

No move to tap markets lost by plague-hit India'

By Sohail Manzur

No measures have so far been taken by the authorities concerned to tap the markets lost by the exporters of plague-stricken India although other countries are not sitting idle, sources concerned said.

The issue of tapping the export markets of Indian goods was raised by some officials of the Commerce Ministry shortly after the suspension of air and sea links with India by many countries following the outbreak of plague in that country.

But the matter was ignored and no special drive was made in this regard, the sources pointed out.

A top official of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) said plague should not be linked with the EPB's export promotion activities since it is a sensitive issue. "We are constantly in touch with our embassies and exporters about promoting exports and all these are being done as a normal practice".

When asked whether any special move was taken during the last one month for promoting export of any specific product to the Gulf region or their countries, the official said no such step was taken.

Commerce Ministry sources

however, said there is no reason to sit idle at this moment because even if Bangladesh does not try to tap the markets of the Indian products, others will do it.

The sources pointed out that Pakistan is sending a trade delegation to Saudi Arabia to negotiate export of 'basmoti' rice to that country. India was the sole exporter of this improved variety of rice to Saudi Arabia since 1991, when Pakistan lost its market there for exporting the product to Iran at a price lower than that for the Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan is seeking to recapture its rice market taking advantage of the suspension of air and sea links of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states with the plague-hit India, the sources noted.

Efforts are being made also to tap the markets of other Indian products in the member-states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) by some countries.

The six GCC-member states were the biggest single market for the Indian exporters before they lost it due to the precautionary measures against plague by those countries.

Ninian due today

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Flight will be received at the Zia International Airport by diplomats of the Commonwealth countries, leaders of the ruling BNP, the Awami League and High Commissioner of Australia in Bangladesh Kenneth William Aspinall.

From the airport, Sir Ninian Stephen will go to the state guest house Padma where the would meet the press to make an arrival statement at 11.30 am.

The 71-year old Commonwealth emissary has a wealth of experience as a jurist and diplomat. He earned respect in international circles when he acted as a negotiator in Northern Ireland talks between the British and the Irish governments in 1992. He was also a leading observer in the first multi-racial elections in South Africa.

He served as Governor General of Australia from 1982 to 1989.

Sir Ninian served as a judge of the High Court of Australia from 1972 to 1982.

Talking informally to a

group of journalists at his residence yesterday, the Australian High Commissioner described Sir Ninian as a 'jurist and lawyer of great ability'. He said, he was fully aware of the former Governor General's ability to talk to people and resolve problems.

Asked about the possible outcome of the talks, the High Commissioner said, he or his country was in no way involved but personally he felt optimistic because of Sir Ninian's mediatory role on previous occasions. "I hope his efforts will produce some positive results."

The High Commissioner made it clear that the former Governor General is coming on a Commonwealth mission. "He is a private citizen. He does not come as an Australian government representative. Sir Ninian will report to the Commonwealth Secretary General directly."

Two of Sir Ninian's aides — Dr Moses Anafu and Chris Childs — arrived in Dhaka October 10 and have already started preparations for the forthcoming negotiations.

Order of items for talks

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Nationalist Party (BNP) Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukder, who was present at the meeting, told this correspondent late last night, "We have tried to explain to the Commonwealth team that if the Opposition's objective is to ensure a fool-proof electoral process, the only way is to have a really independent Election Commission under a constitutional government. And in that case, the question of discussing the issue of a stronger Election Commission with wide powers comes first."

The BNP Secretary General also informed the Commonwealth officials that the ruling party is ready to discuss the issue according to the order set by Commonwealth Secretary General Chief Emeka much earlier.

Emeka put the question of strengthening the EC as the first item, caretaker administration issue as the second and the code of conduct for the political parties as the third item on the agenda.

According to Talukder, the officials did not comment on

the ruling party contention.

They are, however, expected to make a working paper for Sir Ninian Stephen, the Commonwealth emissary, who arrives in the city today.

Meanwhile, leaders of the opposition parties and groups in Parliament met yesterday afternoon to discuss the strategy for the proposed dialogue. Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim told reporters at the Sangsad Bhavan that national elections under a caretaker administration would be the main item at the talks. He also hoped that the ruling party would join the dialogue with a mind to meet the Opposition demand for a non-partisan caretaker government to conduct the national polls.

An insider told The Daily Star, after the meeting, the Opposition leaders were yet to decide on the size of their delegations for the talks but they resolved unanimously not to include any non-MP in the team.

Senior leaders of the principal opposition party Awami League later met party chief Sheikh Hasina at her Minto road residence to apprise her of the outcome of the meeting between Samad Azad and the Commonwealth officials and the Opposition leaders meeting. Satisfied over the results, the AL chief is learnt to have advised her party colleagues not to shift from the present position.

Prof. Badruddoza Chowdhury and Salam Talukder also had a closed-door meeting after the Commonwealth delegation left Chowdhury's residence at 10:30pm and resolved to stick to their present position relating to the order of subjects on the three-point agenda for the talks.

IDNDR Day observed

The International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) Day was observed in the country as elsewhere in the world yesterday. To mark the day, discussions, seminars and rallies were organised in different district headquarters.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia rides on a buggy during her visit to the Proton National Car Assembly Plant at Shah Alam in Malaysia yesterday. — AFP photo

Khaleda visits Proton Saga car plant

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, along with her entourage members, visited the Proton Saga car plant in Shah Alam here this morning, reports BSS.

The Prime Minister went round different sections of the massive Proton automobile plant, which manufactures over 500 cars a day.

The Managing Director of the Proton automobile plant Datuk Mohammad Nazmi Bin Dato Mohammad Salleh briefed the Prime Minister about the plant.

Earlier on her arrival at the car plant, the Prime Minister was received by the managing director of Proton car plant.

3 accords

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ASM Mostafizur Rahman and Malaysian Minister for International Trade and Industry Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz signed the agreement on behalf of their respective sides.

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) on literature between Bangla Academy and Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka was signed by Bangladesh High Commissioner in Malaysia Mahmood Alam and Director General of Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka on behalf of their respective sides.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Bin Mohamad witnessed the signing of the agreements at Perdana.

2 hurt in blast

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Oct 12: Two brothers were seriously injured in a cocktail explosion in Kaula today. They were admitted to the Sylhet MAG Osmany Medical College Hospital this afternoon. Obaidur Rahman, 13, and Masum Bellah, 8, sons of Abdul Hakim, head moulana of Kaula Girls' High School, found a small can lying on the road and took it to their house at about 1:30 pm. Suddenly the can exploded which injured both the brothers.



Activists of the Sanmilita Sangram Parishad before a police cordon during the Secretariat gherao programme yesterday. — Star photo

Nobel prizes

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blocks, in the 1940s and 1950s.

The prize was awarded to Canadian Bertram N Brockhouse, of McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, and Clifford G Shull of the United States who works at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, Mass.

The researchers developed techniques of scattering neutrons as a way of looking closely at solids and liquids, an achievement that has applications in everything from ceramic superconductors to exhaust cleaning systems in vehicles. The Royal Swedish Academy said in a statement.

Malaysian entrepreneurs

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The Prime Minister said the Malaysian capital and the highly competitive labour force in Bangladesh can be combined for very profitable industrial ventures in Bangladesh.

Similarly, she said, Bangladeshi workers, engineers, doctors and other professionals would be able to substantially contribute to the economic development of Malaysia.

Underlining the need for reducing the growing trade imbalance between the two countries, she said it is a cause of concern for us while Malaysia is selling much more to Bangladesh than buying.

"As the business leaders of your country, you will agree with me that your initiatives in reducing this widening gap are of great importance. Our products are price competitive and of high quality. We would expect you to import more from Bangladesh," Begum Zia added.

She said the Malaysian businessmen would find Bangladeshi goods more profitable and find Bangladeshi products including jute goods, jute carpets, tea, fish, garments, ceramic items, China ware and leather goods specially price competitive.

The Prime Minister said her delegation is also requesting the Malaysian government to create better market access in Malaysian market for Bangladeshi goods.

Special envoy to the Prime Minister, M Morshed Khan, Executive Chairman of Board of Investment (BOI) M Mokammel Hoque, President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Latifur Rahman and President of NCCIM Ybhg Tan Sri Wan Sri Azmi Wan Hamzah, top businessmen, investors and entrepreneurs of Malaysia took part in the discussion.

The President of NCCIM said that the Malaysian investors were keen to invest in Bangladesh.

He, however, underlined the need for having investment without workers, militancy and political instability.

Malaysian entrepreneurs, said they were impressed at the new opportunities that Bangladesh now offers for investment and trade.

She also highlighted the strategic location of Bangladesh in the enormous market of South Asia, a market of one billion consumers and Bangladesh enjoys a special degree of acceptability in all South Asian countries, who have created a preferential trading area called SAPTA.

Formal talks

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policy his country would give priority to Bangladeshi workers as regards the employment of manpower from abroad.

Describing Bangladeshi workers as disciplined and hard-working, the Malaysian Prime Minister said they would prefer manpower from Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Prime Minister offered Malaysia trained and qualified professionals from Bangladesh. Malaysia is the second largest employer of Bangladeshi manpower after Saudi Arabia.

Besides skilled and unskilled manpower, Begum Zia said Bangladesh could provide a good number of doctors, engineers, nurses and members of other professions to Malaysia.

During the talks held at Perdana, the office of Malaysian Prime Minister, the Bangladesh Prime Minister was assisted by Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman, Labour and Manpower Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Special Envoy to the Prime Minister, Morshed Khan, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, ANM Eusuf, Additional Foreign Secretary (East) Moliuddin Ahmed, and Bangladesh High Commissioner in Malaysia Mahmood Alam.

The Malaysian delegation included Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi, Minister for International Trade and Industry Dato Seri Rafidah Aziz, Deputy Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Dato Abdul Halim 'Ali, Malaysian High Commissioner in Bangladesh Ahmed Fuzi Bin Haji Abdul Razak and Under Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Choo Siew Kioh.

The Malaysian side underlined the need for expanding cooperation between the two countries in the field of education and training and regular exchange between the BOI (Board of Investment, Bangladesh) and MIDA (Malaysian Industrial Development Agency) for building a stronger bond in trade and investment.

Begum Zia said Bangladesh could provide fiscal incentives to Malaysian investors who would also like to set up export-oriented industries in Bangladesh.

The Malaysian side requested Bangladesh to equal the level of import duty to that of soyabean and withdraw the ban on the import semi-solid palm oil.

The Bangladesh side said that they would consider the request.

The two Prime Ministers also agreed to further activate the joint committees of the National Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The two sides also agreed in principle to introduce regular flights of Malaysian airlines to Dhaka.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister said her country would extend cooperation to the institute of Islamic understanding at Malaysia to help project the correct image of Islam worldwide.

While discussing economic and environmental situation of Bangladesh, Prime Minister Begum Zia mentioned the problems Bangladesh is facing due to the Farakka barrage over the international river Ganga.

The formal talks over, Bangladesh and Malaysia signed three agreements to promote bilateral ties.

The two Prime Ministers exchanged the novel by Anwar Rihwan 'The Last Days of an Artist' that has been translated by the Bangla Academy into Bangla.

Yeltsin sacks finance minister

MOSCOW, Oct 12: President Boris Yeltsin appealed to his fellow-countrymen to stay calm today after firing his Acting Finance Minister and asking parliament to sack the Central Bank Chairman over the collapse of the rouble, reports Reuters.

Itar-Tass news agency quoted Yeltsin as telling a meeting of the Security Council that all essential measures would be taken and that the rouble's nosedive would "not lead to sharp price rises."

Yeltsin said a state investigation would be held into the causes of Tuesday's rouble fall. The unit lost 21.5 per cent of its value against the dollar, falling to 3.926 from 3.081 in a single session on the Moscow interbank currency exchange.

It recovered 5.1 per cent at today's session to 3.736.

The affair has caused intense political embarrassment to the government as well as undermining confidence in its economic programme.

Ivan Rybkin, chairman of Russia's state Duma, said the parliamentary lower house would take a formal vote of confidence in Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin's government on October 21.

The Midnight File

Plane ready to fly Cedras to exile

PORT AU PRINCE, Oct 12: US officials said charter planes were on the ground at Port Au-Prince Airport today ready to fly former Haitian military leader Lieutenant General Raoul Cedras to exile but negotiations were still continuing over his destination. "We are still negotiating that departure. The planes are on the ground but I can't give any timetable," said US embassy spokesman Stanley Schragar. He said Cedras would definitely leave "in the next day or two," before Saturday's scheduled return of exiled Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, reports Reuters.

ROK businessman shot dead in Algeria

TUNIS, Oct 12: In a brutal explosion of fresh violence in Algeria today, gunmen shot dead a South Korean businessman and a local politician and four car bombs exploded in the capital. One man was blown to bits as he flees one bomb which went off prematurely in the locality of Gardji, in Koba district on the heights of the capital, Algerian television said, reports Reuters.

Maj Halim now denies killing wife Rehana

By Court Correspondent

Abdul Halim, an army major now under suspension, has denied his involvement in the murder of his wife, Rehana Begum.

When produced before the Dhaka Magistrate Court yesterday, Halim requested the court not to take cognizance of his earlier confessional statement.

Rehana Begum was found murdered in Halim's official residence at Shaheed Latif Road of Dhaka Cantonment on August 22. It was then reported that Rehana was murdered by a group of intruders.

During police investigation, Abdul Halim made a statement before a city magistrate under section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code (Cr.P.C.) saying that he had murdered his wife as a sequel to a bitter conflict.

However, Halim yesterday told the court that he did not make the statement voluntarily. He said, he was forced by police to make the confessional statement. He also told the court that what he had stated about his relationship with his wife was also not true.

The defence-lawyers pleaded for bail of Abdul Halim, the prime-suspect in the murder yesterday, but the magistrate rejected the petition. The petition for withdrawal of the confessional statement will be examined later.

Two advocates, Mosharrar Hossain Kajol and Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan, appeared for Abdul Halim.

Malaysia lifts freeze on visas for Indians

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 12: Malaysia on Wednesday lifted a freeze on visas for Indians to visit Malaysia which was imposed after the outbreak of plague there last month, reports AP.

The Cabinet also decided at its weekly meeting that Malaysia Airlines would resume flights to India, which were suspended September 29.

MAS flies six times a week to Madras and twice a week to New Delhi. Flights by Air India and Indian Airlines flights to Malaysia were allowed to continue despite the plague scare.

Clash over fish gher

From Our Correspondent

KHULNA, Oct 12: At least 20 people were injured, four of them seriously, in a gunfight between rival groups over possession of a fish gher at Amvita, 10 km from the city. The gunfight which began at 3 am today continued till noon. One of the rival groups was reportedly led by a JCD leader.

Toll collections by Shantibahini increase

CHAGRACHHARI, Oct 12: Toll collection by the outlawed Shantibahini has increased in recent times while a ceasefire is in force in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), reports UNB.

Local leaders said members of Shantibahini, the armed cadre of the Parbatyatta Chattergama Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) demanding autonomy for the CHT, have been moving freely collecting tolls in the name of their movement.

Liquor seized

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 12: Anti-smuggling team of the Chittagong Sea Customs today raided a Chinese flag carrying vessel 'Nandu Jiang' and recovered foreign liquor and beer worth taka 8,70,000. Official sources said the raid was made after receiving a tip-off when the cargo vessel took berth at Chittagong port jetty. A departmental case has been filed.

Doc held by angry students, rescued after 6 hours

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Oct 12: A group of agitated students of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology here today took away a physician of the local Osmany Medical College Hospital following the death of a fellow student who was under treatment at the hospital.

The doctor was, however, rescued by police after about six hours.

Rukonuzzaman, a first year Honours student of the university was injured in a road accident on September 15 and had been under treatment at the hospital since then. He was operated upon this morning and died at about 1-30 PM.

A group of agitated students of the university then went to the private chamber of Idris Ali, consultant, orthopaedics and forcibly took him to the campus. They blamed him for 'wrong treatment'. The students also ransacked the private chambers of two other doctors.

On information, police went to the campus and rescued him at about 9 am.

A case has been lodged with Kotwali police by the director of the hospital. Police has also been deployed in the hospital premises.

Kuwait alert to defend independence

Kuwait has iterated that its people and armed forces are fully alert to defend its sovereignty and independence with the support of all friendly countries, reports UNB.

A statement issued by the Kuwaiti embassy in the city yesterday said that Iraq's threat to Kuwait and the concentration of its army on the border reflects "the spirit of aggression" and affects international and Gulf peace.

3 Ctg Airport staff sued

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 12: An airline passenger has filed a case with the Port Thana here accusing three Chittagong airport employees of stealing his briefcase. The briefcase reportedly contained work permit (NOC) of a Middle-East country, port police said.

The passenger, Kanchan Biswas, who returned from Muscat on October 3, lodged the case with the port thana on Tuesday alleging that the briefcase was stolen at the Chittagong airport while he was busy completing his baggage formalities. The passenger later tried to get back the briefcase and submitted a written complaint to the airport manager. But failing to get back his briefcase and NOC, he filed the case.

When contacted over telephone, the airport manager said, committee had been formed to enquire into the matter. The airport customs officials also said, they were informed of the theft case.

Lanka

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presidential election and will include senior government ministers and a possible one-to-one meeting between Tiger leader Velupillai Prabhakaran and Prime Minister Kumaratunga.

The two sides on Thursday are expected to discuss arrangements for future talks, a ceasefire, which the rebels want if the negotiations are to continue, and the problems of Jaffna residents.

"The fact that the Tigers are keen to discuss the people's problems mean that the ordinary man is calling the shots for once in the peace process," another analyst said.

For many years now, Jaffna residents haven't had electricity, running water or other basic amenities. Going to Jaffna and back is dangerous, with travellers having to cross a lagoon and risk being shot at by navy patrol boats or spotter planes.

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