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NEWS BRIEFS

DESA activities reviewed

The number two sub-committee of the parliamentary sub-committee on the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources yesterday reviewed the activities of Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA). Chaired by sub-committee convenor Manzurul Hasan Munshi, the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, reports BSS.

Rafiqul Islam RMP commissioner

Deputy Inspector General Rafiqul Islam Khan has been appointed Rajshahi Metropolitan Police Commissioner. A Home Ministry source said Wednesday he would assume the new assignment on July 1 when RMP goes into operation. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is likely to inaugurate the metropolitan police force, reports UNB.

Five dacoits held in city

Mohammadpur and Dhanmondi police, in a joint operation Tuesday night, arrested five alleged dacoits with one 303 bore rifle, 14 rounds of bullet and a huge quantity of explosive-making materials, reports BSS.

Arms factory unearthed

NARAYANGANJ, June 17: Police today unearthed an arms factory from the premises of Ananda Shipyard near Meghna Ghat and recovered 5 country made sten guns, reports UNB.

Jatiya Sangsad budget session begins today

By Staff Correspondent

The sixth session of the Fifth Parliament, dubbed the budget session, opens this afternoon after a break of 60 days.

This will be the third session in the current year. The second session, after witnessing a stormy walkout by the members of the opposition on the issue of Golam Azam, was prorogued April 18.

The most important order of the day today is the presentation of the national budget for the coming financial year. Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman is scheduled to present the budget proposal at 5.15 in the afternoon, which would be broadcast and telecast live by Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television.

Immediately after calling the House to order, the Speaker Shakh Razaque Ali will nominate the panel of Chairperson and move a condolence resolution.

Despite its importance as the budget session, the current meeting of Parliament is expected to witness stormy debates on different issues of national politics, law and order situation.

Meanwhile, a number of MPs belonging to the opposition have expressed dissatisfaction about the way the budget session has been timed. They said that with only 12 days of the financial year left including 4 days of holiday for Parliament, the members would be left with no choice but to participate in vote on accounts.

They complained that the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), would do as it did last year and in 1980, 81.

The current session of Parliament is expected to continue till the last week of July.

In addition to passing the budget on June 30, the present session is expected to consider three bills for approval.

Meanwhile, the Speaker has fixed 23 days for question-answer with days specifically meant for some ministries.

The members have already been notified that the question-answer would be allowed from June 20.

The Rules of Procedure does not allow any discussion or point of order on the day the budget is placed.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia presiding over the meeting of BNP Parliamentary Party at Sangsad Bhaban yesterday. — PID photo

Opposition will join JS, hopes PM

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has expressed the hope that the opposition would join today's session of parliament.

Begum Zia made this observation yesterday while addressing the meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party.

The meeting scheduled for 5 pm was delayed by about two hours and lasted for about 45 minutes. Sources close to the meeting told The Daily Star that the meeting was delayed to allow negotiations with the leaders of the opposition.

Chaired by Begum Zia, the meeting was addressed by Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury, Deputy Leader of the House, Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder, Secretary General of the party and Minister for LGRD and Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Chief Whip of the party.

The speakers placed stress on the necessity of attendance.

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Decline in IDA loan to Bangladesh Speed up structural reforms, aid agencies tell Dhaka

By M Syeduzzaman, Guest Columnist

WASHINGTON DC, June 17: In the backdrop of a decline in the World Bank (WB) lending to Bangladesh under the International Development Association (IDA), the agency's soft loan window, sources close to both WB and IMF have been urging Dhaka to speed up efforts in resolving serious structural problems.

These sources say, reflecting the views held at the highest level of the two agencies, that while Bangladesh has been reasonably successful in maintaining macroeconomic stability over the past several years, there is a "general disappointment" over the country's low growth rate.

It is understood that both the Bank and the IMF are asking for faster movement in respect of tackling "serious structural problems" for stepping up the growth rate.

What also causes concern among experts here is the decline in the IDA-lending programme for Bangladesh. At this stage, it appears that by June 30, the programme for the fiscal year 1992 may reach about \$ 260 million (excluding a loan of \$ 100 million which has just been negotiated for industrial sector adjustment, adds our staff correspondent in Dhaka), compared to \$ 460m in the fiscal year 1991, and \$ 540 million in 1990.

To fully commit the indicative share of Bangladesh in IDA, it would be necessary to build up a programme of over \$ 600 million in the fiscal year 1993. To achieve this objective, all out efforts on the part of the Government of Bangladesh and IDA are called for, according to experts here.

In this context, the out-

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US President George Bush (R) and Russian President Boris Yeltsin watch members of a ceremonial honour guard pass in review on Tuesday on the White House's South Lawn. — AFP photo

Opposition sits today to decide stand Khaleda-Samad Azad meet fails

By Nurul Kabir

The opposition parties in parliament barring Jamaat will meet at 10 this morning to jointly decide whether they would join the budget session beginning this afternoon.

The opposition parties except Jamaat and IOJ held two rounds of combined meeting yesterday afternoon to decide the matter. Meanwhile, the AL presidium member and deputy leader of the opposition in parliament Abdu Samad Azad had a meeting with the Prime Minister and leader of the House Begum Khaleda Zia at the latter's parliament chamber yesterday evening.

The deputy leader of the opposition demanded of the ruling party to meet a four-point charter of opposition demands but came out of the meeting frustrated.

Meanwhile, most of the AL MPs attending its parliamentary party meeting that was adjourned at 11:30 last night were of the opinion that the AL should boycott at least the

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Memo to PM Garo community demands job quota

A seven-member Bangladesh Garo Youth Council, led by its president Salil Chandra Gogoi, called on Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday, reports BSS.

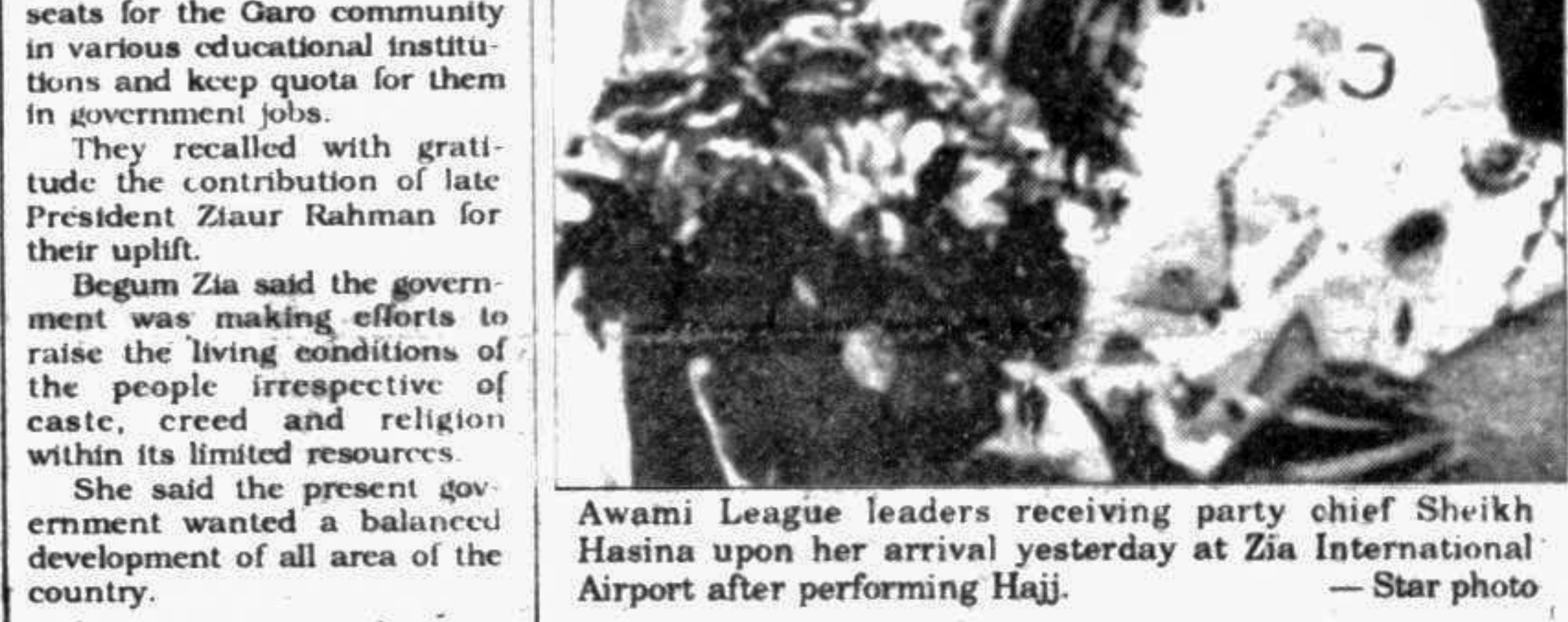
Whip Advocate Abdul Karim, who is also the Advisor of the council, was present.

They discussed their various problems with the Prime Minister and submitted a memorandum to her. They requested the Prime Minister to make provisions for reserved seats for the Garo community in various educational institutions and keep quota for them in government jobs.

They recalled with gratitude the contribution of late President Ziaur Rahman for their uplift.

Begum Zia said the government was making efforts to raise the living conditions of the people irrespective of caste, creed and religion within its limited resources.

She said the present government wanted a balanced development of all area of the country.



Awami League leaders receiving party chief Sheikh Hasina upon her arrival yesterday at Zia International Airport after performing Hajj. — Star photo

Growth rate fixed at 5 per cent

By Staff Correspondent

The government has fixed a target of 5 per cent growth in the overall economy of the country during the next financial year provided favourable weather and normal socio-economic conditions prevail.

Of different sectors, a growth of 4 per cent in agriculture, 11.53 per cent in power and gas, 5 per cent in transport and communication and 4.8 per cent in trade and services has been planned, according to authoritative sources.

Earlier, the growth rate for the current year was estimated at 5.7 per cent but a 4 per cent growth has been achieved.

During the current year, agriculture, industries, power and gas, transport and communication and trade and services sectors have achieved a growth of 2.3 per cent, 5.7 per cent, 13.3 per cent, 4.9 per cent and 4.7 per cent respectively.

Sources in the Ministry of Finance told The Daily Star that the growth during the current year was retarded because of delay in implementing the development programmes caused by excessive rains and subsequent drought in the northern areas of the country. To cope with the situation the size of the project aid was cut by 17 per cent bringing it

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Sign NPT or face aid cut, US threatens India

NEW DELHI, June 17: The United States told India today to move towards nuclear non-proliferation and clean up its human rights record if it wanted continued US aid, a senior Indian official said, reports Reuter.

She did some very tough talking, it was a crisp and clear message, said the official, who asked not to be identified, of talks between Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Teresita Schaffer and Indian Finance Minister Manmohan Singh.

She made it clear that pressure from the US Congress made it difficult for the government to keep human rights and nuclear issues separate from aid, the official said.

Relations between the two countries have improved steadily over the past three years, but they are still clouded by several irritants.

The nuclear issue is one of the most prominent, with Washington worried over high tension between India and Pakistan, which have fought three wars since independence in 1947. Both are widely believed capable of building nuclear weapons.

Schaffer met Singh ahead of talks with other Indian officials due to start on Thursday which US Ambassador William Clark said would include the nuclear issue.

Washington wants India to sign the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, New Delhi, which says its nuclear programme is entirely peaceful, resolutely refuses to do so, saying the pact discriminates against non-nuclear powers.

Clark described Schaffer's meetings with Indian officials as exploratory.

There is no American plan, he told reporters. The United States would prefer India to sign the NPT. But between those two, there are lots of options.

AP adds: US Ambassador William Clark said Wednesday the agenda will include confidence-building measures to dispel mistrust on the Indian subcontinent.

The talks come against a complex background of improving US-Indian relations that are being sullied by a growing list of irritants.

Last month, Washington banned exports to India's space agency when it refused to tear up a contract for Russian satellite technology. This week, the Commerce Department imposed licensing restrictions against India, Pakistan and several other countries with missile programmes.

A government spokesman said Wednesday India would not be deterred from research in "areas which we deem of importance to us. We cannot be subjected to unreasonable pressure as exemplified in the most recent US decision."

The spokesman, Aftab Seth, also said India had nothing new to offer Mrs Schaffer on the nuclear issue but was prepared to listen.

India has said the problem must be tackled globally, without discriminating between countries with and without nuclear arms.

Power projects Quest for new sources of funds

By Sohail Manzur

The government plans to find out alternative sources of funds required to implement the planned projects of the power sector as it has become difficult to mobilise them from the World Bank, according to sources at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources.

The difficulty is mainly because of hard conditionalities imposed by the bank, the sources say, adding that the government is now trying to negotiate with some other international organisations.

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Hasina back home

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina returned home yesterday morning from Saudi Arabia after performing Hajj, reports UNB.

Hasina along with her husband and son left for Makkah on June 5 to perform the holy Hajj.

She was greeted at the airport by party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Qamruzzaman, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, Mohammad Nasim, Matia Chowdhury, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Mozaffar Hossain Paltu, Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury Maya and MA Aziz and a good number of party MPs, including Prof MA Mannan, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Altaf Hossain Golondaz, Abul Hasan Chowdhury and Dharendra Debnath Shanbhhu.

From the airport, Hasina went straight to Bangabandhu Bhaban where she offered feteha praying for the salvation of the departed souls of her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur-Rahman, her mother and other members of the family who were killed in military coup on August 15, 1975.

US assures all cooperation in resolving refugee crisis

The United States has assured all possible cooperation in resolving the Rohingya refugee crisis, including further contributions to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reports UNB.

The assurance came when Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman met with US Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger on Tuesday, according to a message received in Dhaka Wednesday.

Mostafiz, who had a one-day stopover in Washington after attending the Earth Summit in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, briefed the US state department official on the latest situation concerning the Rohingya refugees from Myanmar.

During the meeting, they emphasised the humanitarian aspects of the refugee problem and hoped for its speedy solution.

They reviewed the ongoing bilateral cooperation, which was further strengthened following the recent visit of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the United States, and decided to take follow-up in this regard.

The Foreign Minister was accompanied by Bangladesh Ambassador to USA Abul Ahsan and Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr Kamal Siddiqui.

Mineral Resources Act to be amended

The government will bring some changes in the existing rules of leasing out mines, officials said Wednesday.

Cabinet has taken the decision to amend the Mineral Resources Act, sources at the Energy Ministry told UNB.

The Ministry of Law and Parliamentary Affairs is examining details of the envisaged changes.

Revision of the Act is likely to be on minor technical points along with lease of mine fields.

As per the amendment, no foreign company will be allowed lease of any mine field for more than 8 years and to carry out works in more than three blocks of a field.