of it is that the issue is repatriation and officials want them to return while Rohingyas refuse to budge to the regular gospels of "all is right at home now".

"Without the UNHCR, it makes the whole process uncertain and even the small number agreeing to go were backing out because of propaganda by some aid agencies," one camp official said.

Local refugee commissioner, Khandaker Shaheedul Islam, said "We cannot say for certain when the repatriation will start, but hope to set a date in our next meeting with Myanmar on May 25."

He said the authorities believed that even if one small group returned home voluntarily it would have a "snow-balling" effect on the others, but added "that the whole process is difficult and is like walking a tightrope."

Islam added: "After we (Myanmar and Bangladesh) agree on a list, we will then ask who was willing to go... no one will be forced to return."

A senior foreign ministry official said the refugees earlier demanded only guaranteed safety on their return, but now they want Yangon to handover power to pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi before returning home.

"Bangladesh is not responsible for such internal political matters... let them go and settle their political problem in their own country," he added.

Three days after the UNHCR refused to take part in the repatriation process because conditions were not yet safe for the Rohingyas to return, an official of the organisation told some 17,000 refugees at Dhoo Palong camp May 16 that "We wish to say that anybody who wants to go back voluntarily should be free to do so and no person should stop him."

He added that "You will go back only when the UNHCR is convinced that your return to Myanmar will be safe."

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Students press for curbing terrorism

A day-long students convention organised by DUCSU Sunday decided to observe anti-terrorism and anarchy week from May 31 heralding a united move against campus violence, reports UNB.

The week will conclude in another students convention in the capital on June 6 where next course of the anti-terrorism crusade will be decided.

The decision is part of an 11-point resolution adopted at the moot of elected student union representatives from across the country which was convened by the Dhaka University Central Students' Union on an Engineers' Institute.

Read out by DUCSU Joint Secretary Nazimuddin Alam, the charter of resolutions also contained a call for forming terrorism resistance committees by student unions and organisations of all educational institutions.

The convention demanded arrest and punishment of outsiders and terrorists creating trouble in different educational institutions, irrespective of party affiliations.

The convention urged the authorities to deal with iron hands those unleashing indiscipline, anarchy and terrorism in socio-political arena.

Stating that the lackeys of the autocratic regime were still active creating indiscipline in society, the convention demanded that all collaborators of autocracy be hauled up and put on the dock.

It also sought construction of dormitories to solve the residential problems of students. The moot's demands also include more stipends for meritorious students and parttime jobs for general students.

The convention thanked the Prime Minister for fulfilling various claims of students and urged her to meet the rest of the basic 10-point demand of the student community.

It lauded the pledge of the student leaders to consolidate democracy by rising against terrorism.

The convention was inaugurated in the morning by Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, who could not attend the final session owing to sudden indisposition.

A message from the Prime Minister was read out by Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam MIA.

Instead, the Prime Minister

sent the message read out by Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam MIA.

Begum Zia sought cooperation of people from all strata of society in launching the movement against the terrorists.

"Violence is a national problem. It creates unrest and instability, hinders development and advancement of the country," she said in her message, adding "democracy and violence cannot co-exist."

DUCSU arranged the convention attended by representatives of student unions of nearly 200 colleges, universities.

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Construction of Meghna-Gumti Bridge begins

GAZARIA (Munshiganj), May 24: The construction of Meghna-Gumti Bridge (Bangladesh-Japan Friendship Bridge-2) involving Taka 276 crore formally began today, reports BSS.

Communications Minister Oli Ahmed performed the ground breaking of the 1,410 meter long bridge on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

With completion of this bridge, the last ferry-crossing on 275 km-highway, connecting the capital city with the port city of Chittagong, will be eliminated.

Japan is providing Taka 220 crore to the bridge construction project while the rest Taka 56 crore comes from the Government of Bangladesh.

The construction work of 9.2 meter-wide bridge with 7.2 meter carriage way is expected to be completed by February 1996.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia laid the foundation stone of the bridge on September 3 last year.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khondakar Mosharraf Hossain, State Minister for Communications Fazlur Rahman, Deputy Minister for LGED and Cooperatives M Abdul Hye attended the ground breaking ceremony as the special guests.

Japanese Ambassador in Bangladesh Toshio Saiki and Secretary of the Roads and Road Transport Division Manzoor-ul Karim also spoke on the occasion.

Democracy replaced by neo-autocracy: Hasina

SATKHIRA, May 24: Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina today accused the BNP government of reneging on its election pledges to the people and ruling the country "on bluff", reports UNB.

The government has totally failed to meet people's basic needs of food, work and shelter in its 14-month rule resulting in despair and indiscipline everywhere, she told a public meeting.

The Awami League President, who arrived here this morning on a two-day organisational tour, was addressing a big public meeting at the PN High School ground in the afternoon.

"Although Begum Zia had made lofty commitments during electioneering, after assuming power, she miserably failed to fulfil those pledges," she said.

"Democracy has been replaced by neo-autocracy, bribery and corruption have crippled economy, indecision and inefficiency bred frustration in commonman."

Bringing charges of entente between the ruling party and Jamaat-e-Islami, Hasina said BNP was backing the Jamaat-Shibir clique in armed attacks

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Dhaka population to reach 11m by decade end

By Asiuzzaman

The capital will be burdened with more than 11 million people by the end of this decade making it the 15th largest city in the world in terms of population.

According to experts, on population and housing settlement with less than seven million people Dhaka is currently holding the 31st position in the world.

Dr M Shahidul Ameen, Associate Professor of the Architecture Department Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) and ASM Ismail, an engineer of the

See Page 12 Col 6

Democracy, violence can't co-exist: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday called for launching a movement on the basis of national consensus against violence, a "national problem", reports UNB.

Her call came in a message she sent Sunday afternoon to the DUCSU Convention on violence held at the Engineers' Institution.

Earlier in Sunday morning, she inaugurated the moot of student union leaders from across the country. She was to address it in the afternoon but couldn't owing to sudden indisposition, PM office sources said.

Instead, the Prime Minister

sent the message read out by Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam MIA.

Begum Zia sought cooperation of people from all strata of society in launching the movement against the terrorists.

"Violence is a national problem. It creates unrest and instability, hinders development and advancement of the country," she said in her message, adding "democracy and violence cannot co-exist."

DUCSU arranged the convention attended by representatives of student unions of nearly 200 colleges, universities.

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Domestic resource collection exceeds target: Saifur

The revenue expenditure of the country for the first time has been kept within the budgetary provisions during the current fiscal year, reports BSS.

The domestic resource collection also exceeded the target significantly leading the financial and fiscal management to a sound footing.

This was stated by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman Sunday while addressing the meeting of the Council Committee on Economic and Financial Affairs at the Secretariat cabinet room.

The committee had an elaborate and in depth discussion

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Suchinda announces resignation

BANGKOK, May 24: Army-backed Prime Minister Suchinda Kraprayoon, reviled by Thais after troops killed democracy demonstrators, announced his resignation Sunday on national television, reports AP.

The announcement came after a day of false rumors that Suchinda had fled the country under heavy pressure from leading government and military factions to resign.

While welcoming the news, many Thais were angered that the top military commanders remained in place. Mass street protests were to go on as planned Monday.

"If these people remain in their posts, I fear you cannot say that fundamental change has taken place," said Abhisit Vejchachiwa, an opposition member of parliament.

Suchinda, a 58-year-old former army chief, led a military coup in February 1991 that toppled an elected government. He was named prime minister April 7 by a coalition of pro-military parties that emerged with a parliamentary majority after an election a month earlier.

The move outraged civilians, particularly the country's middle class, which is fed up with military dominance of politics. They launched huge demonstrations that plunged Thailand into its worst crisis since the 1970s.

The pro-democracy forces demanded that an elected politician replace Suchinda, who had gone back on an earlier promise not to become prime minister.

The protests turned violent last week. At least 48 people were killed and hundreds injured as troops violently suppressed pro-democracy demonstrators in downtown Bangkok.

The number of dead might be in the hundreds. Officials said several hundred people listed as missing likely died, their bodies either burned on the spot or secretly trucked out of the city.

Suchinda, somber in a dark gray suit, appeared on state-controlled television at 11:18 a.m. (0418 GMT). Seated behind a desk, he bowed deeply, his hands folded prayer-like before his face in the traditional Thai greeting.

Then, his face impassive, he read a 4 1/2-minute speech expressing regrets over the violent crackdown that has elicited almost universal outrage from Thais.

"I am deeply sorry about the unrest and clashes between the government officers and the people which led to a great loss of lives and physical damage, both among the officers and people," Suchinda said. "Though the situation has subsided, there are traces of damage in the spirit of the people in the country and to our economy, whose restoration must take a period of time."

Santiago telephones Bush for action

MANILA, May 24: Presidential candidate Miriam Santiago, on the second day of a 'fast to the death', said today she had complained to US President George Bush about widespread fraud in Philippine elections, reports Reuters.

The pugnacious former judge, charging that vote-rigging was robbing her of victory in the May 11 polls, said she urged Bush in a letter she sent last week to remind nations that a free ballot was crucial to democracy.

She said she was confident that the Philippine congress, which will officially count the votes on Tuesday, would back her charges.

Santiago spoke by telephone from her hospital bed in Manila's Philippine Heart Centre for Asia where she launched her protest fast on Saturday, taking only cups of tea and receiving vitamins through an intravenous drip.

Former defence chief Fidel Ramos is leading the seven-cornered race with a 1.03 million vote lead over tycoon Eduardo Cojuangco, an ally of late dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Santiago, who led in the first four days of a slow vote count until Ramos overtook her, has dropped to third place, 47,000 votes behind

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School boy stabbed to death

Bt Staff Correspondent

A 15-year old school student was stabbed to death in broad day light at Zigatola area in the city Sunday.

The victim, Shahabuddin, a student of class eight of Zigatola High School resided in the same area.

When Shahabuddin came out of house at around noon yesterday, a group of young men hurled crackers at him. The attackers severely stabbed him after he had fallen down on the street. They fled away immediately.

Fatally injured Shahabuddin was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors on duty declared him dead. The body was

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NEWS BRIEFS

Bangla Academy programmes
 Bangla Academy will hold a session of discussion, recitation and music today in the afternoon in observance of the birth anniversary of National Poet Kazi Nazrul Islam in its premises. Prof. Santanu Kaiser will present a paper on "Nazrul Modernism and Contemporary Relevance." The session to be chaired by Professor Strajul Islam Chowdhury will be participated by Prof. Selina Akter Jahan, Siddiqur Rahman and Dr Hayet Mahmud, reports BSS.

Saudi-Bangla EMS suspended
 Express Mail Service (EMS) between Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh was suspended temporarily for "unavoidable reasons", an official handout said Sunday. Members of the public will be notified as soon as the EMS with Saudi Arabia start functioning again, reports UNB.

Diarrhoea kills six in Pabna
 Six people, including two babies and a village doctor, died of diarrhoea in last two days in Pabna sadar upazila, health control room sources Sunday said. During the period, the killer disease also attacked 200 people in three villages of the upazila, reports UNB.

Goods worth Tk 16 lakh seized
 The Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate officials have seized goods worth Taka 16 lakh including banned sarees. Acting on a secret information, the officials Saturday night seized 2300 pieces of cotton sarees and 240 bags of PVC from Chandkharpur area, reports BSS.

One killed, 20 hurt in road mishap
 CHANDPUR, May 24: A bus plunged into a roadside pond on the Chandpur-Comilla highway today, killing its conductor and injuring 20 others, 8 seriously, reports UNB.