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ANNOUNCEMENT
'Save Dhaka' Campaign

The Daily Star will launch a 'Save Dhaka Campaign' beginning tomorrow, April 23, as part of our Agenda '95. The campaign will focus on different aspects of the capital which is seized with numerous problems affecting daily life.

Among the broad themes to be covered are problems of Urbanisation and Housing, Traffic and Transport, Civic Amenities, Health, Pollution and lack of recreation facilities.

Stories on different aspects will be printed on Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays. Our aim would be to highlight some of the problems faced by the city dwellers. On the days in-between, except Fridays, pictures or photo reports depicting problems of living in Dhaka would be featured. We look forward to readers' response and solicit their contributions and suggestions.

— Editor

AL to discuss proposal for dialogue today

By Staff Correspondent

In view of fresh offer from Prime Minister and BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia for dialogue at a party conference in Chittagong Tuesday.

The AL chief told a section of diplomats in the city Thursday that she was ready for a 'peaceful dialogue' with the ruling party for resolving the political impasse.

Party MPs will meet separately tomorrow, ahead of the 19th session of parliament beginning Monday.

The MPs of the three major opposition parties, who had resigned en masse, planned to stage a sit-in near the Speaker's office Monday to protest the 'continuity of the half-empty Parliament.'

The two other parties — the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami — also convened separate meetings of their MPs.

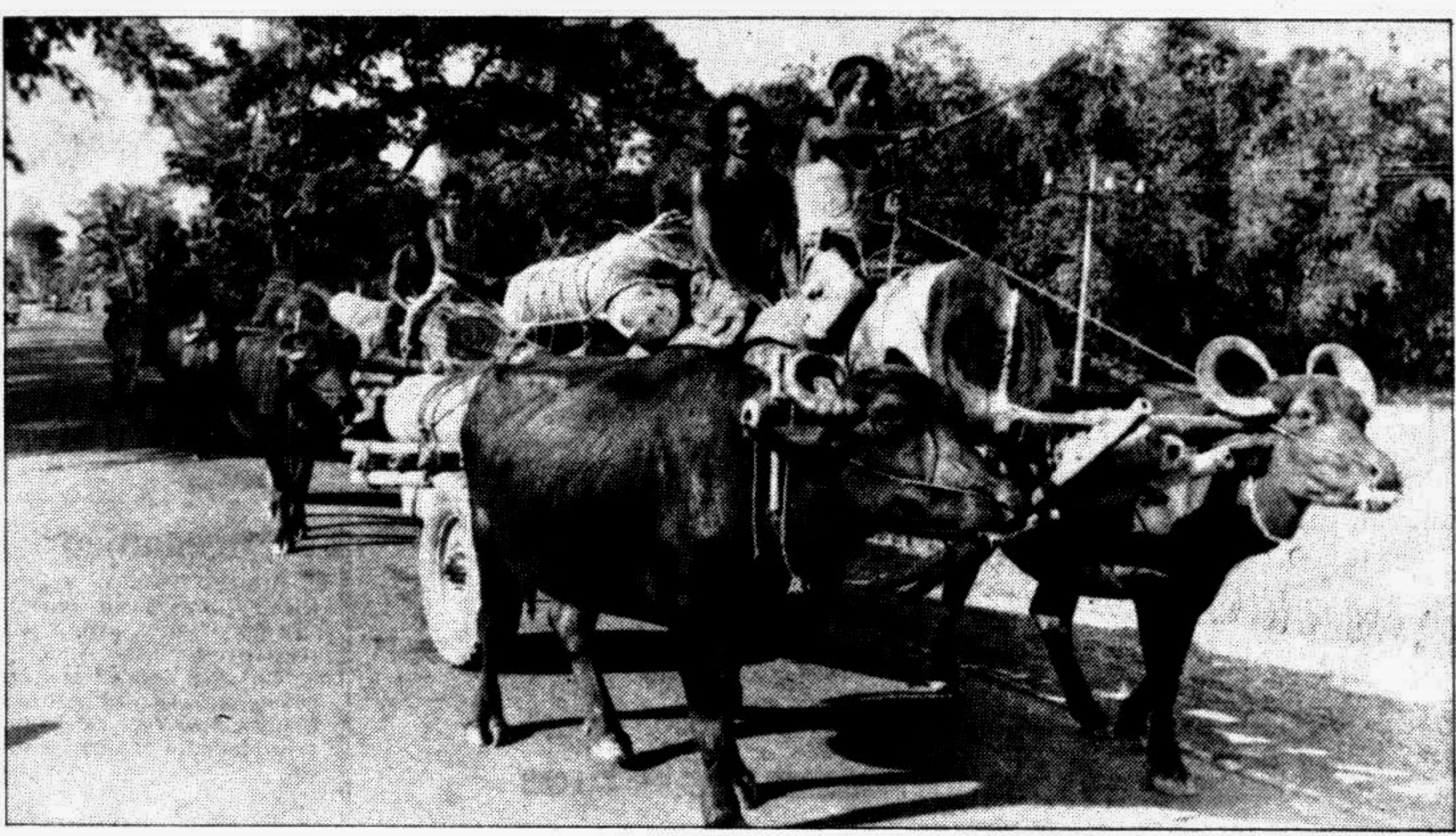
The meeting was convened in the central working committee (CWC) of the Awami League today to discuss the ruling party's latest proposal for a dialogue and the AL's stance if such a dialogue takes place.

"The committee members would discuss in detail what will be the AL's stance if a dialogue takes place for resolving the present political impasse," a member of the CWC told The Daily Star last night.

Other issues like the next general elections will also come up for discussion at the meeting, he said.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina will chair the meeting of the 54-member highest policy-making body of the party, scheduled to begin at 10 am at the central office of the party at Bangabandhu Avenue.

The meeting was convened



The water buffalo continues to be the major beast of burden in the rural areas. This picture was taken in Kurigram.—Star photo

BNP respectful to other parties, says Khaleda

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday said the BNP is respectful to other political parties and wants to work with them for the development of the country as "it believes in multi-party democracy," reports UNB.

"If we want to develop our country, if we want to resolve national problems, we must work unitedly," she said.

Begum Zia was addressing the Mayor and Ward Commissioners of the Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) when they called on her at the Prime Minister's 30 Hare Road office last night.

She said, "The country will achieve success in every sector if we all work together. There is no alternative to unity to build up the country."

The Prime Minister said her government believes in

Teresa lays foundation of home for the aged

GAZIPUR, Apr 21: Mother Teresa laid the foundation of a home for the aged and the children at a village in the district, reports UNB.

"Live together in the family, pray for each other and love each other," said the Nobel laureate, unveiling the plaque of the rehabilitation centre at Bishwa Kuribari, about 45 kilometres from Dhaka.

The 85-year-old Mother Teresa, who devoted her life in the service of distressed humanity, said "we have all been created to love and to be loved" and urged all to serve the poor, the blind, the handicapped and the helpless with joy.

"Where there is love, there must be peace and unity," said the Yugoslavian-born missionary.

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Oklahoma blast toll rises to 57

OKLAHOMA CITY, Apr 21: The death toll in the car bomb attack on a federal government building here rose to at least 57 on Thursday, according to a senior fire official, reports AFP.

The blast, which decimated the building, injured at least 432, 72 of the injured had to be hospitalised. Jon Hansen, the city's Assistant Fire Chief, said that 150 more were still unaccounted for.

Hansen said that the official death toll stood at 57 — the number of bodies brought out of the building. He added that

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Drought hit all 156 gardens Tea production may decline by 20 pc

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Apr 21: Tea production faced a fresh setback as drought hit hard most of the gardens in recent months.

Tea officials and growers fear a huge crop loss, if the draught which began in October last year continues up to next month of this year.

Officials of the state-owned Bangladesh Tea Board said, "We are yet to make assessment of crop loss due to drought which hit all 156 tea gardens. We are trying hard to boost production and improve quality to survive in the world market."

The growers and officials said tea leaves turned red in most of the gardens in Sylhet, Chittagong and other places.

President of Chittagong chapter of the Tea Growers' Association Nasir Uddin said that the production may decline by 20 per cent this year due to the drought.

"But the production may go down further if the water crisis persists. Over 20 per cent tea plants were already damaged," Nasir added.

"Recently we have appealed to the Tea Board for digging water reservoirs and providing sufficient irrigation facilities to overcome the water crisis," he said.

A senior official of a leading

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Armed men torch 100 huts, injure 200 in Natore

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Apr 21: At least 200 people were injured when armed youths indiscriminately fired on the inhabitants of Abdulpur and Gosaipur villages under Lalpur thana in Natore district today, eyewitnesses said.

The attackers also set fire to about 100 kutcha houses and looted many more. The villagers fled their houses as the youths started their operation at about 9 am.

Of the injured, four were rushed to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital in critical condition and 18 were admitted to the Bagatpara Health Complex. Most of them received bullet injuries.

Police rushed to the spot around noon and recovered 17

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NEWS BRIEFS

Urs of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) ends
 From Staff Correspondent
 SYLHET, Apr 21: The annual Urs of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) concluded here this morning amidst great religious fervour. The 675th Urs commemorating the death anniversary of Shahjalal began at the shrine here Wednesday midnight through placing Gilaf in the majar.

NPT: Iran opposes indefinite extension
 UNITED NATIONS, Apr 21: Iran today opposed the West's drive for indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), supporting a series of extensions to allow for strengthening the treaty, reports AFP.

622 more Rohingyas return home
 COX'S BAZAR, Apr 21: As many as 121 families of 622 Myanmar Rohingyas refugees returned to their homeland today. With this, the number of repatriated Rohingyas stood at 1,88,888, officials said. They said 62,003 more Rohingyas are awaiting their repatriation in 12 refugee camps here, reports UNB.

US enraged, may ask for explanation Allowing Libyan pilgrims can't be a political issue: Riyadh

RIYADH, Apr 21: The Saudi government defended itself today after allowing a Libyan plane taking pilgrims to Makkah to land in violation of a UN embargo, reports AFP.

Government officials, facing US State Department demands for an explanation of why they authorised the plane to fly to Jeddah on Wednesday, said they regarded the question as a religious matter and not a political issue.

Prince Ahmad Ibn Abdel Aziz, the Deputy Interior Minister, did not respond directly to the criticism but said: "Saudi Arabia prevents no Muslim from going to Makkah to perform the rites."

"We welcome all of the faithful on the pilgrimage on condition that they have entry visas and conform to the rules," he said in an interview with the newspaper Ash-Sharq al-Awsat.

Saudi King Fahd is the custodian of Islam's holiest sites in Makkah and Medina, near the Red Sea city of Jeddah in the west of the country.

Privately, senior officials in Riyadh said the government decided to separate politics and religious affairs after learning from the experience of hosting Iranian pilgrims who had held political rallies in Makkah.

The official Saudi press agency issued its customary warning to visitors on Thursday to avoid engaging in political activity during the annual pilgrimage known as the Hajj.

But the Libyan flight, which western diplomats said marked a triumph for Libyan leader Moamer Gaddafi's policy of forcing Arab neighbours into helping him breach the sanctions, was a religious matter, Saudi officials insisted.

"We don't ask every pilgrim how he got here," said one senior official.

Under the terms of the UN embargo, imposed in April 1992 after Libya refused to extradite two suspects wanted for the 1988 Lockerbie plane bombing, Saudi Arabia should have stopped the Libyan plane entering or leaving its airspace.

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Japan-style gas panic

SEOUL, Apr 21: Hundreds of South Korean police patrolled the Seoul subway system today as posters sprang up throughout the city alerting the people to a Japan-style poison gas attack, reports AFP.

The red, white and blue posters warned subway riders to avoid touching or accidentally kicking stray containers found in the subway, and, in case of strange smells, to cover their faces and head for the nearest exit.

Police leaflets said the alert had been triggered by the deadly March 20 sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system and the subsequent non-lethal attack in Yokohama this week. Twelve died in the Tokyo attack.

Newspapers quoted police spokesman as saying security at the city's airport and major public buildings had been simultaneously stepped up.

Garments sector employs no child labour: BGMEA

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) said yesterday that child workers in Bangladesh garments industries had been almost eliminated and there has been no further employment of child labour.

It also requested the Child Labour Coalition of the US to refrain from negative propaganda about Bangladeshi garments shipped to the US since not a single piece exported there is the handwork of child labour.

In a press statement, the BGMEA said its attention was drawn to a news item in a section of the press reporting that the Chairman, Child Labour Coalition, USA has alleged failure of the BGMEA to sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the 'School-e-Jai' programme for phased elimination of child labour within specific time limit.

Redwan Ahmed, the President of BGMEA, expressed his total dismay and surprise at

Six die in separate incidents

By DMCH Correspondent

At least five persons, including a minor boy, were killed, one reportedly committed suicide and another 20 persons were injured in separate incidents in the city and Narayanganj yesterday and Thursday.

Two employees of the Hardest Garments were killed and 20 others injured when a speeding truck knocked their bus at Bolta, Narayanganj yesterday.

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Another Lalbagh gas explosion victim dies

By DMCH Correspondent

Another victim of the gas pipeline explosion at Lalbagh in the city Sunday died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday, raising the death toll in the accident to two.

Mohammad Bulbul Ahmed, 30, succumbed to his burn injuries yesterday morning.

Father of two children, Bulbul was resident of Nur Fatah Lane of Lalbagh. He was a trader.

The other victim, who died Wednesday, was Abdul Kader, 15, a hotel boy.

DMCH sources said the condition of four others were critical.

At least 15 persons were seriously injured in the explosion.

Share price situation 'stagnant'

By Sharier Khan

Although all share price index at the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE) has climbed up by nearly 12 points during the last two weeks after a prolonged bearish trend, market operators consider the present situation "stagnant."

"Rise of the index does not necessarily mean that the market has improved, rather, it is undergoing a correction process," said a market operator, terming the rise of index a "respite."

He further forecast that the market would continue to decline since it had been affected by the political impasse in the country.

An authoritative source in the DSE noted that the market strength had also decreased in the recent months, after the introduction of one-year lock-in period which was disliked by the foreign investors. The foreign investors continued to sell shares in large numbers at a lower yet profitable price. They are not keen about buying, said the source.

The DSE index closed at 775.00 Thursday last, climbing up from 763.06 on April 6.

However, the index had climbed up to 783.59 Monday last but then slowly came down by eight points.

The market capitalisation increased by Tk 66 crore in two weeks. At the closing of the week Thursday last, most of the issues traded incurred losses, contrary to the trend prevailing for most of the days in the last two weeks, which lost three working days due to hartal and siege programmes of different political parties and labour organisations.

In three weeks till April 6, the index fell by 70 points or around 8 per cent, while the improvement in the last two weeks was around 1.5 per cent.

The total market capitalisation stood at Tk 42.80 billion at the closing of the week from Tk 42.14 billion two weeks ago.

A total of 9 lakh 16 thousand 930 shares and debentures worth Tk 16 crore 64 lakh were traded during the two weeks against 4 lakh 93 thousand 717 shares and debentures worth Tk 7 crore 62 lakh 54 thousand two weeks ago.

"Again, I do not consider these a bullish sign. In my opinion, the market seems to share a sense of uncertainty about the politics and economy of the country. Many investors think the GDP of the country would be lower in the coming fiscal and the stock market would continue to reflect their thoughts," market operator said.

Prices of most shares traded deviated by a small percentage and market operators consider this a sign of stagnation.

The volume leader in the two weeks was Beximco Synthetics which sold over one lakh shares at a stable price.

Confident Cement was the next volume leader in the last two weeks, having sold 77200 shares. On Tuesday last alone, it sold 42700 shares. Two weeks ago its share price was around Tk 181 while it sold at Tk 200 Thursday last.

Ashraf Textiles sold 74300 shares in total in the two weeks at a reasonably stable price.

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India successfully test fires "Akash"

NEW DELHI, Apr 21: India successfully test fired its surface-to-air medium-range missile "Akash" today from its test range in the eastern state of Orissa, the Press Trust of India (PTI) said, reports Reuters.

This was the seventh test fire of the locally developed missile, the news agency said, quoting a Defence Ministry spokesman.

"The flight trial was fully successful and met the mission requirements set for the trial," the spokesman told PTI.

The spokesman said the trial was aimed at establishing the reliability of the integrated "ramjet" propulsion system.

Changes in export, import procedures

Star Report

The government has made some changes in the procedures of import and export through different check posts on the land border with India and Myanmar due to shortage of skilled manpower, official sources said.

The changes, however, would not be applicable to trade through two important customs stations — Benapole and Tamabil — which are adequately manned.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) in a notification recently, said an importer will have to submit a pre-shipment inspection certificate in respect of price, quantity and quality of the items.

The new procedure will not be applicable to those imports for which letter of credit (LC) has already been opened by April 10.

The notification warned that any import without the said certificate would be treated as irregular import and actions would be taken in accordance with law.

The existing procedure will, however, continue to apply for imports and exports through the land customs stations of Benapole and Tamabil.

The exports of all goods through any land customs stations and imports of bovine animal, fresh fruits, rice, wheat, seeds, plants, fish and cement will not come under the new procedure.

The new procedure will be applicable to all other goods imported through any land customs station other than Benapole and Tamabil.

When contacted, the chairman of the NBR said that the decision to impose restrictions came as a result of shortage of skilled manpower.

"We need specialised workforce to handle imports of different technical items," said the chairman. "Until now importers have been using any border post for import."

This caused enormous problems since specialised manpower cannot be made available everywhere, he said.

Malaria claims 36 in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Apr 21: Malaria has claimed thirty-six lives and affected more than two thousand people in three thanas of the district in the last two weeks.

Of the total deaths, 15 died in Gowainghat, 15 in Jaintapur and five in Companyganj thana.

Besides, acute scarcity of medicine in thana health complexes made the situation serious.

The civil surgeon told this correspondent that the situation was under control and put the death figure at 15.

Four medical teams have been working here and necessary medicine would be available soon, the civil surgeon hopes.