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NEWS BRIEFS

Biswas, Khaleda
greet Mubarak

President Abdur Rahman Biswas has warmly greeted Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak on the occasion of national day of his country. In a message, President Biswas expressed the confidence that the friendly ties between the two countries would be further consolidated in the coming years. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia also, in a message, greeted Hosni Mubarak on the occasion, reports BSS.

RU VC panel
polls Aug 12

RAJSHAH. July 22: The VC panel election of the Rajshahi University will be held at a senate session on August 12. Vice Chancellors Prof Anisur Rahman will chair the senate session that will elect a three-member VC panel. The chancellor of the university will appoint one of the three as VC for a four-year term, reports UNB.

Hasina greets
Tony Blair

Opposition leader and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday congratulated Tony Blair for being elected the leader of the British Labour Party. In a message to him, she hoped that the Labour Party would play an important role in UK politics under his leadership. She wished his good health and long cherished career, reports UNB.

Trawler capsizes
in Bay

BARISAL. July 22: A fishing trawler capsized in the Bay of Bengal, some 50 km from Patharghata thana of Barguna district on Thursday. The trawler, FB Gangchil, overturned in the Bay amidst high wind with 10 people, and a huge quantity of fish and nets therein yesterday midnight, reports UNB.

No action yet on banks'
SLR exemption

By Inam Ahmed

The Bangladesh Bank's prescription for bailing the commercial banks out of their troubles regarding the statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) requirement is still awaiting action by the Finance Ministry.

The banks are still smarting under a shortage of treasury bills because of the government's mode of deficit financing from non-bank sources. This has led to a serious SLR shortfall for most of the commercial banks.

The government's mode of deficit financing over the last couple of years has shifted the source of its borrowing from the banks to various savings instruments.

This has resulted in a reduced supply of government approved treasury bills, forcing the banks to meet their SLR requirement — 15 per cent of their liabilities — by depositing non-interest bearing cash to the Bangladesh Bank (BB).

Against this backdrop, the BB earlier this year strongly recommended to the Finance

Ministry that the provision for the commercial banks' SLR should be waived in keeping with modern international practice. However, this view is yet to receive any matching response from the Finance Ministry, according to highly placed official sources.

The policy-makers now feel that stricter banking supervision and the provision of capital requirement of the banks — six per cent of their liabilities — make the SLR redundant since any heavy withdrawal can be cushioned by the banks' own capital.

The other prevailing logic of the central bank overseeing the country's monetary situation by increasing or reducing the SLR requirement has also been refuted by the BB in its proposals because money supply can be regulated through many other mechanisms.

Moreover, SLR only creates a crowding-out effect, said a policy planner in the govern-

ment. "Money is siphoned from the commercial banks to meet the government's expenditure. This way the money supply cannot really be curbed or raised."

The Bangladesh Bank had also suggested that by withdrawing the SLR, the cash reserve ratio (CRR) can be enhanced from the present five per cent of liabilities to ten per cent. Also, the CRR can be revised periodically to effectively match the central bank's aim of either increasing or reducing money supply to strike a balance between growth and inflation, the official said.

The government's mode of non-bank deficit financing has also come under criticism from the World Bank which feels that their results in a transfer of resources from the private sector to the banking sector for which the government has to bear unacceptably high interest rates, between 12 and 18 per cent, on its savings schemes.

Yangon agrees to hold talks
with UN on HR issue

BANGKOK. July 22: Military-ruled Myanmar said Friday it has agreed to hold talks with the United Nations, which is seeking improvements in human rights, democratic reform and the release of opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi, reports AP.

The talks would involve Myanmar Foreign Minister Ohn Gya and UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The date and other details are being worked out. Ohn Gya told reporters as Myanmar for the first time attended the foreign ministers meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Some of Ohn Gya's comments suggested, however, that his government may not be ready to take the UN concerns head-on. "I don't think we have a human rights problem," he said when asked about protests by US Con-

gressmen.

And as Myanmar tried to improve its international image in Bangkok, its troops attacked refugee encampments astride the Thai-Myanmar border sending more than 5,000 people fleeing into Thailand, according to refugee sources.

The Mon National Relief Committee said the attacks Thursday targeted two camps located about 280 kilometers west of Bangkok. These were inhabited by the Mon ethnic minority, members of which continue to fight the central Myanmar government.

In recent days, an Associated Press reporter travelled to the remote area of the camp where the refugees said they fled their country because of brutal treatment by the military and economic hardships.

Myanmar has been criticised by the UN General Assembly and isolated by the

United States, the European Union and other Western nations for the past six years because of its human rights record.

Later Friday, Ohn Gya met for an hour with the deputy chief of the UN Development Programme Nay Htun, who is the highest ranking UN official currently in Bangkok.

Local press reports had said the two would discuss an agenda for the UN Myanmar talks. But in brief comments to reporters after the session, Nay Htun referred only to Myanmar's development needs.

"Dialogue in itself is certainly positive. Whether it leads to anything remains to be seen," said the German ambassador to Thailand, Berthold von Pfetten.

He said the European Union, which is also attending the ASEAN meeting, was trying to get Myanmar to join.

More comet fragments
may hit Jupiter

GREENBELT (Maryland). July 22: Comet fragments completed their bombardment of Jupiter today, but the scorched marks may remain for weeks above the cloudtops of the solar system's largest planet, reports AP.

Jupiter could possibly be hit by more than the forecast 21 fragments, said Eugene Shoemaker, co-discoverer of the comet and a US Geological Survey scientist.

He said these could be unseen pieces within the comet train that have gone into the Jupiter cloudtops undetected until impact.

Comets can become invisible to telescopes after they exhaust the loose material that creates their coma, or dust cloud, which reflects sunlight, he said.

To astronomers, the Comet shower on Jupiter has been more than just a light show.

The comet fragments provided a natural probe of Jupiter's atmosphere. By penetrating deeply and then ex-

ploding, the space rocks performed a sort of chemical analysis. Astronomers can use measurements of the light spectrum to identify molecules in the black patches left by the impacts.

Already they have found sulphur ammonia and hydrogen sulfide. They are still looking for water.

The planetary pummeling has also allowed experts to verify their ability to gauge the size of comet fragments based on the apparent brightness. They used this scale to judge which pieces would be the largest and the impacts have proved their calculations correct.

By watching how the black impact marks eventually dissipate, planetary scientists could also learn more about the weather and wind currents of Jupiter.

As the marks dilute and eventually stream away, they'll act rather like a windsock, telling the speed and direction

2000 Earth-bound
space rocks!

WASHINGTON, July 22: Now that Jupiter's being turned into a cosmic pin cushion, Congress is considering a programme to find as many as 2,000 space rocks that could smash into Earth, reports AP.

"If a comet or asteroid the size of the one we have been watching hit Jupiter this week were to hit the Earth, it would cause a major, global catastrophe," said Rep. Ralph Hall, chairman of the House space subcommittee.

He asked for and got an amendment to NASA legislation that calls for a 10 year programme to identify and catalogue "the orbital characteristics of all comets and asteroids that are greater than one kilometer in diameter" on a course that crosses the orbit of Earth. The entire Congress will vote on the provision.

It's not as fanciful a task as it sounds. If a head-on collision is coming, there is a remedy: destroy the object with a nuclear blast or nudge it off



Chakma refugees repatriated from Tripura Thursday crossing the Feni river at Tabalchhari border, 50 km from Khagrachhari town. — Star photo by Anisur Rahman

Govt deepens
unemployment
problem, says
Hasina

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday criticised the BNP government for indiscriminate termination of workers and said it had failed to create job opportunities for the unemployed, reports UNB.

Addressing central leaders of the Employees' Union of the Bakhirabad Gas Systems Ltd and more than 300 employees from Chittagong, Feni, Chandpur and Dhaka who joined the Awami League at 29 Mintu Road, the Awami League President blamed the government for deepening the unemployment problem in the country.

In a pointed reference to not playing of national anthem at the senate meeting of the National University reportedly at the instruction of the Vice-Chancellor, Hasina said the Vice-Chancellor must seek apology to the nation for his unpardonable mistake.

She asked the Chhatra

Rohingya refugees

Repatriation picks up

By Special Correspondent

Repatriation of Rohingya refugees, which was slowed down in May due to cyclone in Cox's Bazar, has now picked up.

In the first 20 days of this month, 2436 refugees returned to Myanmar compared with only 524 during May and June.

According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Dhaka, 57,800 Myanmar refugees have been repatriated since September 1992. Some 250,877 refugees were registered in Bangladesh and given shelter at 19 makeshift camps in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts.

The Rohingyas fled to Bangladesh, mostly in 1991, to avoid persecution by Myanmar authorities.

The repatriation of refugees are now being conducted under a memorandum of understanding between Bangladesh and the UNHCR signed last year.

The UNHCR officials said the eagerness for voluntary repatriation among the refugees is rising, resulting in increased flow of their return home.

The government of Myanmar has so far cleared 135,000 refugees for repatriation while the cases of others are being considered.

About 11,500 refugees have now been taken to transit centres along Bangladesh-Myanmar border for repatriation. Myanmar has set up five reception centres at Kanyinchang, Magyichang, Pynpyu, Ngakura and Taungbro which can receive a total of 2900 refugees a week.

"The capacity of reception centres will be increased to 3400 from August 1 and this will help boost the repatriation process," said an UNHCR official.

Until Wednesday, 193077 Myanmar refugees were staying at the camps in Bangladesh.

Federation Cup
final today

Sports Reporter

Star-studded Muktijoddha Sangsad Krira Chakra mark their maiden appearance in the final of any domestic tournament today when they take on giants Abahani Krira Chakra in the final of the BEXIMCO 12th Federation Cup final scheduled for a 5 pm start at the Dhaka Stadium.

Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh will cover the match live.

Tickets will be on sale from 2:30 pm while the gates will be opened at 2 pm.

Taslima may
leave
country

Controversial writer Taslima Nasreen is considering to leave the country to seek protection, not asylum, said a spokesman of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, reports PROBE news service.

Taslima may attend a government-sponsored writers' congress to be held at Stavanger, Norway, next month, Norwegian Under-Secretary of State Jan Egeland told the Swedish state-run radio. She has already received an invitation from the organisers.

Foreign Ministry sources in Dhaka said the Swedish radio had broadcast a special programme on the writer along with interviews of Bangladesh Ambassador to Sweden Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury and Jan Egeland on July 12.

The Norwegian Under-Secretary criticised the government of Bangladesh for what he called, suppressing her freedom of speech and for taking no action against the people who threaten her life.

Egeland said the Bangladesh government had assured her protection "but the people who protect Taslima have little faith in that". He pointed out that there are direct and indirect contacts between the authorities and those who protect her.

Replying to a question whether Norwegian nationals are threatened by fundamentalists in Dhaka, Jan said, "Our staff there are worried... we only have a development office, no embassy, with poor security."

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Ctg tense over
Jamaat,
APSU meets

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG. July 22: Tension is mounting in the port city with two rival organisations going ahead with their programmes of holding public meetings at the same venue and at the same time.

The All-Party Students Unity (APSU) has scheduled a meeting at the Laldighi maidan on July 26 in demand for the trial of Jamaat-e-Islam leader Golam Azam and other 'war criminals'.

But earlier the city unit of Jamaat gave an announcement for a public meeting on July 26 at Laldighi maidan to be addressed by party chief Golam Azam.

The Jamaat workers are now taking all preparations to welcome their leader and to hold the meeting, party

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7 suffer burn
injuries in
factory blaze

By Staff Correspondent

At least seven people suffered burn injuries in a fire that broke out at a garments factory at Mohammadpur in the city yesterday.

A huge quantity of clothes were gutted in the blaze at the Fashion Garments. But the total loss could not be ascertained immediately, fire service officials said.

"It is believed the fire broke out in a store room on the third floor of the factory from an electric short circuit around 2:30 in the afternoon. But the matter is still under investigation," said a fire service spokesman.

Of the injured, a staff of the factory Anwar Hossain, 25, was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) while six others were given first aid.

Our Savar Correspondent adds, a devastating fire at the local thana health complex quarter yesterday left five people injured and property worth taka 10 lakh damaged.

City traffic jam —III

Demand for unified authority

By Masud Hasan Khan

With the traffic situation worsening in Dhaka, the demand for a unified traffic authority is increasingly gaining ground.

The roads in the capital belong to Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) looks after registration and fitness of the vehicles, barring the rickshaws while traffic is controlled and laws enforced by the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

Besides, an assortment of utility service agencies are engaged cutting, repairing or earth-filling the streets round the year.

These mixed and un-coordinated activities by the agencies concerned with traffic

have only led to further deterioration of the situation, observes people as well as experts.

There is now the need for a super authority for the metropolitan city, said Prof Nazrul Islam of the Urban Research Centre of Dhaka University. "Many capitals in Asia are efficiently being looked after by a single organisation," he pointed out.

He suggested that the DCC's mandate could be broadened to make it a strong organisation responsible for the overall welfare of the citizens of Dhaka.

Prof Islam pointed out that creation of a similar body was suggested in the Dhaka City Master Plan which, however,

was not implemented as yet. "Our imagination in the transport sector is so poor that we have not yet set up a transport ministry," commented Abdul Haq, a leading car dealer of Dhaka.

Haq suggested that the government should immediately chart a comprehensive transport policy which, he felt, could successfully push the unfit vehicles off the road as well as lessen the traffic congestion in the urban areas.

A study on Dhaka's traffic congestion spelt out that a typical jam in the old Dhaka involving 1000 vehicle for one and a half hour cost the road user about Taka 1.5 lakh.

A brilliant study on rick-

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Piling up of construction materials and unplanned digging of roads often cause traffic jams. — Star photo