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Bangladesh to open missions in 3 more countries soon

By M Anwarul Haq
 Dhaka is taking preparations to open three more overseas missions shortly. These missions with ambassadorial level representations will be opened in the capital of the Maldives, Jordan and Brunei, according to sources. With these, Bangladesh will have 46 ambassadorial level missions and 10 sub-missions. After the opening of a full-fledged mission in the Maldives capital of Male, Bangladesh's diplomatic presence in all the SAARC countries will be ensured. Presently, Dhaka's high commissioner to Sri Lanka is concurrently accredited to the Maldives. Brig (ret) Khalequzaman Chowdhury, former ambassador to Yangon, is tipped to become Bangladesh's first envoy to Male. Maj Gen Amsa Amin, presently ambassador to Brazil, is likely to be made the country's first envoy to Jordan. Dhaka's new mission in Brunei will be headed by a politician. See Page 12 col 6

Govt must ensure atmosphere for cooperation, says Khaleda

Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia said her party is committed to democracy and to extending fullest cooperation to the government, reports UNB. She hoped that the government would provide an atmosphere congenial to keeping this commitment. The BNP chairperson stated this while talking to the visiting Deputy Foreign Minister of Italy, Senator Patrizia Toia, when the latter called on her in the city yesterday. She hoped parliamentary delegations would be exchanged between the two countries to promote better working of democratic institutions. Discussion between them centered around matters of mutual interest, said a party release. Begum Zia recalled with pleasure her visit to Italy in 1992 when she had the opportunity of discussing bilateral and other matters with Italian President and Prime Minister. See Page 12 Col 2

Decision on financing jute purchase likely today

Star Report
 The government is likely to take decision on providing bank financing for the purchase of raw jute during the current season, at a high-level meeting today, sources in the jute ministry said. Chaired by Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria, the meeting will be held at the National Economic Council Bhaban. Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury, Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed, State Minister for Jute AK Faezul Huq, leaders of Bangladesh Jute Association and high officials of different banks will attend the meeting. According to the sources, the meeting will discuss different aspects relating to the jute sector and is expected to take a decision on providing a reasonable price to the jute growers. The meeting will also review the latest loan recovery position of the jute sector. The government has estimated that a total of 51.30 lakh bales of raw jute will be produced. See Page 12 col 6

Appointment of relatives—opens up many questions

Column : Currents and Crosscurrents by M M Rezaul Karim Page 4

Budget 1997-98: Good features overshadowed by inappropriate measures

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Rome to support businessmen to invest in Bangladesh: Italian DFM tells DCCI

DSE price index posts 11-point rise Pages 6,7

Fire kills 9 in 2 garments factories in Mirpur



A relative of one of the fire victims wailing at the factory gate yesterday (top) and a partial view of one of the two garments factories damaged in a fire (bottom). — Star photo

By Staff Correspondent
 At least nine people were burnt alive in a devastating fire in two garments factories in Mirpur Section-1 in the city Tuesday night. Of the nine, two were identified as Abu Taher, 32, and Moshir Rahman, 28, yarn controller and administrative officer respectively of one of the affected factories, Maxborn Bangladesh Ltd, according to fire brigade and police sources. The seven others could not be identified till last night as the bodies were charred in the blaze. These were recovered from the premises of the other affected factory, Rahman & Rahman Apparels Ltd. Fire fighters and Mirpur police recovered the bodies during a search in the debris till yesterday morning. Later, all the nine bodies were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

The fire broke out in the seven-storey building, on Mazar Road, housing the factories at about 8:30 pm and totally destroyed Rahman & Rahman Apparels Ltd and partially damaged Maxborn Bangladesh Ltd. According to a directory of the BGMEA, Rahman & Rahman employed 450 people and produced shirts, jackets and pants. Maxborn employed 310 people and produced sweaters. The managements of the factories, however, could not be contacted till last night. Fire brigade sources said the third and fourth floors of the building housed Rahman & Rahman Apparels while Maxborn was located on the fifth floor. The origin of the fire could not be ascertained until yesterday. Local people said that the fire originated from an electric short circuit on the fourth floor. However, police or fire brigade could not confirm whether the factories were open when the fire broke out. It was gathered from local people that Rahman & Rahman was partially open as it had a shipment schedule yesterday. But, the workers of that particular shift were not in the premises at the time of the fire as they went out during a tiffin break. Some people said the main switch of the power supply line was put off following an electric short circuit, the factory premises plunged into darkness as a result and the victims were trapped inside. Besides, the factories on other floors of the building were closed. Fire brigade sources said they found a staff of Maxborn after they extinguished the blaze at about 11:30 pm. Later, they opened the gate of the factory and recovered the two bodies. The two, who were identified later on, died of intense heat. Nine units of fire fighters from the headquarters, Mirpur, See Page 12 Col 7



Bangladesh batsman Athar Ali Khan swipes the ball as Pakistan wicket keeper Moin Khan looks on in the Asia Cup opening match in Colombo, Sri Lanka yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

Bangladesh put up a good fight to thwart defeat

COLombo, July 16: Bangladesh's cricketers scored their highest total in one-day internationals — 210 in 50 overs — but it was not enough to beat Pakistan's imposing 319 for five in an Asia Cup match at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today, reports AP. Opener Athar Ali, with a career-best 82, and skipper Akram Khan with a maiden half-century (59), paved the way for Bangladesh's history-making total with an alliance that produced 110 runs for the fourth wicket. They took the score from 61 for three before parting with the total at 171 in the 42nd over. The stand helped Bangladesh surpass a previous-best 178 made against Sri Lanka in Calcutta at the Asia Cup in 1991. Athar, who was playing in only his ninth one-day international, batted with authority. More on page 10 stroking the ball on either side of the wicket. He hit eight fours and one six before being ruled stumped by the third umpire off off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq, who finished with best figures of five for 38. Akram picked his runs off See Page 12 Col 3

PCJSS to discuss draft accord with affiliated bodies

By Special Correspondent
 Talks between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCCHT) and the Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS) continued yesterday on the draft of an agreement both sides are trying to finalise to restore peace in the region. The meeting is likely to resume this morning. The PCJSS delegation may leave in the afternoon, according to sources. It will take the draft for discussions at various levels of the organisation including its military wing, the Shantibahini. The sources said that at yesterday's meeting both sides were yet to resolve their differences on a number of key issues, particularly on the authority of the proposed Regional Council, its structure and running of the administration and maintaining law and order. The fate of the District Councils also could not be decided upon. The PCJSS has been pressing hard for total authority instead of partial authority as had been proposed earlier on the district council's power to levy taxes and administering law and order upto a certain level. The NCCHT leaders dismissed total authority saying it would require constitutional amendments, something it is unable to provide. Besides, there had been resentment by the NCCHT on the See Page 12 Col 7

BNP plans to 'settle issues' with BTV

Star Report
 While deciding on the invitation to BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia for appearing in a BTV programme, her party now plans to settle with the BTV authorities all issues relating to coverage of the main opposition party. The reply to the BTV authorities' letter requesting the Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad to participate in the programme titled *Desh bashir Mukhomukhi* (face the countrymen) is likely to contain BNP's grievances as regards telecast of its programmes and the demand for fair treatment to the party by the state-owned electronic medium hinted a top BNP leader engaged in drafting the reply. BNP has been charging the government for using the TV to belittle the party. Begum Zia was invited on June 24 to appear in the programme. "It'll take another couple of See Page 12 Col 2

Project on Gulshan Lake 'City's environmental balance endangered'

By Staff Correspondent
 The planned commercial development project on Gulshan Lake has come under strong criticism from different quarters. Top architects, planners and environmentalists expressed their dismay and termed the deal as an outright crime. Meanwhile, Induz Valley has already engaged a Singapore-based firm to conduct the preliminary survey on the commercial project to be built on Gulshan Lake, company sources said. An Induz Valley official told The Daily Star that the company has started the surveys, including water and soil tests. Rajdhanee Unnayan Katripakhya (Rajuk) allocated 220 acres of Gulshan Lake and its surrounding areas to Induz Valley, a Singapore-based developer, to construct condominiums, service apartments, luxury hotel and clubs. The deal was done in violation of the country's construction law and ignoring the recently formulated Master Plan for the city. Shamsul Wares, President, Institute of Architects, Bangladesh, said the project should be stopped immediately. "This project was hurriedly approved to serve the interest of a few individuals, it grossly undermines the law of the land and it is detrimental to the environment," he added. He explained that to maintain the environmental balance of the city, 22 per cent water bodies should be ensured. But in See Page 12 Col 3

WB disbursed \$ 314.5m in loans to Bangladesh in FY97

World Bank's new lending commitments to South Asian region declined by almost one billion dollars in 1997, but its disbursement rose sharply with Bangladesh receiving 314.56 million US dollars, reports UNB. According to the Bank's annual operational results, made available here yesterday, new lending commitments to the region totalled 2.011 billion dollars in loans, credits and guarantees during 1997 fiscal that ended June 30. The new commitments were down almost one billion dollars from 1996 when the countries of the region received commitments worth 3.01 billion dollars. The figure was 3.25 billion dollars for 1995 and 2.37 billion dollars for 1994. The Bank attributed the decline to "annual fluctuation." Its new commitment for 19 projects included 1.38 billion dollars from the International Development Association (IDA), the soft-loan arm of the World Bank, and 625 million dollars in loans from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). India was the largest borrower in South Asia receiving 1.5 billion dollars in 1997. It was followed by Bangladesh's 321 million dollars for three IDA projects, Pakistan's 84.8 million dollars for two IDA projects, Sri Lanka's 57.8 million dollars for three IDA projects and Nepal's 18.3 million dollars for one IDA project. No lending was provided to Afghanistan, Bhutan or the Maldives. The Bank's 1997 assistance programme aimed to provide high-quality services and innovative and efficient programmes by working with partners and involving broad community participation. The Bank will provide Bangladesh with a 105 million dollars IDA equivalent credit to help more than 100 NGOs expand lending to an estimated 1.2 million poor and mostly female borrowers. The project will also strengthen the institutional and financial viability of the lending agencies through training, research, impact evaluation, and disseminating best practices for increasing cost effectiveness. The main prongs of the Bank's strategy focused on helping countries improve their fiscal situation and push ahead See Page 12 Col 1

ICDDR,B tenancy to be extended by 25 yrs

By Nazmul Ashraf
 The government has decided to extend the tenancy of the International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease and Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) by another 25 years, according to officials in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. Tenancy of the centre is scheduled to end in 2003. The planned extension aims at enabling the centre formulate its future plans and attract international funding for research and hospital projects. To keep the centre functional until 2028, the Health Ministry is now working on a bill, seeking an amendment to the ICDDR,B Ordinance 1978 that established the centre with an initial tenancy period of 25 years. Initially, the centre had started work in the name of Cholera Research Laboratory. The proposed amendment has already been approved by the Cabinet and scrutinised by the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs. It was also endorsed by the Finance Ministry early this month, because it involves government funding. The Health Ministry is now giving final touches to the draft bill which will be placed before the Cabinet again for forwarding it to the President, the officials said. On receiving the President's consent, the bill will be placed in the Jatiya Sangsad. Asked why the tenancy is being extended six years before the expiry, Health Ministry officials said the centre is facing problems as regards obtaining long-term international assistance. See Page 12 Col 8

Regional experts suggest urgent steps to tackle arsenic problem

International experts have termed the contamination of underground water by arsenic in Bangladesh as a major public health hazard and suggested the government to tackle it on an "emergency basis," reports UNB. "Immediate relief on emergency basis should be provided through supply of safe drinking water to all those affected or at risk because of the current exposure," recommended a consultation meeting organised by WHO in New Delhi. International experts on arsenic and policy makers from India and Bangladesh at the meeting also suggested immediate action to treat the people suffering from arsenic poisoning. The consultation meeting, organised by WHO's South East Asia Regional Office (SEARO), recommended formation of well-equipped task forces to identify and address patients with arsenic poisoning, said a WHO press release yesterday. The meeting's recommendations for action, prepared to provide a policy guideline to the national authorities in Bangladesh and India, were made available this week. The experts observed that public health personnel and NGO staff in the areas having arsenic problems should be trained for rapid case identification and management. "Tubewell water in the locality where patients have been detected should be tested in order to ensure safe water and prevent further exposure to arsenic for those who are at risk," according to the recommendations. The meeting said supply of safe water could be ensured by identifying sources of safe water or by treating surface water that was not contaminated, removing arsenic from contaminated water and harvesting rain waters. The experts acknowledged a number of domestic and community water treatment methods developed recently to remove arsenic in drinking water. But they called for WHO's assistance in reviewing and evaluating the efficiency of these arsenic removal technology. The meeting emphasised the need for mass communication campaigns to raise public awareness about the effects of arsenic contamination and ways to get arsenic-free water. It said comprehensive site investigations and private water sources should be carried out to find the presence or absence of arsenic. It also recommended for setting up of a national reference laboratory and surveillance of water quality. As a long-term objective, the experts recommended that national data bases on arsenic in drinking water need to be strengthened and a comprehensive management information system be established to facilitate monitoring, better planning and implementation of programmes. They also suggested the government to undertake hydrogeological surveys in order to identify underground aquifers. See Page 12 Col 1

Aug 15 killing Rama says none influenced him to become PW

Defence counsels cross-examining Abdur Rahman Sheikh alias Rama yesterday suggested that he (Rama) was not present when the August 15 killing took place and was influenced to be a witness in the Bangabandhu murder case, reports UNB. Rama, a servant in Bangabandhu's house, who during his deposition on Monday said he witnessed the killing of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975, however, firmly replied that he was present on that fateful night and did not appear as a witness being influenced by anyone. All the five defence lawyers, except Sharfuddin Mukul, counsel for Taheruddin See Page 12 Col 7

PSC chairman won't resign: Amicable solution likely

Star Report
 Chairman of the Public Service Commission (PSC) Prof SMA Fayed has changed his mind about his resignation as issues in the Commission are likely to have an amicable solution, according to sources in the PSC. In a dramatic development, officers and employees of the Commission yesterday regretted their earlier "misconduct" sources in the PSC said. The officers and employees had demanded resignation of the Chairman. The PSC Chairman told The Daily Star last night, "I don't think I will quit now." On Monday See Page 12 Col 1

WB willing to fund three flyovers in city

By Staff Correspondent
 World Bank has agreed in principle to finance construction of three flyovers in the city, sources in the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) said. The decision follows a preliminary study to build flyovers at Kowran Bazar-Sonargaon intersection, Mahakhal and at Jatrabari. The second phase of the study is now being done by the Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) at the DCC premises. A DCC official said DUTP will study the proposed project in detail, do the drawings, estimate the costs and prepare report documents. The detailed report is expected to be completed See Page 12 Col 3

Aero Bengal to resume services in 2 routes from Tuesday

By Naimul Haq
 Aero Bengal Airlines, the only airline in the private sector in the country will resume its services in Dhaka-Barisal and Dhaka-Chittagong routes on Tuesday next. Air Commodore (ret) Moin-Ul Islam, one of the owners of the company said yesterday. The Aero Bengal Airlines started operating in the routes under a Short Take Off and Landing (STOL) service on July 17, 1995 with two Chinese Y-12 aircraft and one Russian AN 24 aircraft. The services were stopped after the Civil Aviation Authorities of Bangladesh (CAAB) raised objection on technical grounds. The CAAB had stopped operation of the 48-seater AN-24 aircraft. See Page 12 Col 1