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NEWS BRIEFS

Khaleda shocked

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed her deep shock at the death of BNP Jhalidhaka thana unit president Zahiruddin Ahmed. In a condolence message Begum Zia recalled the contributions of late Ahmed saying he was a dedicated leader preaching Bangladeshi nationalism and the politics of production. BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar also condoled the death of Zahiruddin Ahmed, reports BSS.

477 tribal refugees
return home

CHITTAGONG, Aug 1: Some 99 families comprising 477 tribal refugees from Indian state of Tripura today voluntarily returned to their homes in Khagrachhari hill district bringing the total number of repatriated persons to 2772. The Khagrachhari control room sources told BSS here that this sixth batch under the second phase of repatriation was received by Kalparanjan Chakma MP.

Tk 850 for workers' medical test

The Labour and Manpower Ministry has informed that arrangement has been made for medical test of the workers going to Malaysia at BIRDEM and Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital at a cost of Taka 850. Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka will only accept medical certificates from these two hospitals for giving visas. The measure will be effective immediately, reports BSS.

Ministers' pledges take
their time to materialise

By Nurul Kabir

The government has so far fulfilled only 58 out of 443 pledges made by the ministers on the floor of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) during the first 14 sessions of the country's present parliament.

However, another 183 projects, undertaken by the government following pledges made by ministers in the House, have so far been implemented partially.

These statistics were revealed at a meeting of the JS standing body on government pledges held yesterday morning with its chairman and Chief Whip of Parliament Khandaker Delwar Hossain in the chair.

The Opposition members of the eight-man body were not present.

According to meeting sources, the JS body on government pledges is however yet to receive any information about the state of implementation of 202 pledges made by the cabinet members.

Parliament Secretariat sources said letters had been issued to the ministries concerned requesting them to provide the JS body with adequate information on all the projects but the ministries are yet to respond accordingly.

The cabinet members usually make commitments in response to notices by Parliament members drawing the attention of the House to both national and regional problems and seeking necessary government measures to resolve those.

All the 443 pledges made so far relate mostly to development issues, ranging from construction of bridges and culverts to setting up of telephone exchanges at different JS constituencies.

However, the chief of the JS body monitoring implementation progress Khandaker Delwar Hossain told this correspondent last night that effective functioning of his

committee could contribute a lot towards making the government accountable to Parliament.

"The opposition members of the committee have a very important role to play in that respect," the Chief Whip observed.

The Opposition parties in Parliament are on a boycott since March of both Parliament sessions and JS standing body meetings.

The pledges committee is planning to produce a report for the next session of Parliament. According to meeting sources, a sub-committee was formed yesterday to scrutinise the information gathered so far to prepare a draft to be placed in the House. The sub-committee is supposed to complete scrutiny by the first week of next month.

Yesterday's meeting was attended by the ruling party members of the committee M A Matin, Sirajul Islam and Abdul Wahab.

Cabinet okays BTV
programmes thru'
'Asiasat' satellite

The cabinet in a meeting yesterday approved the proposal for transmission of BTV programmes via 'Asiasat' satellite to project Bangladesh in the region, reports UNB.

This will enable Bangladesh to project its development efforts, culture and heritage as well as educational and entertainment programmes throughout the Asia-Pacific regional countries, a government handout said.

The satellite channel will also be used to telecast special programmes for the SAARC countries.

Other countries in the region such as India, Pakistan and Myanmar are already using satellite channels for airing TV programmes.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting of the cabinet which also approved amendment to the Negotiable Instrument Act 1881 and replacement of the Apprenticeship Ordinance 1962 by the proposed Apprenticeship Act 1994.

Ministers, state ministers in charge of different ministries and divisions attended the meeting.

14 killed in bus plunge
at Sonargaon

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Aug 1: At least 14 people were killed when a speeding bus skidded off the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and plunged into a ditch near Darikanda village in Sonargaon yesterday.

Some 25 passengers trapped inside the ill-fated bus under water were rescued by local people and sent to different hospitals in Narayanganj and Dhaka.

The rescuers feared the death toll might rise since the bus was still under water at the time of filing this report at 10 last night.

It was believed the bus, owned by a transport agency Jatri Seba, met the accident due to mechanical trouble when it was coming to Dhaka from Lakshimpur. The bus sank into six to seven feet under water in the ditch around 4:30 in the afternoon, according to witnesses.

Local people, police and Fire Service men rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation which was continu-

ing at the time of filing this report.

Of the 14 dead, thirteen bodies were recovered from the trapped bus while the other, a man in his 30s, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) after admission. The victims also included a woman and two children. None of them could be identified immediately.

Of the injured passengers, seven were admitted to the DMCH in the evening.

PM shocked

BSS adds: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia last night condoled the loss of lives in a tragic road accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

She conveyed sympathy to those injured in the accident and directed the concerned authorities to provide proper treatment to them.

The Prime Minister conveyed deep sympathies to the members of the bereaved families and prayed for eternal peace of the departed souls.

21 indicted for
Lalbagh killings

By Staff Correspondent

Twentyone people were indicted yesterday for their alleged involvement in the post-polio violence in the capital's Nawabganj area which left seven people killed.

Public prosecutors framed the charges in the court of the Second Additional District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka.

Among the 21 accused, only five who had been arrested so far were present in the court. The others including Alhaj Abdul Aziz, a defeated ward commissioner candidate in the January 30 polls, were still at large. Aziz is the main accused in the case.

A source said, Public Prosecutor Abdur Razzak drafted the charges and Assistant Public Prosecutor Mahboob Ahmed appeared in the court for framing the charges.

Charges were brought under sections 148 (for rioting being armed with deadly weapons), 149 (for unlawful assembly), 302 (for committing murders) and 307 (for attempt to murder) of the Bangladesh Penal Code (BPC). See Page 12 Col 8

A 'white elephant' in
its death throes

By Sharier Khan

Production at the Tk 2,000 crore Machine Tools Factory in Gazipur has stopped since July 14 and over 90 per cent of its employees have been retrenched.

But the government is yet to decide the fate of the factory described as a 'white elephant' by Industries Minister A M Zahiruddin Khan. The factory has not been officially declared closed.

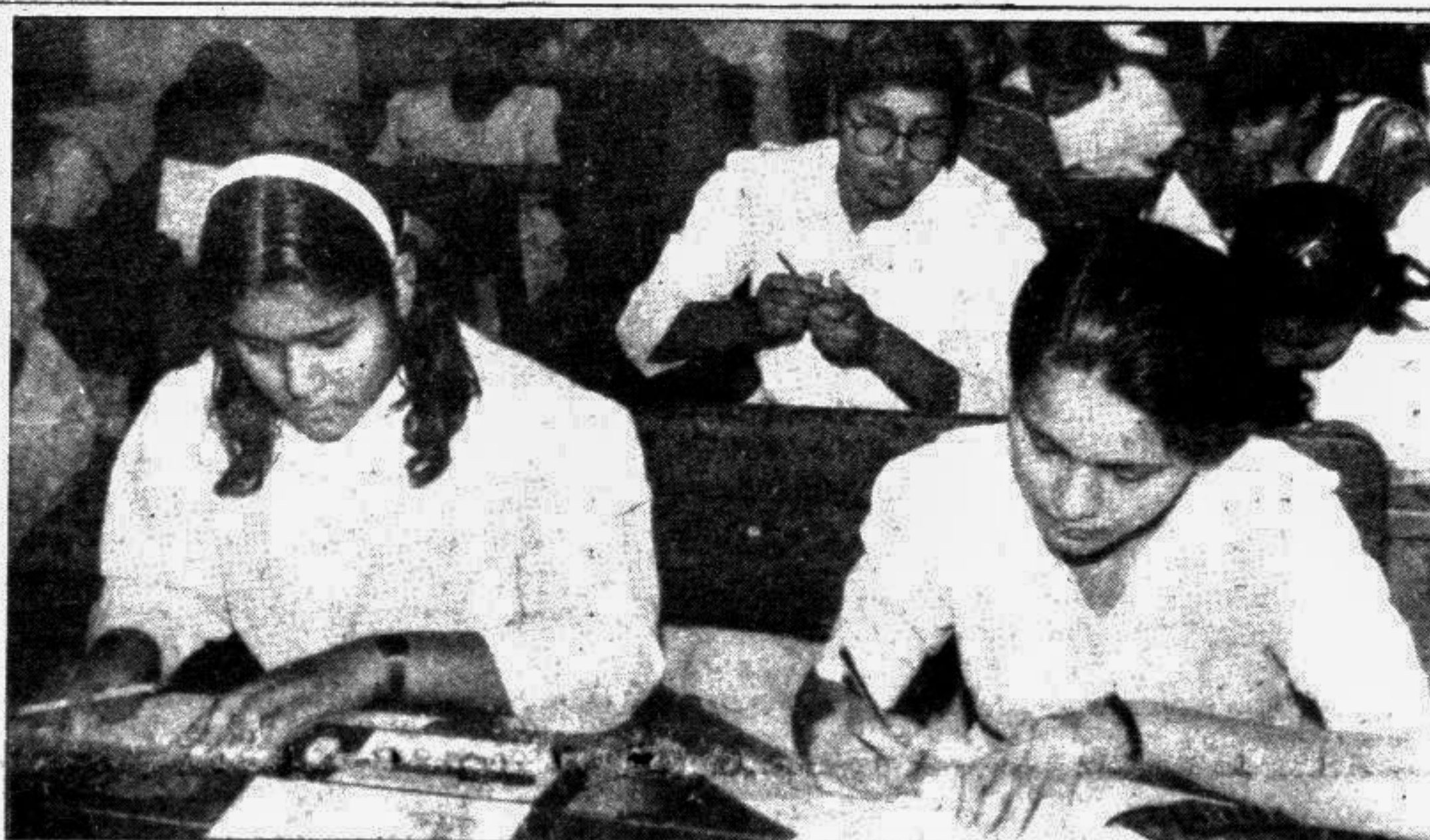
The minister, when contacted, told The Daily Star that the government is trying to find alternative ways to use the machinery at the factory without further burdening the national exchequer.

The authorities retrenched some 1455 employees out of a total of 1650 at the factory in two phases at a cost of Tk 24 crore, according to officials of the factory and Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC). They said that another Tk four crore would be spent to retrench the remaining employees.

The factory's sales office at Motijheel in the city was also closed down on July 20.

The Industries Minister said that a framework was being contemplated under which the private sector could be allowed to use the machinery on

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Examinees at a city centre on the first day of the countrywide HSC examinations yesterday. — Star photo

1295 expelled on first
day of HSC exams

By Staff Correspondent

At least 1295 examinees were expelled for adopting unfair means on the first day of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations yesterday, according to reports received till 11 last night.

The examination of Bengali first paper was held on the day in a peaceful manner.

A total of 4,08,045 HSC examinees were enrolled this year under the four education boards of the country.

Of the expelled examinees, 240 were reported in Dhaka, 196 from Comilla, 790 from Rajshahi and 69 from Jessore. Besides, an invigilator at a Gaibandha centre under the Rajshahi Board was also ex-

pelled for malpractice in the examination hall. CID police arrested two persons on charge of selling questions at Comilla.

Education Minister Jami ruddin Sircar visited the examination centre at Dhaka College in the capital. He talked to the examinees and others welfare.

Chairman of the Dhaka Board Prof. Latifur Rahman and the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka were present during the minister's visit.

According to the control room of the Dhaka Board 240 candidates were expelled from 210 centres of the board yesterday. See Page 12 Col 8

BSRS in a dilemma

By Sohel Manzur

The Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) is still undecided about what to do with the money borrowed from the Bangladesh Bank and other sources because a government embargo on the Sangstha regarding financing new projects is still in force, according to sources.

The BSRS, one of the six development financing institutions (DFIs) of the country, borrowed Tk 175 crore in May last from the central bank. Bangladesh Bank collected the money by selling treasury bonds to the commercial banks.

After repaying a Tk 108 crore loan to the government, the BSRS has now Tk 67 crore in hand to invest in addition to its present capital of over Tk 100 crore.

But, according to officials of the BSRS, the Sangstha is not being able to invest the funds because of the embargo imposed in early 1985 as per the suggestion of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the ground of its poor loan recovery performance.

The BSRS management has, in the meantime, sought permission from the Ministry of Finance for financing new projects and also for beginning commercial banking.

A high official of the Finance Ministry, talking to The Daily Star last night, however, said the ministry has been examining various

aspects of the proposal submitted by the BSRS, although, he added, the ministry is least concerned about the Sangstha because of its 'insignificant' contribution to industrialisation.

There are several other banks which have been contributing significantly to the industrialisation of the country but the BSRS has failed to prove its importance and worth, he said, adding that the ministry is yet to decide whether the BSRS would go for commercial banking or not.

Another official of the ministry said the BSRS should have no problem in investing the funds because the Sangstha has as many as 80 sick projects. At least, some of these deserve rehabilitation through BMRE (balancing, modernisation, rehabilitation and expansion) or working capital credit.

He also said a four-member special working committee led by FBCCI President Mahbubur Rahman and represented by the BSRS Managing Director Al-Amin Chowdhury was formed by the ministry early this year to take decisions on the sick projects on a case-by-case basis. The term of the committee expires on August 7, but no decision has yet been taken by the committee, he said.

The funds available with the BSRS are not sufficient to re-

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SAARC Secy Gen Silwal tells The Daily Star
Bilateral issues best avoided

By M Anwarul Haq

"Contentious bilateral issues among the member-countries should not be raised or included in SAARC forums. These outstanding matters should rather be discussed at bilateral levels outside the purview of SAARC."

This was stated by Yadav Kant Silwal, Secretary General of the 7-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in an interview with The Daily Star in Dhaka yesterday.

Silwal said it was an undeniable fact that the member states were confronted with many contentious bilateral issues, but the regional body would have failed to attain the current level of cooperation had the SAARC charter contained provisions for discussion of inter-state problems.

"The visionaries of SAARC and the leaders who founded the organisation in 1985 in their wisdom decided to exclude deliberations on bilateral issues in the official forums of the organisation. I think their collective wisdom has enabled the organisation not only to take a positive shape but also make considerable progress in the fields of social and economic cooperation," Silwal said.

The SAARC Secretary General who is a former foreign secretary of Nepal, observed that growing regional cooperation would ultimately

pave the way for abandoning confrontation and the settlement of disputes.

"Keeping bilateral issues outside the purview of SAARC has really helped the organisation grow. May be in the future these issues could be discussed. But personally I feel that the scope for officially raising bilateral matters should not be incorporated in the charter."

Silwal disagreed with the contention of critics that the organisation has not made much headway.

"Critics are always there. But you have to look at the political complications prevailing in the region and the background in which SAARC has been created and continues to operate."

Silwal, however, agreed that "the political complications to a certain extent has not enabled us to make as much progress as we had expected."

The Secretary General pointed out that despite the political complications, there is now a growing realisation among the member-nations to promote regional cooperation. The members are increasingly realising that a regional endeavour for economic cooperation is required to be reckoned with in a rapidly changing world scenario where vast economic strides are being made. "The SAARC countries are now genuinely endeavour-

ing to promote economic and social cooperation. Otherwise we may be marginalised."

Silwal said the issues of trade, i.e. SAPTA and a common stance on poverty alleviation, are now being earnestly pursued by the SAARC states. He expressed his belief that the first round of negotiations on SAPTA will end within September and that the trade concessions would be operative by the end of next year as envisaged. He pointed out that Nepal and Sri Lanka had already ratified the agreement.

The Secretary General mentioned that the importance of the 'pro poor' plan has been accepted and a three tier action plan has been formulated. These plans, he said, would come up before the next summit.

"SAARC provides a policy framework. But it is upto the member countries to implement it. I can say, all the countries are now quite serious."

Silwal felt that in nine years, SAARC has made a significant strides.

"We have strengthened SAARC as an institution. We had seven summits. All the heads of state or government had participated in all the summits. They had attended the summits despite of their domestic preoccupations. This itself speaks of the importance that each of the nation attaches to SAARC," he noted.

Unseat govt to save
country: Hasina

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Aug 1: Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina has called for intensifying the on-going agitation to unseat the BNP government to save the country from what she described as anarchy.

Hasina, who arrived here this morning, was addressing journalists at the Chittagong Press Club. She said that the present 'neo-autocratic government' was pushing the

country towards chaos.

"If the BNP government remains in power for the rest of its term it will get further scope to establish Golam Azam in the country's politics."

"The incumbent Prime Minister is following in the footsteps of her husband Ziaur Rahman who brought back Pakistani national Golam Azam to Bangladesh and rehabilitated the anti-Liberation forces in politics," Hasina added.

The AL chief categorically said that without struggle the pro-liberation forces could not survive in the country.

She blamed the government for the tragic incidents of July 26 in Chittagong and alleged that police had protected the armed terrorists on that day while innocent people were killed.

"After the Chittagong killings this government has no right to stay in power," Hasina said and added that those incidents indicated the alarming condition of law and order in the country.

Hasina said the BNP government was harbouring the terrorists.

She advised the journalists to file a case for the police action upon them on July 26.

She went to the local press club to express her sympathy

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PM may visit
Bhutan soon

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to visit Bhutan in near future, reports UNB.

Exact date and other schedule of the planned trip will be finalised at a mutually convenient time. Bhutanese Foreign Minister Lympo Dawa Tsering said in the capital yesterday.

Begum Zia, the current chairperson of the seven-nation SAARC, is scheduled to visit India and Pakistan in November.

She is also expected to undertake pre-summit tour of three other SAARC countries—Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives—by the year-end.

Legal notice regarding purchase of choppers

By Staff Correspondent

The Tax Payers' Association of Bangladesh—a body of private citizens—has served legal notice to the presidents and secretaries of the four major political parties and all members of Parliament charging them with 'failure' to protect the country's interest while purchasing two helicopters for the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief.

The parties sued are the BNP, the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat. A Supreme Court lawyer MA Qudus Sheikh, signed the notice on behalf of the convener of the association, K Anam. The notice has also been served to the secretaries of the Foreign Affairs, Finance

and Relief ministries and to the owners of four business firms involved in the deal.

It was mentioned in the notice that a Russian firm, Aviaexport, is selling two Mi-17 helicopters to Bangladesh for 9.5 million US dollars, a rate much higher than the original price of two million US dollars.

The notice claimed that the other bidders were eliminated on the plea that they did not offer 1984 models, as required by the tender documents.

The legal notice said there is no major difference between the 1991, '92, '93 and '94 models but the Relief Ministry is to be obliged to pay a high

price for having chosen only the 1994 model. The notice said Aviaexport did not provide the serial number of the offered helicopters during submission of tender.

A copy of the notice has also been served on the Director General of Defence Purchase, and two Russian diplomats—Kharitanov and V Skovtinn. The DGDP has been assigned by the Relief Ministry to purchase the helicopters.

The convener of the Tax Payers' Association also said in the notice that "We object (sic) to the purchase of communist country products, including Russian Federation as those are (sic) of high cost, poor quality (sic) high maintenance

cost and unreliable."

"India has refused to pay 2,000 crore US dollars to the Russian government for the above reason," the notice mentioned.

When contacted over telephone about the substance of the legal notice, MA Qudus Sheikh told The Daily Star that he signed the notice after being satisfied with the necessary documents provided by his client. Article 102 of the constitution permits a lawyer to issue such legal notice.

The Secretary of the Ministry of Relief declined to comment on the issue.

"I have no comment," Hafiz Khan told The Daily Star. He claimed not to have received

any such notice yet.

According to a ministry source the bids are awaiting final approval of the government's purchase committee headed by the Finance Minister.

The notice, signed on July 26, asked the defendants to reply within seven days otherwise the client may go for legal action.

Convener of the association K Anam said his notice is based on facts and he wants to protect the national interest. This correspondent tried to contact a number of MPs regarding the matter. Only Tajul Islam Chowdhury, a Jatiya Party MP confirmed having received a copy of the notice.

India refutes Pak
FM's remarks

India has rebutted the Pakistani foreign minister's reported remarks on India's relations with other SAARC countries as baseless and a demonstration of bad taste that harmed the forum's spirit, reports UNB.

In an interview with a Dhaka daily published on July 30, Sardar Asaf Ahmad Ali had reportedly said that SAARC had bogged down, because India has disputes with all regional countries with the exception of the Maldives.

"These mistaken views on India's relations with other countries in SAARC show an exceptionally bad taste," a press release from the Indian High Commission in Dhaka quoted India's State Minister for External Affairs RL Bhatia

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