

\$ 624m LCs for import of essentials opened

Letters of credit worth over 624 million US dollars for import of nine essential items, including rice, cement and fertilizer, were opened during first eight months of the current fiscal, reports UNB.

According to Bangladesh Bank data available yesterday, LCs worth 174,601,971 dollars were opened for importing a total of 764,593 metric tons of rice from July, 1994, to February 95.

Rice topped the list of the selected commodities, reflecting the huge domestic demand of the staple food that faced a production shortage at home due to drought-like situation during the last harvest.

It was followed by fertilizer which also has a serious demand during the current IRR-Boro cultivation period. LCs worth dollar 95,691,051 were opened for importing

1,174,539 tons of fertilizer during the eight-month period. LCs for importing 1,595,819 tons of cement, also facing a sudden price-hike in recent days, amounted to 90,022,947 dollars during the period.

LCs for the import of rice, fertilizer and cement accounted for some 58 per cent of the total LCs worth 624,747,180 dollars opened for the nine commodities.

Other commodities for which LCs opened are: 424,825 tons of wheat (dollar 82,237,157), 222,080 tons of BP Sheet (dollar 75,166,218), 210,466 tons of Sugar (dollar 66,195,786), 20,279 tons of milk powder (dollar 33,055,319), 22,830 tons of pulses (dollar 7,639,751) and 1,595 tons of chilly worth 136,980 dollars.

Nor'wester lashes dists

Bakalia slum area were also damaged in the nor'wester.

Local Met office recorded 18 mm rainfall in the port city. Two persons were killed and many others injured when a severe nor'wester hit parts of Louhajang thana in Munshiganj yesterday morning.

One person drowned in a boat capsized in the Padma due to the storm while another was killed as a nor'wester lashed some villages in the afternoon.

The season's first nor'wester also caused heavy damage to dwelling houses and standing crops.

Meanwhile, the capital and its adjoining areas experienced the first hailstorm of the season yesterday. The city dwellers, after a prolonged hot spell, took the afternoon shower accompanied by hail as a great relief.

A downpour temporarily inundated some of the city streets in Motijheel, Shantinagar, Kakrail, Bijoynagar, Purana Paltan, Khilgaon and some areas in the old city. A rainfall of 39 mm was recorded in the city.

Hasina at Ghatail rally

Awami League to condole the death of college student Atique who was killed in police firing on March 15 during the farmers' agitation for fertiliser at the thana headquarters.

The Awami League chief visited Atique's house at village Ghuni, on her way to the meeting venue. She walked about one kilometre on a kutcha road leading to the house and conveyed her sympathy to the bereaved mother of Atique.

Hasina told the meeting that the fertiliser crisis was the result of corruption and politicisation of the ruling BNP.

Farmers asked for fertiliser, but got bullet... this government has shed the bloods of farmers, workers and students, she said and demanded the trial of Atique's murder.

"We don't know whether we will get any justice from this government, or any trial of any killer," Hasina said accusing the government of blocking the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu.

She called upon the people to join the grand peasant rally in Dhaka on April 16 to intensify the agitation for the ouster of the BNP government.

On her way to Ghatail, the AL President also addressed several waistline gatherings at Gorai, Tangail sub terminal, Elenaga, Kalihati and Dubai.

Earlier, at the beginning of her road journey to Ghatail, Hasina visited some places of Tongi Purashava, including Baradewa, Mudafa, Sataish bazar, Khartail and Gazipura, and campaigned for the AL-backed candidate in the April 10 pourashava election.

proach to the problem of poverty in the region. The two prime ministers agreed that the success of poverty alleviation strategies in South Asia was crucial for the success of the efforts to protect and preserve environment and to maintain ecological balance in the region.

They, the communique said, agreed on the relevance of the Copenhagen declaration to the national and regional efforts to combat poverty in South Asia.

The leaders also recalled the importance of Copenhagen objectives of poverty alleviation in developing countries through internal measures supported by assistance from the developed countries.

In this regard, the communique said, they stressed the importance of special measures in favour of the least developed countries including the already agreed principle of granting one per cent of their GDP by developed countries to the LDCs.

The two prime ministers agreed that in the context of continuing economic liberalisation, the private sector had an important role to play in the economic cooperation between the two countries.

They also agreed that the private sector needed to be further encouraged to exchange visits and hold discussions to identify new areas of cooperation and trade.

The two leaders, it said, agreed to implement the decisions of the eight meeting of

Astami Snan ends

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Apr 8: The traditional astami snan, the holy bath of the Hindu community, at Langalbandh, about 20 km from the capital, ended tonight amid due solemnity.

Thousands of Hindu devotees from across the country as well as from India and Nepal took holy dip seeking divine blessings.

For thousands of years, Hindu devotees have been taking this bath at this place on the bank of the Old Brahmaputra under Narayanganj district.

The devotees took baths reciting mantras at the thirteen ghats along the one kilometre bank of the river.

The auspicious time for bathing began at 7:07 pm yesterday and ended at 8:40 pm today.

4 killed, 25 hurt in road accidents

By Staff Correspondent

Four persons were killed and at least 25 others injured in two road accidents yesterday.

Our Narayanganj correspondent says, two persons died on the spot when a bus collided head-on with a Dhaka-bound truck at Mugrapara under Sonargaon thana yesterday morning.

At least 20 passengers of the bus were injured.

The bus skidded off the road and fell on a nine feet down low land.

One of the deceased was identified as Gobinda Das, 20. The other victim was an unknown male in his early twenties.

The injured persons were admitted to different hospitals in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

Meanwhile, our correspondent at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) added that two persons were killed when a bus overturned near the Kanchpur bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway Friday night.

Commerce and Information Minister M Shamsul Islam, while inaugurating the Commerce Secretary level meeting, underlined the need for developing an integrated customs system in import and export trade to increase economic and trade cooperation among SAARC countries.

He said economic cooperation among the SAARC countries could be further expanded by removing the customs and other hindrances in the trade sector.

The minister reiterated the determination of the government of Bangladesh in promoting SAARC cooperation. He said the government was pledge-bound to consolidate a stable economic system in this area through free market policy.

Shamsul Islam referred to the positive results of regional economic and trade bodies in other parts of the world and said the SAPTA has no alternative to ensuring an honourable share for the region in world trade.

The biggest SAARC member country will have to play a leading role to be a role-model in the region," said a leading Nepalese diplomat in Kathmandu yesterday.

Adhikari

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benefits for all the three countries, experts feel.

The water sharing issue is likely to be broached by Prime Minister Man Mohan Adhikari when he goes to New Delhi on April 10 for a five-day visit.

New Delhi's clearance for transit facilities offered by Bangladesh for Nepalese exports will also be on the agenda.

Nepal, on its part, seems to be agreeable to renewing the Treaty of Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1950 with India with some amendments.

Informed observers in both Dhaka and Kathmandu feel that New Delhi will be able to generate both goodwill and economic benefits if it positively responds to Nepal's transit problem and Dhaka's need for water on priority basis.

The Prime Minister of Bangladesh thanked her Nepalese counterpart, His Majesty's government and people of Nepal for the warm welcome and hospitality extended to her and members of her delegation.

The communique said Prime Minister Adhikari accepted with thanks the kind invitation extended to him by Prime Minister Begum Zia to visit Bangladesh at a mutually convenient date.

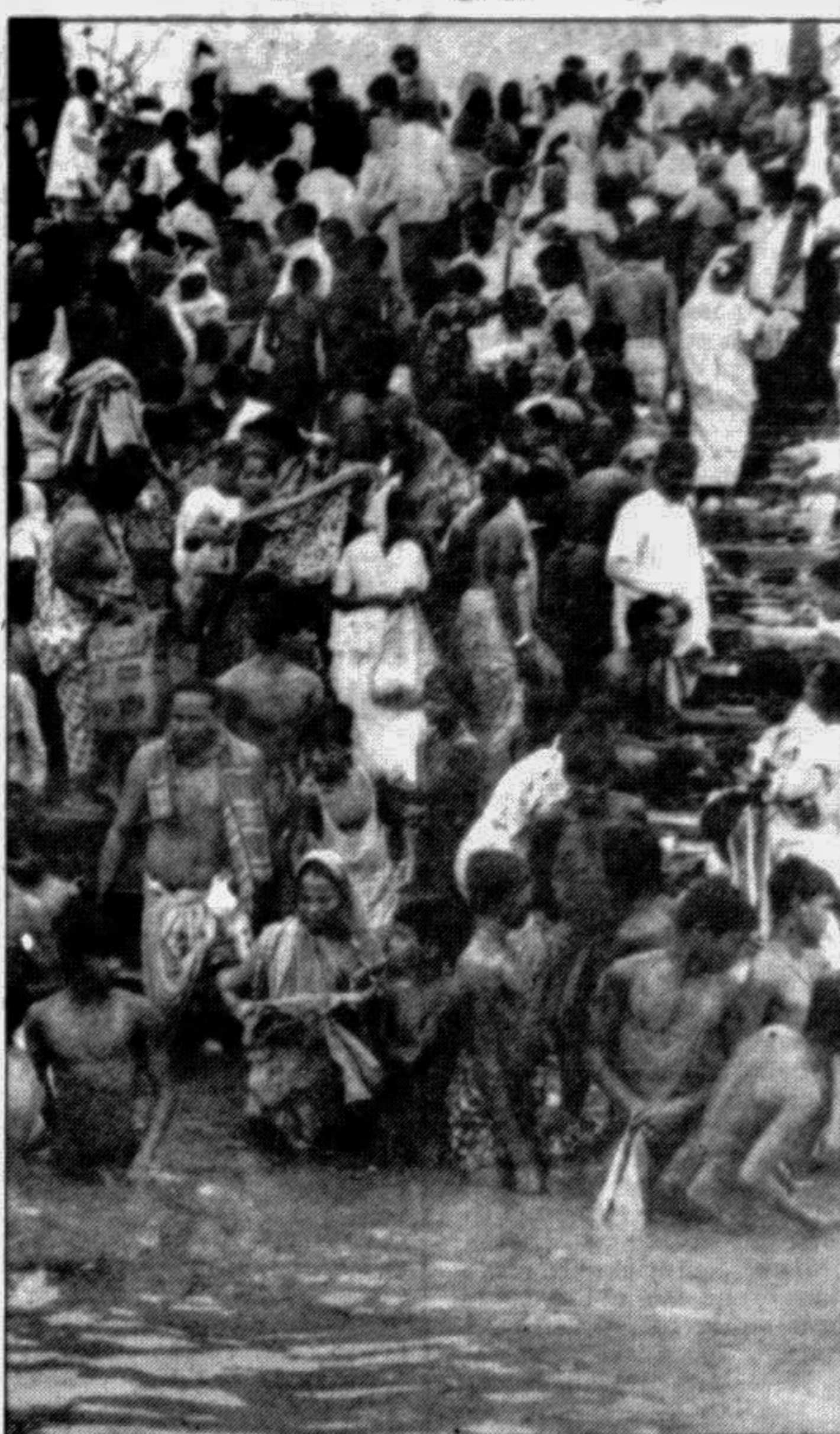
It said the Bangladesh Prime Minister and the members of her delegation were accorded a warm welcome on their arrival in Kathmandu.

MOUs with two more US companies to generate power

Bangladesh yesterday signed memorandum of understandings (MOUs) with two more US companies for the generation of electricity in the private sector, reports BSS.

The two companies, Solar International and Occidental Ventures Corporation, will set up two power stations with a capacity of generating 300 MW each. About 550 million US dollars (2200 crore taka) will be invested in these two projects, according to an official handout.

Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources signed the two agreements with the representatives of the two companies separately.



Believers taking a dip in the old Brahmaputra at Langalbandh in Narayanganj during Astami Snan, a religious festival of the Hindu community. — Star photo

SAARC body meets to promote economic ties

The two-day fifth meeting of the SAARC Committee on Economic Cooperation (CEC) to promote economic cooperation and relations among the SAARC member countries began in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

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The Aga Khan obtains divorce

The Aga Khan, head of the Ismaelian sect which numbers 15 million faithfuls worldwide, has obtained the divorce which he requested last September, informed sources in the London Ismaelian community said Friday, reports AFP.

The divorce was pronounced March 23 by a Swiss court, the sources said, and provided for the division of the Aga Khan's fortune totalling 20 million pounds (32 million dollars) and 32 million pounds (48 million dollars) in jewellery.

The Aga Khan asked his lawyers September 30 to start divorce proceedings against his wife the Begum Salima Aga, the former British model Sally Crooker-pool, whom he married in 1969.

The floating hospital would move from one place to another in the country

Earlier, during a meeting with the Nobel laureate missionary at her Calcutta residence on March 1, District Governor of Rotary International District 3280 Rtn M Mosharraf Hossain invited her to visit Bangladesh.

Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday that they were contacting the offices of the President and the Prime Minister to make appointments for Mother Teresa with them.

Mosharraf said that floating hospital setup on a 110-foot barge under the joint auspices of Rotary France and Rotary Bangladesh is funded by the Rotary Foundation.

The floating hospital would move from one place to another in the country

Indian SC stalls construction of power plant near Taj Mahal

NEW DELHI, Apr 8: India's Supreme Court has stalled the construction of a proposed thermal power plant close to the Taj Mahal because of fears it could add to the pollution damaging the 17th century marble mausoleum, reports Reuter.

The Observer newspaper said the Supreme Court had issued notices on Friday to the government of the neighbouring Rajasthan state the Petroleum Ministry, the Environment Ministry and the Pollution Control Board, questioning the project.

It quoted environmentalist lawyer Mahesh Chander Mehta, who petitioned the court against the multi-million dollar project, as saying pollution from the proposed Dhoplur Power Station would also harm a nearby crocodile farm.

The Supreme Court last year ordered the closure of scores of factories near the Taj Mahal in an effort to stave off what environmentalists say is its imminent destruction.

Several government committees have probed various aspects of the pollution affecting the Taj Mahal.

World Bank

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overcome the delays in importing and exporting of goods. According to the findings, Customs take 12 days, on an average, to release imported inputs of the exporters at the port and airport. Customs also take nine days, with a maximum 75 days, to give clearance to an export shipment.

However, majority respondents (57 per cent), specially the exporters, thought that the business climate was more favourable now than what it was five years back. Also 52 per cent said that day-to-day constraints faced in business activities have decreased.

Commenting on the survey, the World Bank memorandum, to be presented at the Aid Club meeting in Paris later this month, says that some government agencies have shown slower progress in adopting to the government's policy of economic liberalization.

The bank insists that the government should further improve institutionalised mechanisms for formal consultations with the private sector to resolve major bureaucratic impediments to their daily activities.

On EPB and BOI, the World Bank memo says notwithstanding recent improvements, they still remain ineffective in their promotional activities.

Hartal today

Today's hartal will be followed by a nation-wide day-long hartal tomorrow, while the Srani Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP), an umbrella body of 18 labour organisations, has called a 48-hour strike from Tuesday.

On the other hand, the Left Democratic Front (LDF), an alliance of eight left-leaning political parties, has called a day-long hartal throughout the country on Tuesday, coinciding with the first day shutdown programme of the SKOP.

In support of today's hartal, the Awami League brought out a torch procession in the city, while the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat also brought out separate processions.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina in a statement yesterday called upon the people to make today's and tomorrow's hartals a success.

She also urged the people to remain alert against the government's "conspiracy to confuse the people" about the opposition's on-going agitation. She called for continuing the agitation until the fall of the government.

The opposition will organise peasants-workers rallies in the city on April 16.

Mother Teresa

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ception to be accorded to her by Rotary Bangladesh on April 20.

Mother Teresa, who championed the cause of humanity throughout her life, is also scheduled to visit the Missionary of Charity Home in Sylhet, one of the 17 such homes run by her organisation in Bangladesh.

Earlier, during a meeting with the Nobel laureate missionary at her Calcutta residence on March 1, District Governor of Rotary International District 3280 Rtn M Mosharraf Hossain invited her to visit Bangladesh.

Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday that they were contacting the offices of the President and the Prime Minister to make appointments for Mother Teresa with them.

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The floating hospital would move from one place to another in the country

The Midnight File

Foreign diplomats tour Kabul

KABUL, Apr 8: The United Nations on Saturday took diplomats from several countries on a tour of the war-ravaged capital in an attempt to raise emergency funds to help rebuild Kabul. Diplomats from the US, Denmark, Britain, Norway, Sweden, the Netherlands, Japan and the European Community, were shown a selection of aid projects and visited the worst hit parts of the capital, reports AP.

Benazir offers troops for Bosnia

WASHINGTON, Apr 8: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has offered "thousands" of Pakistani troops for Bosnia if the US decides to give arms to the Bosnian Muslims and the Europeans withdraw their troops from Bosnia as a result, according to US media reports. Bhutto made the offer to Senator Bob Dole while praising his efforts to persuade the US to break the UN embargo and arm the Bosnian Muslims, reports PTI.

22 more killed in Kashmir violence

SRINAGAR, Apr 8: In renewed gunbattles between soldiers and separatist guerrillas in strife-torn Kashmir, 22 people were killed on Saturday, a government official said, reports AP.

The fighting came after nearly two months of relative calm in the state and appeared to be linked to the federal government's plan to hold state legislature elections soon in Kashmir, the only Muslim majority state in the country.

More than 11,000 people have been killed in five years of fighting between Indian government soldiers and the guerrillas, who want independence in the country's only Muslim-majority state.

The federal government dismissed the state government several years ago, which began the rise of the Muslim insurrection.

On Saturday, soldiers searching for separatists in a village near the border with Pakistan faced a volley of gunshots from rebels hiding in homes, the government spokesman said.

The demonstrators demanded security of the female students on the campus.

The JU authorities have served the student concerned with a showcause notice.

Security of JU female students demanded

Female students of the Jahangirnagar University yesterday held a demonstration demanding exemplary punishment to a student who reportedly tried to abduct a girl student at gun point recently.

The demonstrators demanded security of the female students on the campus.

The JU authorities have served the student concerned with a showcause notice.

Rice production shortfall

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reduced as indicated by the agricultural experts," it added. Mentioning the average retail prices of urea from March 1 to 15, it pointed out that in Chittagong the price was Tk 310 to 360 per 50 kg bag, in Comilla Tk 329 to 425, in Dhaka Tk 190-363, Myemensingh Tk 340-392, Jamalpur Tk 336-359, Rajshahi Tk 380, Dinajpur Tk 365, Pabna Tk 352-414, Khulna Tk 377 and in Barisal Tk 310-323. The factory price for per 50 kg bag was Tk 188 and the maximum retail price was set at Tk 230.

According to a BCIC estimate on April 2, the fertiliser factories have kept pending private dealers' orders for delivery of over three lakh tonnes of urea worth Tk 112 crore from July till this month.

But during July-February of this fiscal, the BCIC exported 4.34 lakh tonnes of urea as against only 2.98 lakh tonnes during the corresponding period of the previous fiscal since the international price of fertiliser had gone up sharply.

The IFDC said that the BCIC netted US dollars 100 or Tk 4000 per tonne for their sales in the international market. By exporting an excess of 1.36 lakh tonnes of urea, the BCIC fetched home over 13 million dollars as net profit.

However, the IFDC pointed out, "Closer inspection of the possible effects of having a possible one million tonne shortfall in rice production might also cause serious doubts about the soundness of the (BCIC's) decision (to export). It noted the possible costs of importing rice at a price of dollars 250 per tonne would be 250 million dollars.

The basis of estimating the loss of rice production is one kg urea provided 7.5 kg yield extra.

The IFDC bulletin further said that the BCIC factories sold 107,823 tonnes of urea through the DCs and dealers in the first fortnight of March. The supply of urea during the third and fourth weeks of March was expected to have gone down by 10000-12000 tonnes as two urea factories — the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser factory and the Jamuna Fertiliser factory — was shut down for unscheduled mechanical problems, it said.

Body to fix terms of references for audit firms

Finance Minister M. Saifur Rahman said here yesterday that the auditors could play an important role in establishing discipline in financial institutions and banks, reports BSS.

The finance minister was exchanging views with the representatives of various audit firms engaged in bank auditing at the Finance Ministry's conference hall. State Minister for Finance Advocate M Mujibur Rahman, former Deputy Prime Minister Jamaluddin Ahmed and Secretary, banking division ATM Shamsul Huda were present in the meeting.

The meeting constituted a ten-member committee on parameter for reporting criteria" headed by the secretary, Banking Division, which will fix terms of references for the audit firms to facilitate their functions. The 51 newly appointed audit firms will go to the field for bank auditing after the terms of references are fixed by the committee.

He described the auditors as watchdogs in a free market economy and said proper monitoring and reporting by the auditors were vitally important to find out the lapses and shortcomings of various institutions like banks and remove them.

DU to celebrate platinum jubilee by June 30

By DU Correspondent

The Dhaka University authorities are planning to celebrate the university's platinum jubilee by June 30.

This was disclosed by Vice-Chancellor Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, while addressing as chief guest the annual grand assembly and Eid reunion programme of the DU Alumni Association on Friday.

The Dhaka University enters 75th year on July 1 this year.

He sought cooperation of all quarters, particularly the alumni association, to make the platinum jubilee programme a success.

Presided over by association president National Professor Dr M Innas Ali, the grand assembly was held at the auditorium of the Teacher-Student Centre (TSC).

4 All Party leaders held in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 8: Police arrested four leaders of the local All Party Committee for Resisting Killers and Collaborators of 1971 early this morning on charge of arsoning the bike of the officer-in-charge of sadar thana, reports UNB.

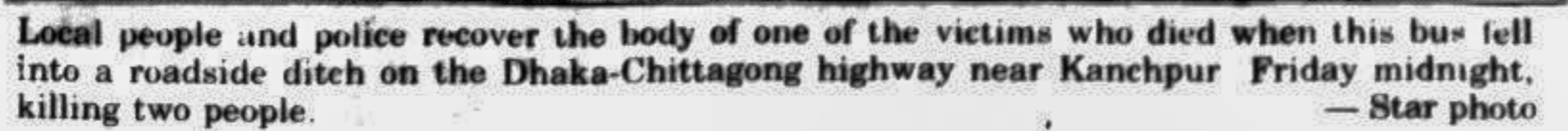
The arrested Mohammad Arju of the Chhatra Dal, Mohammad Zinnah of the Jubo Dal, Jahangir Alam of the Awami League and the local correspondent of the Bhorer Kagoj Mohammad Helaluddin were later released on bail.

Police said the activists during a procession in the town against Golan Azam on April 5 set fire to the bike.

The OC was standing with his police force near Dangapatti square in the town when the incident took place. The OC later filed a case in this connection.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Local people and police recover the body of one of the victims who died when this bus fell into a roadside ditch on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway near Kanchpur Friday night, killing two people. — Star photo