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Fire at gasfield Rly incurs Tk 15 lakh loss daily

From Our Correspondent
MOULVI BAZAR, 21: Bangla-
desh Railway is incurring a loss
of Tk 15 lakh every day due to
disruption in train compen-
sation on the Dhaka-Chittagong
and Dhaka-Sylhet sector
following explosion in a gas
field.

The Divisional Engineer of
Bangladesh Railway told this
correspondent today that they
are trying to resume the train
service as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, the chairman of
the Occidental company, now at
the explosion site said prepara-
tory work on putting out fire
was continuing. He said they
are awaiting the arrival of more
fire fighting equipment from
abroad.

The members of the enquiry
committee on the Magurchhara
gas field explosion today visited
the spot and monitored the
work of various organisations
engaged in putting out the fire.

Seismic survey needed to restore rail links with Sylhet

By Staff Correspondent

A seismic survey will have to
be conducted in the area of the
rail track which was affected by
the fire at the Magurchhara
drilling site before restoring di-
rect train communication of
Sylhet with Dhaka and Chit-
tagong, according to railway of-
ficials.

The fire has damaged the
rail track between Srimangal
and Bhanugach, a distance of
about 12 km.

The massive explosion and
fire at the drilling site may
have caused disruption to the
stratigraphic sequences of
earth in that area, the sources
said. The seismic survey will
See Page 12 Col 7

Shibir, BCL stage demonstrations on CU campus defying ban

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 21: A
tense situation prevailed on the
Chittagong University campus
today as rival student bodies
staged demonstration centring
on the issue of naming a girl
students hall.

Supporters of Chhatra Shi-
bir held rally and brought out
procession seeking change of
the name of Prilata Hall while
the supporters of BCL organised
the procession demanding not
to change the name of the hall,
campus sources said.

A large number of police,
most of them in riot gear were
deployed on the campus to pre-
vent any outbreak of violence.
However, the rival student
fronts held processions and ral-
lies defying the ban imposed by
the university authorities.

BNP calls hartal in Sylhet today

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, June 21: The Syl-
het district BNP has called a
dawn-to-dusk hartal in Sylhet
town tomorrow to protest the
fiscal measures in the new na-
tional budget.

A torch procession was
brought out in the town this
evening to drum up support for
the hartal. Its other demands
include ending load shedding
and withdrawal of cases against
BNP, JCD and Jubo Dal workers
and leaders.

Announcement

Results of JU admi-
ssion test are published
on Pages 7 & 8.

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and Questions**

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the right direction
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Business

G-7 summit begins

Prices of gold, oil, tea
fall; sugar stable over
the week
Pages 6,7

Probe body begins work

No progress in dousing gasfield fire

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, June 21: The fore-
ign experts brought by the Oc-
cidental for extinguishing the
fire at Magurchhara drilling
site passed the fourth day today
making preparations for their
operation.

While visiting the area, this
correspondent observed that
the flame remained unchanged
as it was yesterday.

Dousing of the fire may be
delayed by a few days more.
While talking to this corres-
pondent, two officials of Oc-
cidental said they could not give
the exact date for starting the
fire fighting operation. They
said they are making necessary
preparations for extinguishing
the fire.

When asked, the Thana Nir-
bahi Officer of Srimangal said,
installation of fire fighting
equipment at the site will take
some more days and so it is not

possible to say the exact date of
starting the fire fighting opera-
tion. He said there is shortage of
space around the drilling site
for keeping the heavy equip-
ment. He however, said the fore-
most department and authorities
of the Fulbari tea estate were ex-
tending all cooperation to the
Occidental.

The high-level enquiry
committee formed by the energy
ministry visited the site today.
TISN Lodi, Director (Operation),
Petrobangla along with other
members of the committee, S R
Osmani, Managing Director,
BAPEX, Dr M Ismail, Managing
Director, BGFCCL and Deputy
Commissioner of Moulvibazar
visited the spot. The committee
asked all concerned including
those of Occidental to appear
before it on Monday.

The team reached Shamsh-
ernagar Airport by a Acroben-

gal aircraft and drove to the
gasfield.

Two officials of Occidental
talking to this correspondent
said that they were making
preparations for extinguishing
the fire but could not say when
the fire fighting operation will
begin. They however, said that
the flame had reduced consid-
erably.

Natural water reservoirs
have been developed around the
gas field area. The present 'base
camp', which is about 500 yards
ahead of the gasfield site would
be shifted to a new site, about
1000 yards off the present one,
officials said. The existing 'base
camp' would be turned into a
'drilling pad,' they added.

BSS adds: The intensity of
fire at No-1 gas well at
Magurchhara in Moulvibazar
has reduced further today, an
See Page 12 Col 1



Water reservoirs have been created near the Magurchhara gasfield as part of preparatory measures for dousing the fire. — Star photo by Iqbal Siddiqui

Budget to alleviate poverty: AL It will destroy economy: BNP

By Staff Correspondent

Budget discussion

The debate on the proposed
national budget for fiscal 1997-
'98 continued in the Jatiya
Sangsad for the third day yester-
day.

Treasury Bench members
speaking on the budget claimed
that it would ensure, for the
first time, flow of wealth from
the rich to the poor. They men-
tioned the proposals for setting
up of an Employment Bank for
the unemployed youths, intro-
duction of old-age pension and
housing programmes for the
homeless and said that the pro-
posed budget would substan-
tially help alleviate poverty.

Opposition legislators be-
longing to the Bangladesh Na-
tionalist Party (BNP) claimed
that two or three budgetary
proposals were aimed at address-
ing the problems of the poor, while
all the others were bound to de-
stroy the country's development
prospects.

A total of 28 lawmakers of
the ruling Awami League (AL)
and Opposition BNP took part
in yesterday's debate.
Health Minister Salauddin
Yousuf told the House that it
was Awami League which took
action against bank loan de-
faulters, the first such thing in
the history of Bangladesh.

Replying to the BNP allega-

100 shops, houses gutted at Maghbazar

Some 100 shops and houses
were gutted in a devastating fire
at Maghbazar Kucha bazar in
the city last night, reports UNB.

Fire Brigade sources said the
fire broke out at about 7:30 pm
reportedly from the gas oven of
a house adjacent to the bazar.

Eight units of firefighters
from four city stations rushed
to the spot and brought the
blaze under control after two
hours of hectic efforts.

Fire Brigade Officials said
some biscuit factories were also
damaged in the fire.

However, the extent of dam-
age could not be ascertained
immediately.

come from that country."

Panchanon Biswas of the
ruling party said, housing pro-
jects for the homeless, Em-
ployment Bank for unemployed
youths and old-age pension will
help flow of wealth from the
rich to the poor.

Gulam Mohammad Kader of
Jatiya Party observed that the
ADP allocation for the coming
fiscal would be less than last
years' if inflation is taken into
consideration.

Akhbar Hamid Siddiky of
the BNP criticised the proposed
taxes on remittances by the non-
resident Bangladeshis (NRBs).
The NRBs send more than Tk 50
millions per year in foreign ex-
change. If tax is imposed, the
foreign exchange will go to
neighbouring countries through
various means including
Hundi, the BNP legislator said.

Mozahar Hossain of the BNP
observed that the proposed bud-
get will go against the interest
of peasants.

Referring to the two-day
weekly holiday for government
employees, he said, "They
(agriculture labourers) cannot
earn their living by working
seven days a week."

Prof Shahidul Islam of the
BNP accused the AL of flouting
See Page 12 Col 7



A family, affected in the fire at Pearabagh in Maghbazar area of the city yesterday, has taken shelter on a road under the open sky. — Star photo

Missed opportunity for consensus on privatisation

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yester-
day narrowly missed an oppor-
tunity for a consensus on pri-
vatising the loss-incurring in-
dustrial units in the public sec-
tor because of the opposition
BNP's putting a condition.

Commerce and Industries
Minister Tofael Ahmed urged
the Opposition to reach a con-
sensus with the government
side through discussion in the
House on privatisation of the
nationalised industrial enter-
prises, incurring huge losses
year after year.

In this regard, Tofael also
pointed out that the previous
BNP government had listed 65
such industrial units. He also
admitted his party's disagree-
ment over the previous gov-
ernment's move while it
(Awami League) was in the Op-
position.

The BNP lawmakers cheered
the industries minister for his
comment, "It's easy to speak but
hard to do."

Defending the government
move to sell out the loss-mak-
ing industrial units, the minis-
ter See Page 12 Col 2

JS snippets

By Nazmul Ashraf

Jatiya Party lawmaker
Shahadat Hossain has wished
he is 'reborn' as a TNO (Thana
Nirbahi Officer), not an MP.

He expressed the desire in
the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday
saying, rapid action was taken
against those who had attacked
a TNO in Magura while regret-
ting government's inaction
against the persons who as-
saulted him.

"We knew the public repre-
sentatives are the most power-
ful men in a democracy but we
find here, the powerful persons
are the bureaucrats," Hossain
lamented.

Demanding action for the at-
tack on him, the JP deputy drew
Home Minister Rafiqul Islam's
attention and termed Islam the
only 'neutral' minister in the
cabinet of Sheikh Hasina.

Deputy Speaker Abdul
Hamid yesterday allowed 'free
style' deliberations on the re-
jected call attention notices due
See Page 12 Col 4

US tobacco industry to pay \$368b in damages

WASHINGTON, June 21: In a
historic settlement, the United
States tobacco industry agreed
to pay \$368.5 billion US dollars
in damages for ill effects on
smoking, reports PTI.

The industry was spared
dozens of lawsuits for punitive
damages for deception, fraud
and conspiracy in return and
future class action suits were
ruled out.

The agreement was an-
nounced at a news conference
yesterday and is by far the
largest ever involving an indus-
try and concludes three months
of negotiations between attor-
ney general of 37 states and
three tobacco firms — RJR
Nabisco, Philip Morris and
British American tobacco unit
Brown and Williamson.

According to the agreement,
payment of \$368.5 billion dol-
lars will be made in 25 years,
with the industry making a 10
billion dollar down payment.

The industry accepted sev-
eral restrictions on their mar-
keting.

There will be no more adver-
tisements on TV, billboards, at
sports events, and vending ma-
chines. Cigarette cartons will
carry a prominent message
smoking can kill you.

See Page 12 Col 6

Death of Shima JS probe body starts taking testimony

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 21: Mem-
bers of the parliamentary
committee formed to probe the
death of garments worker Shima
Chowdhury, arrived in the
port city today, official sources
said.

The committee members led
by Foreign Minister Abdus
Samad Azad, were staying at
Chittagong circuit house.

The committee members
started taking testimony of the
people concerned from this af-
ternoon and it continued till
filing of this report at night.

The committee will record
the testimony of the police, jail
officials and other people to-
morrow.

The parliamentary commit-
tee was formed on February 18
last to probe the death of Shima
while in 'safe custody' in Chit-
tagong jail on February 7.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina dropping seeds of different types of trees from a helicopter in Cox's Bazar district yesterday. — PID photo

PM urges G-7 to help LDCs achieve economic progress

Prime Minister Sheikh
Hasina has called upon the
major industrial nations for
several measures, including
debt relief, direct investment
and duty free treatment, to help
the LDCs achieve their eco-
nomic progress, reports UNB.

The Bangladesh Prime Min-
ister, as the coordinator of the
least developed countries (LDCs),
made the appeal ahead of
the G-7 summit which began
Friday in Denver, Colorado.

In a letter to US President
Clinton, Hasina urged the seven
industrialised democracies to
incorporate in the final com-
munique of their three-day
summit supportive measures in
favour of the LDCs, according to
an Inter Press Service (IPS) re-
port.

Hasina also asked the G-7,
which includes USA, UK, France,
Germany, Canada, Italy and
Japan, to focus on the plight of
the poorest of the poor, said the
IPS report dated United Na-
tions June 15.

The LDCs are seeking G-7

support for several specific
measures that included provi-
sion of duty free treatment on
an autonomous basis to export
from LDCs, thereby improving
their overall capacity to re-
spond to the opportunities of-
fered by the trading system.

Hasina's letter mentioned
that LDCs also seek restoration
of bilateral and multilateral
aid programmes focusing more
directly on trade and invest-
ment, enhancing activities on
such areas as building and
strengthening physical infras-
tructure and developing human
and institutional capacities.

LDCs also want facilitation
of bilateral and multilateral
debt relief, including flexible
and expeditious implementa-
tion of the World Bank-IMF
debt relief initiative for the
highly indebted poor countries,
and also granting of fiscal and
other incentives by host coun-
tries to encourage foreign direct
investment flows to the LDCs.

According to another mes-
See Page 12 Col 3

Khaleda visits Magurchhara gasfield Form Probe body with local & foreign experts

MOULVIBAZAR, June 21:
Opposition leader Begum Kha-
leda Zia here today demanded
immediate formation of an
enquiry committee comprising
experts from home and abroad
to find out causes of the fire at
Magurchhara gasfield, reports
UNB.

She also demanded trial of
those responsible for the in-
cident and compensation for the
damages caused by the inferno.

The BNP Chairperson and
Leader of the Opposition in
Parliament was addressing a
public meeting on Srimangal
Station Road in the afternoon
after visiting the Magurchhara
gasfield.

Former Finance Minister M

BNP demonstrations at thana HQs today

The Bangladesh Nationalist
Party (BNP) will hold demon-
strations at thana headquar-
ters across the country today to
protest 'anti-people' budget and
price hike of fertiliser, reports
UNB.

Similar programme, includ-
ing rally, will also be held at
ward-level in the capital as part
of BNP's programmes an-
nounced earlier, said a party
press release.

Saifur Rahman MP, former En-
ergy Minister Dr Khandaker
Mosharraf Hossain MP and
former Post and Telecommuni-
cations Minister Tarikul Islam
also addressed the meeting.
Srimangal BNP president Sher
Ali presided.

Begum Zia blasted the gov-
ernment for the Magurchhara
gaswell flame, saying such a
catastrophic incident occurred
due to its inefficiency and ne-
gligence.

She said seven days have
passed with rhetoric and
meaningless procrastination,
virtually no step was taken by
the government to extinguish
the fire.

"Maybe," she continued, "one
month will go this way and the
fire will perhaps be naturally
controlled after unthinkable
damage."

The conflagration is causing
colossal loss of gas worth hun-
dreds of taka every moment and
of forest resources, the BNP
leader said, criticising the
prime minister and her minis-
ters for their "indifferent atti-
tude" towards the devastation
by the incident.

She said the fire severely de-
graded ecological balance in the
area where the ravages also in-
See Page 12 Col 3

Death of Biman's crew: CID team begins probe

By Staff Correspondent

The CID has started investi-
gating the murder case filed in
connection with the death of
Biman crew Nuruzzaman
Sharif in police custody in the
city on Monday.

CID sources said ASP Mun-
shi Atiqur Rahman took up the
case late Friday.

Meanwhile, the one-member
enquiry committee comprising
Additional Chief Metropolitan
Magistrate (ACMM) Habibur
Rahman is also probing the in-
cident. He interrogated a num-
ber of people who stayed with
Nuruzzaman in court custody
and in the custody of Tejgaon
thana, according to sources
concerned.

The committee might take
some time to submit its report
as there are more than 300 peo-
ple to be interrogated.

However, police is yet to find
out the persons responsible for
the killing of the Biman crew.
The murder case was filed with
Sutrapur thana on Thursday as
autopsy report showed that he
died following torture resulting
in internal haemorrhage.

Nuruzzaman, 37, died soon
after he was taken to court on
See Page 12 Col 1

Punitive action will be taken against culprits, JS assured

By Staff Correspondent

Home Minister Rafiqul Is-
lam yesterday expressed deep
shock at the death of Biman
crew Nuruzzaman Sharif and
told the Jatiya Sangsad that
"stern punitive action" would be
taken against the 'culprits'.

Making a statement under
Article 300 of the JS Rules of
Procedure, the home minister
informed the House the steps
taken so far in this regard.

"We shall taken stern puni-
tive action against the culprits,
whoever they may be. We have
no sympathy or weakness in
such case," said Rafiqul Islam.

He expressed his sympathy
for the family members of Nu-
ruzzaman and assured them of
stringent lawful action against
the offenders.

The minister said report of
the investigation now being
conducted by the Additional
Chief Metropolitan Magistrate
(ACMM) would be made avail-
able soon and Criminal Inves-
See Page 12 Col 1

Ershad may go abroad for medical check-up

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Party Chairman HM
Ershad may go abroad for med-
ical check-up in the first week
of July.

JP sources said the govern-
ment may impose 'certain re-
strictions' as regards the coun-
tries he may go to for treatment
of heart ailment.

The Ministry of Law, in its
remarks on Ershad's request
for passport and other facili-
ties, had said that he could be
granted all the facilities per-
missible under law for a former
president, the sources men-
tioned.

Ershad had earlier requested
the Cabinet Division for facili-
ties as a former president. The
Cabinet Division referred it to
the law ministry for its views.

The law ministry said con-
sent of the Prime Minister was
required prior to granting of
such facilities.

The Parliament Secretariat,
in response to a separate re-
quest from Ershad for granting
him passport, observed that
permission from court was re-
quired as he was accused in a
number of cases and that he was
granted bail by the court.

Man commits suicide after killing wife

From Our Correspondent

SATKHIRA, June 21: One
person committed suicide al-
legedly after killing his wife at
Brahmarajpur under sadar
thana on Friday night.

Police said Dilip Kumer
Ghosh, 55, severely beat his
wife Yuthika Rani, 46, with a
heavy stick in their bedroom.
Having been sure of his
See Page 12 Col 7

Husband kills wife in city

By DMC Correspondent

One person allegedly killed
his wife at a slum in Bha-
shantek area in the city Friday
night.

Police said, Zarina Begum,
40, sustained fatal injuries as
her husband Md Safuruddin hit
her head with a sharp weapon
at about 9:30 pm.

A mother of four children,
Zarina was immediately taken
to the Dhaka Medical College
Hospital (DMCH) where she died
at about 11:30 pm, hospital
sources said.

Police arrested her husband
early yesterday. A case was
lodged with Cantonment thana.