

Syria rejects phased return of Golan

DAMASCUS, May 18: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher today briefed President Hafez Al-Assad on his talks with Israeli leaders as the official press dismissed the idea of a phased return of the Golan Heights, reports AFP.

Christopher was met on arrival from Israel by Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq Al-Shara and went directly to the presidential palace.

As the US envoy brought his peace mission back to Syria, the official Ath-Thawra daily said: "Syria firmly and categorically rejects partial solutions as well as a phased withdrawal from the Golan," which Israel has proposed.

"We will not accept any Israeli presence on a single inch of the Golan," the newspaper said.

Israel has proposed a withdrawal over several years from the Heights, which it captured in 1967 and annexed in 1981.

The Washington Post, citing unnamed officials involved in the mediation between Israel and Syria, said Damascus has shown a keen interest in an Israeli offer for a three-stage pullout in exchange for peace.

Israel wanted international monitors and electronic devices installed on the plateau, a demilitarised zone extending to neighbouring parts of Syria, the Post said quoting unnamed officials involved in the mediation.

Syria's response to the proposals prompted Christopher's return to the Syrian capital after his talks in Israel, the paper said.

Christopher said in Israel he would try to "find a common basis between the parties" during his new talks with Syrian officials and that he had Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's 'encouragement' to return to Damascus.

Rabin commented: "If the Secretary of State, has decided to return this week to Syria to pursue the negotiations there, there is perhaps a glimmer of hope."

"We have to extract everything we can from this opportunity. I believe Christopher will find a joint basis for dialogue," he added.

'People's participation a must to protect environment'

Forest and Environment Minister Col (Retd) M Akbar Hossain yesterday said increased participation of the people is a must for facing the environmental challenges of the country.

The minister was addressing as chief guest the concluding session of a grassroots level workshop organised by the National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) at Sreepur of Gazipur district.

The concluding session was also addressed by Michael Constable, Acting Representative of the UNDP Resident Mission and ADAB chairperson, Khushi Kabir.

Couple caught giving proxy in SSC exam

CHANDPUR, May 18: A young couple was caught red handed while giving proxy for each other in the SSC examination centre at Faridganj A R High School on May 12, reports UNB.

According to police, Mizanur Rahman, who already passed the SSC examination in first division, in 1993 again filled up the form along with his wife Parul Begum this year from the same school just to give proxy for his wife.

In the examination centre he used to put his wife's roll and registration numbers in his answer scripts while his wife Parul used to do so in favour of her husband.

In this way, they sat for Bangla, English and General Mathematics examinations but on the day of General Science the matter came to light. The authorities caught both the husband and wife and sent them to the jail.

Rao vows

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try's "integrity."

About 8,000 people have been killed since the four-decade-old insurgency flared up in 1990 in the state.

Outside the auditorium where Rao spoke, a group of about 40 demonstrators representing a variety of groups, chanted, "Stop the Killing, Stop the Rape." Some carried signs that read, "Freedom for All, Freedom for Kashmir."

But, Seraj Ul Haque of Brantree said he was there to protest Indian construction of a dam that, he says will deprive Bangladesh of water.

Border trade with Yangon

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the existing General Trade Agreement (GATT).

The Sonali Bank and the Bank of Myanmar would be involved in matters of trade transactions.

Lt. General Tun Kyi, who is a key member of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in reply to a question from newsmen said that in future it might be possible to extend visa facilities at border points if "progress continued in the right direction."

Tun Kyi said that Myanmar believed in an independent foreign trade policy and it had and will continue to enhance trading with all countries of the world except those embargoed by the United Nations.

Shamsul Islam read out a list of items that are likely to be traded across the border of the two countries.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia offering munajat at the Rauza Mubarak of Prophet Muhammad (SM) at Masjid-e-Nabubi in Medina Al-Munawwara on Tuesday. — PID photo

PM prays

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this morning.

Earlier, the Prime Minister was taken to the air conditioning plant of the Masjid-e-Nabubi located about 7 kilometres off from the mosque. The plant, the biggest in the world, was set under the expansion scheme of the two holy mosques at the initiative of King Fahd to provide modern facilities to the millions of pilgrims, who assembled every year to the holy mosques from all around the world.

Begum Zia, who arrived here yesterday morning by a special aircraft from Jeddah, went round different sections of the plant and was impressed to see the modern air conditioning system which pumps chilled water through underground pipes all the way from the plant to the Masjid-e-Nabubi. Cooled air is also circulated from underground pipes to the entire area of the mosque through air trunks built in every pillar of the holy mosque.

Special envoy to the Prime Minister, M Morshed Khan, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Professor Begum Jahannara, Red Crescent Society Chairman Shahidul Hoq Jamal MP, Shahiduzzaman MP and other members of the entourage were present.

After offering the Asr prayers at Masjid-e-Nabubi here this afternoon, the Prime Minister visited some places of important historical significance like the Jannatul baki, Masjid-e-Quba, Masjid-e-Kiblatine and the site of the battle of Khandakhi here in Medina Al-Munawwara.

Begum Zia is scheduled to return to Makkah tomorrow to perform Umrah there.

Myanmar welcomes Rohingyas back home

By Staff Correspondent

Trade Minister of Myanmar Lt General Tun Kyi yesterday said that his government welcomed the Rohingyas refugees back home and would make every arrangement for their proper rehabilitation.

"I promise that we would receive back everyone that you send,"

Tun Kyi, who is the second man in the Myanmar government, while responding to newsmen's questions after signing the border trade agreement at the state guest house Padma, said that over 1 lakh refugees had already been cleared "for returning home by my government."

He stated categorically "there must be something wrong somewhere which is preventing them from returning" and added "what can we do if they do not come."

The Myanmar minister was making an oblique reference to the UNHCR which was involved in the repatriation process since it cleared the list of refugees.

Tun Kyi said that in 1978, a similar refugee problem was created but the matter was solved bilaterally.

Nearly 2,60,000 Rohingya Muslims from Arakan fled their homes since early 1992 alleging persecution by the military Myanmar authorities, however, refuted the allegation. Till now only about 50,000 of the Rohingyas have gone back.

AC Milan magic

By Sports Reporter

Star-studded Italian club side AC Milan trounced Spanish giants Barcelona 4-0 in the final of the UEFA Cup football championship at the Olympic Stadium in Athens, Greece last night.

AC led 2-0 at halftime through two Massero goals.

Dejan Savicevic and Marcel Desailly added two more soon after the breather to sink Barcelona.



Palestinian policemen are being carried on shoulders by the crowd at the command headquarters in Gaza city yesterday. The Israeli army pulled out of its last positions in Gaza city, completing its withdrawal from the newly-autonomous Palestinian territories of the Gaza Strip and Jericho. — AFP photo

New CM of Sikkim sworn in

NEW DELHI, May 18: India's northeastern state of Sikkim swore in a new Chief Minister today after the former leader was toppled by party rivals in a no-confidence vote, domestic news agencies said, reports Reuter.

Sanchaman Limboo, the former state health minister who led a revolt within the ruling Sikkim Sangram Parishad, was sworn in as Sikkim's capital Gangtok, ending the 15-year rule of Nar Bahadur Bhandari.

Seven ministers were sworn in with Limboo and the cabinet was likely to be expanded in a day or two, the agencies said.

Bhandari's government lost a vote of confidence by two votes on Tuesday in the 32-member state assembly, six months before its third five-year term was to end.

All 16 votes against Bhandari were by rivals within his own party, which holds all but one seat in the assembly. The lone opposition member abstained.

Fate of fishing company

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crore to the Customs godown in the presence of a magistrate and Customs officials.

Port Police, in a sudden raid on April 26, sealed two godowns of the company and made a seizure list of 380 items, including fishing nets, spare parts of the fishing trawlers, communication sets and other deep-sea fishing related equipment.

Port Police said the equipment were seized as the company could not produce any valid documents against those goods. Police also arrested four officials of the company, including two directors.

Meanwhile, Public Relations Officer and spokesman of the company Shamsul Arefin told The Daily Star that the whole incident involving Sea Resources Ltd was nothing but a conspiracy hatched by a vested quarter in collusion with the police with an ulterior motive to destroy the biggest joint venture enterprise.

Arefin said police had seized equipment of the company although it had valid documents for those.

Police even refused to see the documents when the company officials produced those, Arefin alleged. Police, however, denied this.

The spokesman also said that the documents were submitted to the Chittagong court on May 8 but even then police seized all the navigational equipment and communication sets of the company.

He also alleged that police frequently subjected company officials to harassment in the name of interrogation.

He apprehended that if such harassment continued foreign joint venture investors would rethink and most likely pack up their businesses from here.

Pakistan

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(NPT).

Pakistan says it is ready to sign the NPT if Delhi signs at the same time.

Washington last month launched an initiative in Islamabad and Delhi to dampen what it sees as the possibility of a nuclear war over the neighbours' disputed state of Kashmir.

Indian smuggler dies in police custody

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, May 18: An arrested Indian citizen died in the Gowainghat thana hajat of Sylhet district Monday morning. The victim, Ahmed Hossain, was arrested on Saturday afternoon along with another Bangladesh citizen, Abdul Mannan.

They were caught from Salutikor bazar area of Sylhet sadar thana along with 598 units of forged Bangladeshi notes of 500-Taka denominations. Two other accomplices however, managed to escape arrest. The BDR personnel later handed over the apprehended persons to the police, and filed a case against them.

Police termed the death as a case of suicide. Police also said, the victim Ahmed Hossain of Kuchai PS under Kachhar district of Assam had been a member of an international gang engaged in smuggling of currency and other items.

The body of the victim was sent to the Sylhet M A G Osmany Medical College Hospital for post mortem examination. High police officials from Sylhet visited Gowainghat thana yesterday.

Two killed in road mishaps

By DMCH Correspondent

Two persons, one of them a Bangladesh Air Force official, were killed in separate road accidents in the city yesterday.

A flight sergeant of Bangladesh Air Force, Tajul Islam, 30, was killed when a minibus ran over him at Kurmitola under Cantonment police station at 2:30 pm.

Tajul Islam was returning home from work by a bicycle when the accident happened. The flight sergeant was rushed to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) where doctors declared him dead.

Cantonment police seized the minibus and arrested its driver Mohammad Shahidullah.

In another accident, a pedestrian, Khaleq, 30, run over by a speeding truck, died on the spot at Gabtoli bus terminal around 4:30 pm. The truck sped away immediately after the accident, Mirpur police said. Khaleq's body was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

Opinion poll

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government and the rest 28.2 per cent stood against it. Sixty-six point eight per cent of the 190 businessmen, 82.9 per cent of the 70 professionals, 55.9 per cent of the 202 students and 86 per cent of the 57 teachers and 74 per cent of the 131 workers covered under the survey.

Among the respondents with different educational attainments, the idea of elections under a caretaker government is supported by 69.6 per cent of those who have a bachelor or higher degrees. A caretaker government is supported by 57.3 per cent of those with educational qualification below the SSC level.

On the timing of the formation of a caretaker government, 81.9 per cent of the respondents suggested it should be constituted three months before the proposed date of the elections.

The mainstream opposition has been pressing for elections under a caretaker government and has been boycotting Parliament sessions to press home this demand.

The ruling party has, however, rejected the demand on the ground that there is no provision for it in the Constitution.

Anisul Islam stripped of JP presidium post

Anisul Islam Mahmud was relieved of his membership in the Jatiya Party presidium from yesterday, reports UNB.

A brief press release signed by the party's Office Secretary Shafiqul Islam did not say why the former Foreign Minister was stripped of his party post.

Help clean city, Hanif urges citizens

By Staff Correspondent

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Mayor Mohammad Hanif has sought cooperation of the citizens in the DCC's drive for cleaning garbage and wastage during Eid-ul-Azha.

In a statement, issued yesterday, the mayor also felicitated the citizens and extended his Eid greetings to them. He also called upon the citizens to be inspired with the spirit of sacrifice made by Hazrat Ibrahim (AS).

The mayor also hoped that the city dwellers would strengthen Muslim brotherhood and celebrate the Eid with enthusiasm.

The Midnight File

Singapore drops charges against Malaysian boy

SINGAPORE, May 18: Vandalism charges against a 15-year-old Malaysian boy were dropped Wednesday in the last of a series of cases involving foreign teens and a destructive spree last year. The youth, who cannot be named because of his age, originally faced two counts of vandalism — punishable by lashing — two of mischief and one for theft. The first two charges were withdrawn in Juvenile Court, and the charge of theft was changed to one of fraudulent possession of four Mercedes car emblems, reports AP.

Christopher arrives in Cairo

CAIRO, May 18: US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Cairo today from Damascus to brief Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on his latest efforts to give momentum to Israeli-Syrian peace talks. Upon arrival, Christopher left immediately for Mubarak's palace where they will hold talks and give a press conference. Syria said today that a wide gap remained between its position and that of Israel on a peace settlement, reports Reuter.

Rabbani's troops overrun Maidan Shahr

KABUL, May 18: A strategic town west of Kabul has been overrun by forces loyal to Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani, the Defence Ministry said today, reports AFP.

But rival factions denied that Maidan Shahr, which is located 30 kilometres (19 miles) from the capital, had been captured Tuesday in a combined operation by the Defence Ministry and allied forces of the Ittihad-i-Islami faction.

Defence Ministry officials said the town was taken early in the day in a four-hour offensive during which war planes assisted the ground forces.

Maidan Shahr, in Wardak province, "is totally in our hands," said Muhammad Agha Ghul, a commander from the Ittihad-i-Islami faction, which is led by Rasul Sayyaf, a Rabbani ally.

A wounded man at the Jamhuriat hospital here said that rival Hezb-i-Islami artillery was, however, targeting the area from nearby hills, causing "civilian casualties."

A Defence Ministry spokesman said all roads linking the capital with the western regions of Wardak, Paktia and Kandahar were open, restoring links with "our powerful friends" in those areas.

Meanwhile, a radio station run by Rabbani's rival, Prime Minister Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, said Tuesday that Hezb forces loyal to him had lifted a blockade of routes into the capital.

"We welcome the move and hope it has no connection with the last military development in Maidan Shahr," said presidential spokesman Abdul Aziz Murat.

The economic blockade had been in force since January, when Uzbek warlord General Abdul Rashid Dostum, in collaboration with the Hezb, started a drive to oust Rabbani from power.

Serbs free 11 French workers

PARIS, May 18: The French Foreign Ministry said today that Bosnian Serbs had released 11 French aid workers detained in Bosnia since April 8, reports Reuter.

"France welcomes the release of our 11 fellow countrymen from the humanitarian organisation Premiere Urgence, held near Sarajevo since April 8, the ministry said in a statement.

Foreign Minister Alain Juppe told parliament the aid workers were expected to arrive in Paris within hours.

47-member BCU committee

By Staff Correspondent

Kazi Sajjad Zahur Chandon and Aslam Khan have been elected president and general secretary respectively of the Bangladesh Chhatra Union, the student wing of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB).

The election was held yesterday on the concluding day of the organisation's two-day national council at the Engineers' Institution.

Other office-bearers of the 47-member central committee of the organisation include Hafizur Rahman Sohel, organising secretary, Fazle Amin Rubel, treasurer and Tariq Hossain Mithul, office secretary.

Meghna-Gumti

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completed 17 months ahead of the schedule.

Terming the bridge as a great economic importance for Bangladesh, the Communications Minister thanked the Japanese government for its help to the project and the engineers and officials of Bangladesh and Japan for their hard and efficient work which expedited the construction of the bridge.

Col Oli Ahmed also urged the Japanese government to extend their help towards construction of few more bridges like Pakshi, Bhairab and Daleshwari bridges which would be of real help for Bangladesh and its economy.

Shigeo Takenaka, addressing the occasion as the special guest, said that the 1.4 km long bridge would remove the last ferry crossing from the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway.

He said such an improvement in road transportation would lead to the development of many small, medium and large industries in the country's southeastern belt.

"This is yet another milestone in strengthening the friendship between the two countries," the envoy said adding that the Meghna-Gumti Bridge was the longest one ever constructed by Japanese grant aid anywhere of the world.

T Arakawa, senior general manager of the Obayashi Corporation later wished 'Ban Zai' meaning prosperity to the cheers of all present on the occasion.

Of the total 17 pillars, officials said, eight pillars are in Gazaria thana of Munshiganj district while the rest pillars are in Doudkandhi thana of Comilla district.

By-election

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alleged, no fair election was possible under the BNP government after "unprecedented rigging" in the Magura-2 by-polls. However, the Jamaat-e-Islami, the third biggest opposition party in parliament, is yet to decide about its participation in the forthcoming by-election although the party had also alleged rigging by BNP in the Magura by-election. According to sources, the Jamaat is likely to contest the Bogra-4 by-polls as the party has good support in the area. In the 1991 general election, the Jamaat's candidate was the nearest rival to the BNP nominee Azizul Haque who won the polls.

The Gana Forum is also learnt to be preparing to contest the by-election to Bogra-4 parliamentary constituency.

Buriganga

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the meeting.

The ECNEC meeting also approved a modernisation and rehabilitation project of the Dhaka television station at a cost of Tk 70 crore.

The expenditure includes Tk 38.22 crore for equipment purchase, Tk 2.6 crore for construction purpose and Tk 25 crore as duty to the national exchequer.

A Tk 125 crore government primary school development project was also approved by the ECNEC meeting. The project aimed at reconstructing 1,500 government primary school and repair of another 1,500 in the next two years. The meeting decided to release Tk 75 crore in the next financial year for this purpose.

Another project aimed at setting up milk and dairy farms development projects at Chittagong, Bogra and Barisal at a cost of Tk 22 crore. It also approved the Dhaka Export Processing Zone Development Project at a cost of Tk 80 crore.