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Water-logging at Malibagh-Moghbar road in the city after yesterday's rain caused traffic jam. — Star photo

GSP for garments export Netherlands to request EU for consideration

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed has sought Dutch support to Bangladesh's plea for getting GSP for garments export to European Union countries, reports UNB.

Tofael made the request through the visiting Development Cooperation Minister of the Netherlands, Jan P Pronk, who called on him at his office in Dhaka yesterday.

Pronk said they were sympathetic to the plea of Bangladesh about the continuation of unconditional GSP. "We will promote your case to the European Commission for sympathetic consideration," he added.

Tofael Ahmed said it is difficult for Bangladesh to cancel the disputed GSP certificates issued from 1986 to 1996.

"It will create unemployment. Female workers, who constitute 90 per cent of the garment workers, would suffer badly. It will also hamper the poverty alleviation programme and create legal complications," he said.

Depression

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According to DND sources yesterday, standing aus, aman seedlings covering several hundred acres of land have gone under water.

Rain waters have also swamped residential houses, educational institutions and factories.

The seriously affected localities are Dhaniala, Sanir Akhra, Shiddhirganj, Mizmizi, Fatullah, Aliganj, Raghunathpur, Bhaurar, Kutubail, Delpara, Jalkuri, Simrair, and Jatrabari.

The rivers in Brahmaputra basin continued to fall at all points while Ganges-basin rose at the upstream points during the last 24 hours till 6 am yesterday.

The rivers in Meghna and SE Hill basins recorded rise and fall during the period, according to a Flood Information Centre bulletin.

However, the Ganges at Bhagyakul, the Surma at Anahighat, the Kushiara at Amalshid and Sheola, and the Meghna at Bhairab Bazar were flowing above their respective danger levels.

Cabinet resents failure

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affected areas of the country.

While discussing the Magurchara fire incident some cabinet members also wanted to know from Energy Minister Noor Uddin Khan, who representatives of the Petrolbangla was not there during drilling by the Occidental. Some ministers observed that insincerity of the Occidental was responsible for the explosion and asserted that the ministry concerned should have demanded financial compensation from the Occidental much earlier for enormous economic and ecological damage.

However, the cabinet resolved that the Energy and Mineral Resources Minister would submit a 'comprehensive report' in the next cabinet meeting.

During the meeting, most of the cabinet members observed that the Khatib of Baitul Mukarram mosque 'had a hand' behind the recent incident at the premises of Islamic Foundation. The ministers agreed in principle that the Khatib 'should go immediately' as he has clearly identified himself with a particular political camp. Cabinet sources said that a meeting of the governing body

DMCSU polls Aug 7

By DMC Correspondent

The election of the Dhaka Medical College Students Union (DMCSU) will be held on August 7. The decision was taken at a meeting between the election commission and the student leaders yesterday.

Professor Shamsul Islam, Head of the Department Forensic Medicine is the chairman of the election commission.

The student leaders from the Bangladesh Chhatra League (S-P), the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and the Bangladesh Chhatra Union attended the meeting.

According to the schedule, the nomination papers will have to be submitted on July 27 and the final list of the candidates will be published on July 28.

The student politics in the college was suspended after a clash between two students groups last December.

BNP factions clash in city: 20 hurt

At least 20 BNP workers were injured yesterday in an intra-party clash at Pallabi in the city over formation of a ward committee, reports UNB.

The clash erupted when supporters of Mozammel Hossain attacked a rally convened by Ismail Hossain group at Zia College premises to form a committee for the unit of ward number 2.

Both the groups fired several shots and exploded a number of bombs during the clash. They also damaged several vehicles on the street.

Convener of Dhaka city BNP Sadek Hossain, MP, who was present at the meeting as chief guest, left the scene without announcing the committee.

Retrial of Shima rape case demanded

Jatiya Mahila Sangstha urged the government to order retrial of the Shima rape case by amending existing laws which, the women body observed, are not effective in dealing with such incidents, reports UNB.

Addressing a press conference at the Sangstha's office yesterday, its Chairman Ivy Rahman complained that the accused in this case were acquitted through loopholes in the existing laws.

"The conscious citizens were stunned and scared over the court verdict on this sensational case," she told reporters.

The Mahila Sangstha demanded reforms of century-old laws including Section 164 of 1872 and CrPC of 1898.

Quoting the judge's verdict on the case, Ivy said complainant, accused and investigator — all are police personnel. "In that case," she questioned, "how people can get fair judgement against the offence committed by police."

Ivy Rahman, also a leader of the ruling party's women front, said all the 48 witnesses gave their statements in favour of the accused. She observed that the case was affected by poor investigation and careless handling by the government lawyers.

She said the statement of Shima was recorded on November 9 in 1996, one month after the incident. Shima died mysteriously in Chittagong jail custody on February 9 this year.

The Mahila Sangstha called for retrial of the Shima rape case through fresh CID investigation under direct supervision of a representative from the judiciary.

It also demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits.

The press conference was also attended by Baby Moudud, Taslima Chowdhury and Tahmina Zakaria.

'Congestion surcharge at Ctg Port to affect trade'

Country's leading trade bodies have expressed deep concern at the imposition of congestion surcharge at Chittagong port, saying it would seriously affect the trade and industry, specially the garments sector, reports UNB.

The proposed port congestion surcharge at 150 US dollars per 20 feet container would put the garment industry in a most uncompetitive position, risking the loss of business to weaker competitors in other countries, said a joint statement.

The statement was signed by Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Samson H Chowdhury, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry president ASM Quasem, Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Mahbub Jamil, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Mostafa Golam Quddus and Bangladesh Tea Association Chairman AQI Chowdhury.

The Chittagong Feeder Trade Committee (CFTC), a Singapore-based organisation of feeder vessel operators, has decided to impose congestion surcharge on container cargo at Chittagong port from August 15.

The surcharge is a result of congestion in the country's prime port caused by frequent labour unrest and other reasons.

The statement said the ready-made garment industry has to import raw materials and then export the finished products, which means their prices would cost 300 dollars more than the pre-surge period.

"The frequent work-stoppages and go-slows by the port workers, due to political instigations, outdated container handling equipments and their inadequate availability, lack of adequate space to store containers, inefficient port management, strike-calls by political parties and above all, using the dock labourers for local political purposes, have contributed to the present situation marked by frequent work stoppages and very poor productivity," it said.

The statement said it is regrettable that the whole situation is not being dealt with in the manner which is necessary in the larger interest of the national economy.

"Use of dock labourers for political gains is simply unpardonable," it said and also criticised the government for its failure to appoint any chairman for the port on a permanent basis during last three years.

It mentioned that the Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) was being run by the head of another organisation, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation, as an additional responsibility.

The leaders of trade bodies called upon the government to take a crash programme to improve the port services to re-assure feeder vessel operators, port users and private sector firms coming forward for handling facilities and back-up services.

They also requested the authorities to arrange for negotiations with the feeder vessel operators to persuade them not to impose the surcharge.

Political manipulations of the dock workers must be banned. Similarly, port management should be done by professionals with requisite operational and commercial experience, they said.

The uncertainties created during the last few months against privatisation of the port facilities must also be dispelled, it added.

One held in Savar poura commissioner murder case

SAVAR, July 21. An accused in Poura Commissioner Moked Ali Molla Majnu murder case was arrested by plainclothes police today, reports UNB.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided Arapara area of the town and arrested Abdullah Al Mamun alias Abdul, 21, who was also accused in several other cases of terrorism and extortion.

He was sent to Dhaka immediately after the arrest.

2 policemen sued on charge of raping woman

LALMONIRHAT, July 21: A case was filed against two policemen today on charge of violating a woman, reports UNB.

The victim, Alefjan Bibi, 32, of Khochari slum, filed the case against hawilder Abdul Karim and constable Delwar Hossain with the first class magistrate's court (Zone A).

According to prosecution, three policemen, led by hawilder Abdul Karim, entered the house of Alefjan to arrest her husband.

As her husband fled the house after seeing the police, hawilder Karim and constable Delwar Hossain took Alefjan to a desolate spot and violated her.

Magistrate Nurul Islam instructed the officer-in-charge of sadar thana to take legal action against the accused.

Bangabandhu murder

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weapons and the tank. There was no encounter on that night and the firing was one sided.

When asked why he did not file the case being a direct witness, Selim paused for a while before replying, "I couldn't be the plaintiff in spite of my desire as I am illiterate."

Selim, who received bullet wounds during the incident, informed the court that he was at his sister's quarters at Bally Road after his release from the hospital. "My sister's husband was the security of the Food Minister," he said.

Replying to a query the PW said he found Sheikh Selim and Sheikh Maruf standing beside his hospital bed. They came to him to know the situation at the house of Bangabandhu, their maternal uncle.

"I didn't notice," he said when he was asked if Sheikh Selim and Sheikh Maruf were wounded.

The witness told the court that he would recognise the army personnel who took him after he was struck by bullets in his left hand and abdomen on the fateful night of August 15.

He also said he had no contact with AFM Mohitul Islam, the plaintiff of the case and Abdur Rahman Sheikh alias Rama, second prosecution witness, since the assassination of Bangabandhu.

Selim, however, informed that he had met the 'bua' (maid) at her Mirpur residence once or twice while she was alive. "I didn't attend her burial," he replied to a question.

The witness said he didn't know all the accused earlier. "I knew some of them," he said replying to another question from state defence Mozammel Haq Chowdhury. Most of the attackers were in black uniform and the rest in khaki, he added.

Narrating his involvement with the family, Selim said he met Sheikh Kamal and Jamal while going to the Dhanmondi playground to play from one of his (Selim's) uncle's house. "After knowing me, Amma (Begum Mujib) asked me to work there."

"I was not a relative of Bangabandhu," he replied to another question.

Speaking of his service life, Selim said he first worked at the Bangabandhu's house as a staff of Bangabhaban.

He said that he had been transferred twice to Bangabhaban after the killing of Bangabandhu. "The third time, I have been transferred to Bangabhaban two years ago from Uttara Ganabhaban at Nature".

Selim said he gave his statement to the investigation officer on October 3, 1996 at the Bangabandhu's Dhanmondi residence.

The PW 3, however, said that he did not know when the case was filed, as the state defence counsels tried to establish that his statement was recorded before the FIR was lodged.

Jamuna Bridge may be ready

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of the rail track and the gas pipeline will be hanging along the edge of the bridge.

During the day-long visit to the JMB site, sponsored by the Dhaka office of the World Bank, a co-financier of the project, it was found that 21 of the 49 spans of the bridge each measuring 99.4 metres, had already been constructed.

Construction of the 21 spans each consisting of 25 segments has resulted in completion of 21 km stretch of the bridge through which construction materials were being carried by heavy vehicles. Besides, all the 49 piers, having an average length of 83m with 72m below 'bed level', leading to the spans have been 'affixed'. Along with the engineers, the journalists were also taken over the completed portion of the bridge in cars.

Finishing touches were being given to the 3200m east guide bund and the 3100m west guide bund. Sixty-nine per cent of the 14.74 km east approach road at the Elenga (Bhuapur) point has been completed and the 16.92 km west approach road at the Nakla point is nearing completion. Besides, the river training work and reclamation have been substantially completed.

The JMB report says 80 per cent of the work as regards construction of physical components of the main bridge and the approach viaducts is complete, but with a six and a half months overrun to the original construction period following prayer by the contractor concerned.

The report also reveals overrun to the original period — 14 months and nine months respectively for the east and the west approach roads. It's only the river training work which was completed by the original deadline.

On the rate of progress, it said construction work of the main bridge, its approach viaducts and the west road approach is progressing on schedule while work for the east road approach is ahead of the schedule.

Construction of the east road approach is likely to be completed by February '98 while that on the west side by December this year, said Nabinoor Islam Khan, an engineer.

Asked if political programmes like hartals affected construction of the bridge, the deputy project manager replied in the negative. "We did not stop work even in the days of continued non-cooperation during the tenure of the past government," he said.



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Bad days for comic books

SAN DIEGO (California), July 21: These are strange days in the world of Batman. Spiderman and others who dress in capes and masks to fight crime, reports AP.

Comics sales in the United States have plummeted. Collector stores are closing. A few years back, DC Comics even killed off Superman — and then brought him back to boost sales.

For four days ending Sunday, the largest US comic convention, Comic-Con International, drew 35,000 people. Creators and fans alike pondered the future of the industry.

"Comics as we've known them are at a very interesting turn in the road," said Will Eisner, creator of 'The Spirit', and the man whose trophy, 'The Will Eisner Award', is the Oscar of the comics field.

"They have ceased to be a novelty as a form, and they are undergoing a tectonic shift from form to content," he said.

New-style comics — look at 'Too Much Coffee Man' (a bug-eyed character who meditates on the agony and ecstasy of caffeine) — vie with standards that date back to World War II.

At the convention, muscled Batman imitators shared floor space with adult-themed 'bad girl' comics, hocked by scantily clad women with tattoos in places that would make a biker blush.

Pvt TV channel in current fiscal year

The government has agreed, in principle, on the operation of private television channel in the country, said State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed yesterday.

Talking to members of the Overseas Correspondents' Association of Bangladesh (OCAAB) at the National Press Club yesterday, he said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had already approved it and this would be implemented during the current fiscal year.

Prof Sayeed said some 19 foreign and local companies and individuals had already applied for private TV channel. One or more private channels could be allowed on the basis of certain principles which are now being formulated, he added.

The Information Minister reaffirmed his government's election pledges to turn the state-owned radio and television into autonomous bodies.

He said the present government believes in transparency at all levels of society and stressed the need for objective reporting in newspapers shunning the tendency of negative and sensational journalism.

The Information Minister said the members of the OCAAB could play an important role in brightening Bangladesh's image abroad by projecting positive and objective aspects of this country.

He assured that the government would extend all possible cooperation to newsmen in discharging their professional responsibilities.

During the hour-long exchange of opinion, OCAAB members pointed out various problems they are facing in collecting information and official version on important national events.

The minister said he would take necessary steps so that newsmen have more access to information.

President of the OCAAB Zahiduzzaman Faruq presided over the session while General Secretary Farid Hossain gave vote of thanks.

AL rally today

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the 'Shikha Chirantan' and to kill the renowned intellectuals.

UNB adds: A joint meeting of Awami League front organisations will be held at its central office today to chalk out programmes of National Mourning Day on August 15.

Kibria asks bankers Resolve problems of export-oriented industries

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria has asked bankers to work with positive approach for resolving banking problems facing country's export-oriented industries considering their importance in the national economy, reports UNB.

The minister made the call while presiding over a meeting of the managing directors of nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) and private banks in the conference room of the Finance Ministry yesterday.

The meeting, attended by Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed, discussed various problems of entrepreneurs, particularly in ready-made garments (RMG) and leather industry.

Besides, financing large-scale projects through syndication, the problems in financing backward-linkage industry for RMG and the latest situation regarding stocklot were discussed.

The meeting directed the banks to supply adequate and timely for procuring raw materials.

Attaching importance to syndication method, Kibria said it is an effective way of financing large-scale profitable industry.

He told the bankers to remain alert so that no feasible project be rejected for want of adequate funds.

Commerce Minister Tofael Ahmed said bankers have a vital role to play in accelerating export and industrialisation.

He sought sincere cooperation from the bankers in rapid resolution of all problems in this sector.

The meeting was also attended by Finance Secretary, Industries Secretary, Commerce Secretary and Banking Secretary. Senior officials of Bangladesh Bank were present.

IFIC AGM: Writ filed

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The petitioners cited Clause 108 of the Articles of Association of IFIC, which says "A director automatically vacates his seat if he suspends payments to his creditors or compounds with his creditors." In this case, they have suspended payments to IFIC Bank, AB Bank, and other banks and by rescheduling the loans they have compounded with their creditors and hence, their seats as directors have become vacated, it was alleged in the petition.

It was further alleged that they have violated Article 53 of the Article of Association which prohibits borrowing by any director or shareholder from IFIC Bank.

The petitioners also alleged that they have not been served with notice of AGM which, as per law, should be given at least 14 days prior to the meeting. When they contacted the bank officials said there is no need for notice as there was a newspaper advertisement regarding the meeting.

The petitioners further alleged that they have again taken about Tk 12 cr from IFIC to repay their liabilities of AB Bank by a post-dated cheque. They have lost their directorships and also are liable to be removed from their posts under the provisions of the Bank Company Act, the petitioners alleged. But by influencing Bangladesh Bank officials, they have succeeded in dissuading them from issuing any notice for removal, the petitioners alleged.

The petitioners alleged that when this was detected they accepted the liabilities and gone undetected and personal guarantees to repay the loans. On top of it, they took another Tk 100 cr in the name of four companies from AB Bank, they alleged.

The petitioners alleged that Salam Rahman and Sohail Rahman borrowed money in false and fictitious names from the banks of which they are directors and therefore, they acted dishonestly and fraudulently. Such people who have siphoned money from their own banks can not become directors as their appointment is detrimental and harmful to the interest of the bank, depositors and shareholders, they alleged.

Khatib

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gious affairs state minister were present on the rostrum at the ceremony on Friday. The President was scheduled to inaugurate the fortnight long function to mark the Eid-e-Miladunabi.

Trouble broke out during the state minister's speech when some people threw their slippers and shoes towards the dais. They also used invectives. The President left the function without addressing it.

Police later arrested one person, Khalil, who reportedly jumped on the dais during the melee. He was placed on police remand for a day yesterday for interrogation.

He will be produced before the court today.

Police sought permission from the authorities concerned to file a case against a number of persons on charges of sedition and rioting under section 124A.

But the permission from the Home Ministry was yet to reach Motiheel police till 9:30 last night, according to sources.

Sources close to the Khatib said they were not aware of any developments against him. The Khatib was not available for comment.

The ruling Awami League is scheduled to hold a rally at its central office at 4 pm today to protest, among others, the activities of fundamentalist and anti-liberation forces and their threats against intellectuals and to douse the 'Shikha Chirantan' at Suhrawardy Uddayan.

Magurchhara

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said that, it would set up a fence around the gas field and its adjacent 'risky areas' soon for security reasons.

The official, on condition of anonymity, informed that Occidental experts are now preparing for digging several small wells with a view to releasing the gas artificially from the gas traps in the surrounding areas of the main well.

Meanwhile, the Roads and Highways Department began construction of a 3 kilometre by-pass road of the Srimangal-Komolganj road via Padmachhara, said an official, adding that it would take at least one month to complete the road.