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Fire at gasfield Cabinet takes stock of latest situation

The cabinet yesterday took stock of the latest situation of the blaze that broke out at the Magurchhara gas field in Moulvibazar district, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presided over the cabinet meeting held in the Sangsad Bhaban in the afternoon.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Mohammad Noor Uddin Khan, who visited the spot, told the cabinet that urgent steps had been taken to combat the fire, ignited by a gas well explosion late Saturday night.

2 alleged child traffickers beaten to death in Joydevpur

GAZIPUR, June 16: Two people, including a woman, were beaten to death and two others injured at Chapulia in Joydevpur thana today, reports UNB.

Police said the incident occurred when a group of people were passing by Chapulia, near Gazipur Ordinance Factory, in three scooters at about 11:30 am.

Some local people present there at that time chased the scooters and caught four people along with two scooters, suspecting them either child or cat-

Biman fare in domestic routes up by 15 pc

Fare of Bangladesh Biman in the domestic routes has been raised by 15 per cent from March 15, State Minister for Civil Aviation Dr. Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir said in parliament yesterday, reports UNB.

Replying to M. Mashur Rahman of BNP, he said the fare was raised due to operational loss in the domestic routes caused by increased expenditure for fuel and other operational expenses.

Sayed's election SC rejects leave petition against HC stay order

The full bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday refused to grant the leave petition preferred by Shudhanshu Shekhar Halder against ad-interim stay order of High Court on the judgement of Pirojpur-1 constituency, reports BSS.

The Appellate Division comprising Chief Justice A T M Afzal, Justice Mustafa Kamal, Justice Latifur Rahman, Justice Mohammad Abdur Rouf and Justice Bimalendu Bikash Roy Chowdhury passed the order after hearing both the petitioners.

3 Shibir activists held in Rajshahi

RAJSHAHI, June 16: Three activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir were arrested today in connection with the April 25 violence on the Rajshahi University campus, reports UNB.

The arrested were identified as Joyal Abedin, AGS of Islami Chhatra Shibir RU unit, Aminur Rahman, a student of Shah Makhdom College and Shaifur Rahman, a 2nd year student of Rajshahi Law College.

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Flames remain steady, fire fighting team arrives



The flame in the Magurchhara gasfield in Moulvibazar. The photo was taken at 8-45 am yesterday from a distance of about 100 yards. —Star photo by Iqbal Siddiqui

Star Report

The huge fire in Magurchhara gasfield in Moulvibazar is still out of control but the flame remained steady for the second consecutive day yesterday, according to reports reaching here till last night.

A fire fighting team from Alert Disaster Company (Pvt) Ltd of Singapore arrived Dhaka last night, official sources said. Another team from Houston US, is expected to arrive today. The teams will visit the spot this evening.

Experts told our staff photographer during a visit to the spot that the flame which had leaped upto 500 feet initially, came down to a height of 150 to 250 feet yesterday.

"This has happened because the hole of the well has now become a crater and gas is coming out through an expanded area," said an expert.

The heat of the fire can be felt from a distance of one kilometre and at night, the flames illuminate an area of at least five kilometres. The flame is visible from Moulvibazar town, 26 kms away from the gas field, our staff photographer said.

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Fire won't affect gas reserve: Noor Uddin

By Staff Correspondent

The massive fire in the Magurchhara gas field in Moulvibazar has caused no loss of life, Energy Minister Noor Uddin Khan said in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The minister, who visited the gas field yesterday morning said that the fire which leaped upto 600 feet on Sunday night, lost its intensity yesterday and came down to a height of 100 to 150 feet.

The fire has damaged half a kilometre rail track and the drilling rig and other accessories of the US company, Occidental, he said. Occidental is drilling a well in the gas field.

Noor Uddin Khan said, Bangladesh Air Force has been asked to remain prepared for any emergency and the Civil Aviation Department, Immigration and NBR (National Board of Revenue) have been asked to extend all cooperation.

The minister said, the gas field caught fire at 1:45 am on Sunday.

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GSP facility for garments exporters EU to ease Rules of Origin requirement on condition

European Union (EU) has agreed in principle to give derogation of 'Rules of Origin' to Bangladesh in getting Generalised System of Preference (GSP) in garment export to EU countries from July under certain conditions, reports UNB.

This was disclosed by Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed at a joint meeting with the leaders of BGMEA, BKMEA and BTMA in Dhaka yesterday.

According to Rules of Origin, three-stage transformation — fibre to yarn, yarn to fabric, and fabric to garments — for knit garments and two-stage transformation for woven garments is necessary in Bangladesh to get GSP.

The exporters are enjoying 12.5 per cent tariff concession from EU. Derogation of Rules of Origin means EU will provide GSP to two-stage local trans-

formation in knit garments also.

Quoting the latest remarks of EU official concerned the minister informed the meeting that the conditionalities of EU included the cancellation of irregular GSP certificates that had been issued by the Export Promotion Bureau from the late 80s to 1996.

Meanwhile, a EU team visited Bangladesh last year and detected gross anomalies in issuing GSP certificates. Many exporters got GSP certificates without complying to the Rules of Origin criteria.

The GSP rules of EU provide action for withdrawal of GSP from countries who do not take action when 'irregularity' in certification is detected and established.

The minister said EU felt that Bangladesh's garment industry had been well-es-

ablished and cancellation of the irregular GSP certificates would mean payment of duty by the European importers and it would not affect Bangladesh in the long run.

EU also feels that Bangladesh as LDC has no quota restrictions for garment export to EU which is an added advantage over other garment-exporting countries.

The minister said EU indicated that if Bangladesh could not cancel the irregular GSP certificate, EU would withdraw GSP for Bangladesh and it might affect GSP in exporting other goods to EU.

The government will definitely look into the overall interest of the people on GSP issue," said the minister, adding that previous government had issued these irregular GSP certificates and present government will cancel them.

See Page 12 Col 8

Bid to enter PM's office Arrested man dies after getting bail

The man, who was arrested three days ago for his alleged illegal bid to enter the Prime Minister's office, died in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

Police arrested Nuruzzaman, 35, on June 13 as he tried to enter the PM's office at Tejgaon in the city without prior permission.

Later, police brought him on one day's remand after producing him in court.

Nuruzzaman was brought to court yesterday as his lawyer moved a bail prayer.

The court granted the bail, but police rushed Nuruzzaman to National Hospital where the attending doctors declared him dead at about 4 pm.

Shah Alam, the lawyer of Nuruzzaman, alleged to a human rights organisation that his client had died following torture by police.

Bangladesh Society for En-

forcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) secretary general advocate Sigma Huda, in a statement last night, said relatives of Nuruzzaman also blamed police for the death.

But additional deputy commissioner of DMP (West) Krishna Bandhu Das denied the allegation, saying Nuruzzaman was not tortured in custody.

The matter is subject to investigation, but preliminary enquiry indicated that he died of cardiac failure," Das told UNB when reached by telephone at Tejgaon thana.

The ADC of DMP said no injury mark was found when he was produced before the court by police and the court also received him without any objection.

He quoted a brother of Nuruzzaman as saying that the victim was suffering from various ailments.

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Showcouse on govt Absconding in case file but functioning as dist PP

By SC Correspondent

The High Court yesterday directed the government to show cause as to under what legal authority Golam Abbas Chowdhury, allegedly an absconding accused in a criminal case, is functioning as the Public Prosecutor of Barisal district.

The division bench of the HC comprising Justice Md Moazzam Haque and Justice Md Hassan Amin upon a writ petition filed by Ahsan Habib Kamal, Chairman of Barisal Pourashava, issued the rule nisi upon the government, District and Sessions Judge, Deputy Commissioner and the Public Prosecutor of Barisal.

It was stated in the petition that in a Special Tribunal case filed by the writ petitioner, Public Prosecutor Golam Abbas Chowdhury is an absconding

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Dhaka likely to host 3-nation summit in Nov : PM

By Staff Correspondent

Dhaka is likely to host a three-nation summit in November this year, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina disclosed here yesterday.

"Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan has accepted my invitation and he is likely to visit Dhaka in November. We also expect Indian premier I K Gujral's arrival here in

November. Chances are there for a (three-nation) summit in Dhaka," Sheikh Hasina told journalists at the VIP lounge of Zia International Airport in the morning. She did not elaborate.

The Prime Minister was addressing a press conference on her return from the Turkish historic city of Istanbul after attending the launching ceremony and summit of the D-8 economic bloc.

Replying to a question, she said she had lengthy discussion with Nawaz Sharif on various issues in a cordial atmosphere and he has accepted her invitation to visit Bangladesh, possibly in November. "Officials concerned will work out details of the planned visit," she said.

Without disclosing the contents of her talks with Sharif, the PM told another questioner, "Wait until he comes here. We'll have more talks then."

Asked if the D-8 membership would be increased, Hasina replied, "The doors for cooperation will remain open. We the eight nations have just launched it (the eight-member forum of Muslim countries) and

Sheikh Hasina addressing press confce yesterday

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Minister explains in JS Fertiliser price 'adjusted' to check smuggling

By Staff Correspondent

The government will have to spend Tk 344 crore as fertiliser subsidy in the coming fiscal year despite a recent price increase of urea, said Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury yesterday.

The minister was responding to questions and supplementaries during question-answer hour in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Motia Chowdhury said the price of urea was 'adjusted' with that in neighbouring India. She explained that as the price of urea marked a 10 per cent rise in India, it would not be possible for the BDR to check smuggling of fertiliser unless the price was 'adjusted'.

The government would still have to provide Tk. 700 and Tk. 5,000 in subsidies for per ton of locally produced and imported urea respectively, the minister

said.

She was responding to a proposal by ruling party MP, Hafiz Ahmed Majumder for replacing cattle with tractors for ploughing. "It is really difficult for us now to provide subsidy again in procuring tractors," she said while agreeing that if the country aspired to attain self-sufficiency in food production, mechanisation of agriculture is a must.

"There persists tremendous pressure from the donors to withdraw agriculture subsidy," the minister said.

Replying to a question from Shahidul Islam of BNP, the agriculture minister said, MPs would be included soon in district level committees for implementing agricultural rehabilitation programmes.

Responding to another question, she said

See Page 12 Col 8

JS debate on suppl budget Govt, Opposition blame each other for economic failure

As the general discussion on the supplementary budget began in parliament yesterday, Opposition MPs criticised the government for what they said, its total failure in improving the country's economy during the last one year, reports UNB.

The ruling party lawmakers, on the other hand, accused the previous government of leaving behind a shattered economy and said the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has put the economy on the right track.

They said the government had to take a series of measures to bring back discipline in the financial sector which had been weakened by rampant corruption and over-leaving during the five years of BNP regime.

Taking the floor first, BNP legislator Mashur Rahman claimed that the government had totally failed in every sector and said the picture has been reflected through its performance in last one year.

He said the growth in the gross domestic products (GDP) was 5.7 per cent during the outgoing 1996-97 fiscal because of the growth in the agriculture. And credit goes to the country's farmers community, he added.

Mashur Rahman noted that the GDP growth was 5.3 per cent in fiscal 1995-96 and said the growth was only 0.4 per cent higher in 1996-97. It is the result of a total stagnation in all other sectors, including the industry, he said.

The BNP lawmaker said the tariffs of power, gas and water were raised in extra-budgetary ways in last one year. The over-due in the power sector also rose to Tk 1288 crore from Tk 958 crore.

Prof Ali Ashraf of Awami League said the government has taken a number of steps to deal with the default culture and restore discipline in the financial sector.

The growth in the agricultural sector

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Steps taken to make automobile fuel lead-free

The government has taken steps to make automobile fuel lead-free as part of a four-point measure to check pollution caused by emission of black smoke in the city, reports UNB.

Other measures are introduction of more double-decker buses, taking cautious step in issuing fitness certificates and conversion of vehicles into CNG system, Environment Minister Sajeda Chowdhury told parliament yesterday.

Replying to a question from Hasibur Rahman Swapan, she said in the first phase, all government vehicles using petrol and diesel would be converted so that they can use compressed natural gas.

The government has decided to convert all the petrol and diesel vehicles.

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Rangpur Polytech students assault teachers, set fire to quarters, office

From Our Correspondent

RANGPUR, June 16: Some teachers of the Rangpur Polytechnic Institute were assaulted by a group of unruly examinees today.

According to witnesses, the students became unruly when two magistrates prevented them from adopting unfair means in their course final examinations today.

The unruly students also confined the magistrates in a room for about four hours and set fire to the quarters of some teachers, and the office and workshop of the institute.

The assaulted teachers were identified as Vice-Principal Mokbul Hossain, Bijoy Kumar Mondal, Pradip Kumar Kundu, Abdur Rahman, Moazzem Hossain and Harunur Rashid.

Sayed Eskander granted anticipatory bail

By SC Correspondent

Major (Rtd) Sayeed Eskander, brother of BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, was granted anticipatory bail by the High Court yesterday in a criminal case filed for allegedly assaulting two DGF personnel.

The HC also issued a rule calling upon the government to show cause within 12 weeks as to why Major (Rtd) Sayeed Eskander should not be granted anticipatory bail in the case.

The division bench of the HC comprising Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury and Justice Shah Alam Nayeem Mominur Rahman yesterday granted the ad-interim anticipatory bail till disposal of the rule or submission of the police report whichever is earlier.

It was stated in the petition that one Nayek Shahidul Islam of the DGF is the informant lodged Tejgaon Police Station.

See Page 12 Col 1

Ershad suffers heart attack, hospitalised

Jatiya Party Chairman and former President H M Ershad was admitted to hospital yesterday as he suffered a heart attack, doctors said, reports UNB.

He felt pain in his chest early in the morning and was rushed to Suhrawardy Hospital. "Ershad had a heart attack, but his condition is now stable and he is conscious," said an on-duty doctor at the coronary care unit of the hospital in the afternoon.

When contacted, officials at the Jatiya Party Chairman's office declined to make any comment on his ailment. They said his Manikgaon tour scheduled for yesterday has been cancelled.

Ceiling collapse 7 HSC examinees injured in Tolaram College

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, June 16: Seven HSC examinees were injured in the Tolaram Government College centre today when a portion of the ground floor ceiling of the building collapsed on them before the exam started.

However, the injured students appeared in the exam under an special arrangement after first aid, college authorities told The Daily Star.

The injured students are Mazharul Islam, Jamal Hossain, Anowar Kabir, Swapan Kumar Saha, Abul Bashar, Shahidur Rahman, and Habibullah Gani.

The three storey building of the college was constructed in 1956 and it is now in dilapidated condition, sources said, adding that ceilings of different floors collapsed many times.

Principal Ahaj Md Bodul Alam said the chief engineer of the Facilities Department in 1988 suggested major repair works for the building but no steps could be taken due to fund constraint.

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'97 Human Development Index Bangladesh ranks 67th among 78 developing countries

By Staff Correspondent

Planning ministry officials, representatives of the ILO, World Food Programme, UNESCO and NGOs were also present.

Bangladesh also stood first among the South Asian nations in the Human Poverty Index (HPI) of the UNDP.

According to the report, Pakistan ranked 64th in the HPI while Bhutan 62nd, India 47th and Sri Lanka 22nd.

Ten out of the 78 HPI-ranked developing countries — Trinidad and Tobago, Cuba, Chile, Singapore, and Costa Rica — have reduced human poverty of their population to less than 10 per cent.

At the bottom of the rankings are Niger, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Cambodia and Mozambique. More than 50 per cent of the

population of these countries live in poverty.

The report mentioned that the globalisation was largely benefiting the more dynamic and powerful countries in the North and the South. It further said annual losses to developing countries from unequal access to trade, labour and finance had been estimated at 500 billion US dollars 10 times what they receive in foreign aid.

It said all the major financial and international agencies must do more than just cheering on the sidelines about the virtues of globalisation.

Prof Muzaffar Ahmed of Dhaka University said denial of basic human rights to the lower class is largely responsible for the country's widespread poverty. He said the country's