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NEWS BRIEFS

President assents to six bills

President Abdur Rahman Biswas on Tuesday assented to six bills passed by the Jatiya Sangsad. The bills are: the Existing Laws and Legal Instruments (Adaptation) Bill, 1993; Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy (Amendment) Bill, 1994; the Post Office (Amendment) Bill, 1993; the Highways (Amendment) Bill, 1994; the Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat Bill, 1994 and the Police Officers' (Special Provisions) (Amendment) Bill, 1994, reports UNB.

Three UP members held in Cox's Bazar

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, May 18: Police today arrested three members of the Hoaikong Union Parishad on a charge of misappropriating relief materials sanctioned by the government for the cyclone-affected people here. Teknaf thana police also recovered nine bundles of corrugated iron sheets from the UP members Anwarul Islam, Ali Akbar and Kala Mia of Ward Number Three.

DU vacation from Saturday

The Dhaka University will remain closed from Saturday for a 41-day Eid and summer vacation. The scheduled masters and honours examinations will, however, be held despite the vacation, official sources said today. The classes of the university will resume on July 1 while the offices, seminars and library of the varsity will reopen on May 28. The transport section will also open on the day, reports UNB.

Lightning kills one in Jhenidah

JHENIDAH, May 18: A young man was killed and two women were injured in separate incidents of lightning during a storm in Sadar thana today, reports UNB.

The Daily Star



The Daily Star
PUBLIC DEBATE



Today, on page 4, Barrister Nazmul Huda, Minister for Information and Vice Chairman, Bangladesh Nationalist Party, advances his arguments against holding the next general elections under a caretaker government and gives his 9-point suggestion to resolve the issue.

The Daily Star invites its readers to send in their valued opinions on the subject.

PM prays for welfare of Bangladesh in Madina

MADINA, May 18: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today offered prayers and took part in a munajat at the *rauzatul jannat* at Masjid-e-Nabub in Madina Al-Manawara here seeking from the Almighty Allah peace, prosperity and welfare of the people and progress and development of Bangladesh and greater unity of the Muslim ummah, reports BSS.

Begum Zia, who is now in Saudi Arabia to perform the holy Hajj at the invitation of the custodian of two holy mosques King Fahd bin Abdul Aziz, performed *zilarat* at the *rauzat mubarak* of prophet Hazrat Mohammad (SM) in Madina Al-Manawara today and yesterday. She was also shown around the holy mosque here.

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Fate of country's biggest fishing co now uncertain

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, May 18: The fate of the country's biggest fishing company, Sea Resources Ltd, based here has become uncertain following the closing of its godowns and seizure of vital equipment by the police recently.

The precipitate police action, in which all the navigational and communication equipment of the Thai-Bangladesh joint venture have been seized, has made the company's 14 sealing trawlers inoperable.

Sea Resources Ltd, a joint venture with a Thai fishing company — Hardford Ltd — is now likely to incur a monthly production loss of over Taka four crore and the country also will be deprived of a huge amount of foreign exchange, company officials said.

Besides, around 2500 people, both directly and indirectly dependent on the company as its employees, crew members and labourers, are likely to lose their jobs if the company collapses, the officials feared.

The Port Police, after a two-day raid on the godowns of Sea Resources Ltd today completed the shifting of the seized navigational and communication equipment worth Taka two crore.

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Dhaka concerned at war in Yemen

Bangladesh has expressed deep concern and anguish over the current civil war in Yemen, reports UNB.

Bangladesh expresses sorrow at the fratricidal conflict and appeals to her Yemeni brothers to close ranks and peacefully settle all their differences through dialogue and understanding," a Foreign Office spokesman said yesterday.

He said Dhaka also welcomed the recent appeal made by the OIC Secretary General where he, inter alia, reaffirmed his readiness for initiating Islamic mediation.

When his attention was drawn to the situation in the civil war-torn Yemen, the spokesman said the Foreign Ministry had been monitoring the situation.

Border trade accord with Yangon signed

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a bilateral border trade agreement in Dhaka yesterday.

The trade protocol was signed by Commerce Minister Shamsul Islam and Myanmar Trade Minister Lt. General Tun Kyi at the state guest house Padma in the presence of officials of the two countries.

As per terms of the agreement, the two countries will be able to trade goods between Teknaf region of Bangladesh and Maungdaw area of the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Border trade is expected to commence by the middle of next month.

The border trade agreement would be valid for one year but would be automatically renewed annually, unless either of the sides object to it.

The government in Yangon

has earlier signed border trade agreements with China and India.

After signing of the trade agreement, Shamsul Islam and Tun Kyi spoke briefly to the newsmen explaining the salient features of the agreement. The visiting minister also replied to some questions from reporters.

Both the ministers hailed the signing of the agreement and said it was a definitive step to strengthen the economic ties between the two countries.

Shamsul Islam said that the agreement was a 'turning point' in the relations between the two neighbouring nations.

"Let the Naf river become a river of friendship," he said.

The Commercial Minister complimented the visiting

Trade Minister for showing interest in joint venture proposals and said that both Dhaka and Yangon were interested in holding single country trade fairs in their respective capitals by December next.

The Myanmar minister, reading out in English a written statement, said that the border trade agreement reflected the sincere desire of the two countries to bolster their bilateral trade.

He expressed the hope that the agreement will not only further improve the existing trade relations between the two countries but also enhance economic and technical cooperation.

The Myanmar minister said that the agreement had been signed under the umbrella of

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Meghna-Gumti Bridge opens by Oct 15

The Bangladesh-Japan Friendship Bridge-2 under the title 'Meghna-Gumti Bridge' will be opened to the vehicular traffic latest by October 15 this year, reports BSS.

Communications Minister Col (Retd) Oli Ahmed said this while he was casting jointly with the Japanese ambassador in Bangladesh Shigeo Takenaka the final concrete placement to connect the Comilla side with the Dhaka side on the middle point of the bridge yesterday.

The 8.203 billion yen (about Taka 320 crore) bridge, constructed by the Japanese construction company Obayashi Corporation, is situated some 40 kms from Dhaka on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway.

Addressing the officials and engineers of Japan and Bangladesh as well as the newsmen at the site Col Oli Ahmed said the construction of the longest ever bridge was

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All formalities for second Buriganga bridge complete

The meeting also decided to select local lowest bidder to construct the bridge as quotations from foreign firms were high. The lowest quotation received from an international construction firm to construct only the main bridge was Tk 111 crore. On the other hand, a reputed local firm quoted Tk 60 crore, including the cost of flyover construction.

"We could save crores of taka by selecting local firms with local technology which is at par with the international standard for construction purposes," the Finance Minister said.

"It has been sometimes a practice of the donor agencies to impose a condition for selecting foreign firms causing us heavy losses," Rahman told

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Communications Minister Oli Ahmed laying concrete mixture between the last span and the rest of the Meghna-Gumti Bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway during yesterday's linking ceremony.

— Star photo

4 killed, 56 hurt as storms hit 2 dists

Shalikha Hospital.

Of the 10 admitted to Magura Hospital, the condition of three — Alek Khan, 65, Abdul Khaleque, 70, and Hasina Begum, 40 — was stated to be serious.

Two of the missing passengers were identified as Noorjahan, 30, and Nurul Islam, 60.

The launch carrying over 100 passengers was caught in a nor'wester at Tulatulli near the Barguna launch ghat on its way to Barisal from Palashghata. The launch met with the accident at 8:30 pm when the serang tried to anchor the vessel at a nearby island.

Local people and the Red Crescent members recovered most of the passengers.

Police are guarding the place of the accident as four rifles belonging to the Ansars on duty are believed to have been left on the sunken vessel.

The DC and the SP of Barguna visited the spot.

Opinion poll
70 pc favour elections under caretaker govt

By Nurul Kabir

of the opposition leaders as well as the contents of the negotiations for the greater interest of democracy."

Talukder also told The Daily Star that besides him, other members of the party's standing committee — the highest policy making body of the BNP — are also supposed to take initiatives for negotiating with the boycotting opposition.

Replies to a question the BNP Secretary General said, he was not aware that the leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had taken any personal initiative to resolve the crisis.

The BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdus Salam Talukder told The Daily Star yesterday evening that he and his party would continue to make efforts to make the opposition return to Parliament. "We tried before and during the last JS session to press home their demand for constitutional amendments seeking the holding of general elections under a caretaker government. The opposition MPs, however, are yet to decide whether they would attend the budget session.

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The interviewee included 209 service-holders, 190 businessmen, 70 professionals, 57 teachers, 202 students, 131 workers and 141 persons from different other occupations.

They comprised 859 males and 141 females with the rural-urban ratio being 322:678.

According to the opinion poll, conducted by the Development Research Partners (DRP), 71.8 per cent of the 209 service-holders opted for elections under a caretaker government.

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By-election to Bogra-4 JS seat July 7

By Staff Correspondent

The by-election to the Jatiya Sangsad's vacant seat of Bogra-4 will be held on July 7 next.

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday announced the by-election schedule through a gazette notification.

According to the schedule, the candidates will have to submit their nomination papers to the Returning Officer or the Assistant Returning Officers on June 8 and the papers will be scrutinised on June 9. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is June 15.

The EC has appointed the Deputy Commissioner of Bogra as the Returning Officer and the Thana Nirbahi Officers of Kahal and Nondigam thanas as Assistant Returning Officers to conduct the by-elections.

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Pakistan softens stand on N-plan

ISLAMABAD, May 18: Pakistan is ready to consider inspections of its nuclear programme and hopes US weapons sales can resume by the end of this year.

Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ali said today.

Diplomats said Pakistan appeared to be gradually softening its stand that it would only accept international verification of its nuclear arsenal if arch-foe India also submitted.

"We are hopeful that this problem can be and should be solved by the end of the year," Ali told reporters.

He said Islamabad had identified a shift in US policy toward Pakistan, and said the issue of Pakistan's nuclear policy was likely to come into the

limelight during the visit to the United States by President Farooq Leghari this week.

"The US is satisfied through its own technical means that Pakistan has not produced a nuclear weapon," Ali said.

"If beyond this, the US needs other means of verification, for example non-intrusive inspections, we have asked them to send technical proposals and we will have a look at them," he said.

Pakistan has long maintained that it has attained a nuclear capability but says a political decision has been taken not to manufacture nuclear weapons.

Political analysts said Pakistan and the United States might try to evolve a formula

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