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VOL. VII NO. 195 REGD. NO. DA 781

SRABAN 25 1404 BS.

DHAKA SATURDAY, AUGUST 9, 1997

RABIUS SAANI 4 1418 HIJRI

12 PAGES: PRICE TAKA 6.00

Upendra Chakma

reiterates demand for UNHCR involvement

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of Bangladeshi tribal refugees in Tripura Upendra Lal Chakma has reiterated his earlier demand for involvement of the UNHCR in rehabilitation of the returnees refugees in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Unless Bangladesh meets their demands by September 30, they are not coming back, he told reporters in Agartala yesterday after talks with the visiting Bangladeshi delegation. The delegation went to Agartala to try to persuade the refugees to come back home.

According to a BBC report last night, the talks "virtually collapsed," making the return of some 43 thousand refugees uncertain.

The Bangladeshi delegation led by Kalparanjan Chakma, MP, Chairman of the Task Force on Refugees went to See Page 12 col 6

ALCWC finalises programme to observe Aug 15

An emergency meeting of Awami League Central Working Committee yesterday finalised the party programme for observing National Mourning Day on August 15, reports UNB.

Party chief Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting at Ganobhaban, which also reviewed the current political and socio-economic situation of the country, said a press release.

On 15 August 1975, father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family members were brutally killed by a group of ambitious army men at his Dhanmondi residence.

Two girls drown

Two minor girls drowned in separate incidents in the city on Thursday, police and hospital sources said, reports UNB.

Liza Begum, 10, daughter of Abdur Rahman of Kilar Mor in Lalbagh thana, drowned in the river Buriganga on Thursday afternoon while she was bathing. Police recovered her body yesterday.

Also in the same thana, Samina, 8, daughter of Abdus Zahir, drowned in a ditch near her residence at Jagannath Saha Lane on Thursday.

The bodies were sent to morgue for autopsy.

Workers' agitation at Chittagong Port continues

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Aug 8: Coaster Hatch Workers today brought out a procession wearing burial cloth as part of their agitation programme to press home their demand for handling cargo at the outer anchorage.

The processionists paraded Banglabazar and port areas. Later, the hatch workers held a protest rally with their union president Jabol Huq Maji in the chair.

The rally was addressed, among others, by Haji Abu Jafor, Jafor Dobash, Abdul Baten and Kazi Golam Hossain.

The speakers vowed to continue their agitation programme until the demand was met.

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Riot police watch the people coming out through north gate of Baitul Mukarram Mosque yesterday.

— Star photo

House building credit sector in bad shape

By Shehab Ahmed

House building credit sector is facing a crunch as the House Building Finance Corporation (HBFC) has run aground for shortage of funds.

Another lender, in the public sector, the Sonali Bank facing liquidity problems also put a brake on its housing loans.

This left only a small housing company, Delta BRAC Housing Finance Company Limited (DBHFC), and commercial banks operating in the housing credit sector.

The banks are mostly interested in providing loans to the builders of high-rise structures with apartments for sale. Their operations are limited to certain high return areas in the city.

The HBFC's condition is not going to improve soon unless it gets a fresh infusion of funds from the government. This, however, is unlikely in the near future, official sources said.

Although its credits were inadequate to complete a standard multistoreyed building with flats, it played a key role in meeting the fast growing

metropolis' housing needs so far.

The DBHFC, however, is operating on a very small scale since it entered the sector last year with a paid up capital of Tk five crore.

Meanwhile, an application from the proposed National Housing Finance Company

the application was made to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) on January 6 this year. The BB sent the relevant papers to the Finance Ministry for its approval, the sources said.

The clearance is being withheld because of non-banking financial institutions act, 1993 which prohibits directors of one financial institution from becoming director of a similar company.

The NHFC has been proposed with Tk two crore each from its 18 sponsors in Bangladesh and two from overseas Bangladeshis' consortiums in Britain and Zambia.

The local sponsors include three banks — IFIC, AB Bank and UCB. The six insurance companies are Sadharan Bima, Jiban Bima, Reliance, National

(NHFC), a consortium of multi-nationals, banks, insurance companies and overseas Bangladeshis, with a paid up capital of Tk 40 crore and an authorised capital of Tk 200 crore, is awaiting clearance from the authorities.

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Police foil bid to stage protest near Baitul Mukarram

By Staff Correspondent

Police arrested four persons yesterday after dispersing supporters of Islamic Oikyo Jote (IOJ) who tried to stage a demonstration defying restriction on procession and gathering in and around the Baitul Mukarram national mosque.

The ban was imposed by DMP last week.

Police used batons to disperse the IOJ supporters when they tried to stage a rally at the northern gate of the national mosque after Jumma prayers, chanting various slogans defying the ban.

However, they ran towards the Jatiya Press Club. Later, they reassembled after a brief rally and tried to move towards the mosque again, braving a downpour. Police seized a loud speaker mounted on a rickshaw, charged batons and dispersed them at Purana Palatan crossing.

The four arrested are Obaidul, 22, Rafiqul Huq, 25, Yunus Khan, 35 and Hafez Mohammad Enayetullah, 30.

EC deadline to cancel faulty GSP certificates by Oct 1

The European Commission (EC) has threatened to withdraw the GSP facility if the Bangladesh authorities fail to cancel the inaccurate GSP certificates by October 1, reports UNB.

The deadline was set by the Commission after the government failed to take measures to cancel the 6,910 GSP certificates which, an EC investigation team found, were not issued complying with the rules of origin.

Another demand by the Commission to carry out an investigation by the authorities concerned here into some 8,562 "doubtful" GSP certificates was not also honoured, annoying the EC further.

In a recent letter to the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), EC Director PB Knudsen informed that the Commission would withdraw the preferential tariff measures if the conditions are not met by October 1.

Sources in the readymade garment industry felt that the government should act quickly, cancelling the 6,910 certificates immediately and conducting enquiries to verify the authenticity of the other 8,562 certificates.

When contacted, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed told UNB yesterday that the government is reviewing the situation and he is likely to visit Brussels, the EC headquarters, next month.

The minister indicated that a decision from the government regarding cancellation of the GSP certificates may be delayed until the outcome of his proposed visit.

The top officials of the Commission are now holidaying and they will not be available before the next month for an amicable solution of the nagging problem.

As products from a least developed country (LDC), Bangladesh's readymade garment enjoys a 12.5 per cent duty exemption under the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) which gives the industry an edge over its competitors.

But the readymade garment exports faced a disruption after the EC investigation team found irregularities in issuing GSP certificates following complaints that the rules of origin clause is being violated.

The main victim was the exports of knitwear which is to comply with a three-stage in the country transformation — from production of yarn to finished product — to enjoy the duty exemption under the GSP.

Exports of knit items fetched a total of 763 million US dollar in 1996-97 fiscal, 605 million dollar or 79 per cent of which came from the European markets.

Bangladesh requested the EC to derogate the rules of origin clause of the GSP. Tofael Ahmed visited Brussels in January last and wrote letters to top EC officials in an effort to resolve the problem.

Responding, the EC said it is ready to derogate the law, but the inaccurate GSP certificates should be cancelled first and necessary investigation carried out about the doubtful certificates.

In his letter, Knudsen said under the GSP rules, the concerned country should do the tasks and their results communicated to the customs authorities in the European Community within a maximum six weeks.

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State Minister Abul Hossain claims PM now convinced my visit was justified

By Staff Correspondent

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Syed Abul Hossain has explained his controversial private visit to Singapore for 'medical check-up' last week and claimed he succeeded in 'convincing' the Prime Minister that his visit was justified.

The premier reportedly expressed his annoyance over the visit using the state minister's old passport that identifies him as a businessman, instead of his diplomatic passport.

The matter figured at the cabinet meeting on Thursday. He was summoned by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to explain the matter, prior to the meeting. Contrary to speculations, the issue did not come up at the Awami League Central Working Committee meeting yesterday, a top leader of the party said.

Syed Abul Hossain told The Daily Star last night the Prime Minister was convinced by the explanation he gave her.

"I met the Prime Minister at her office prior to the cabinet meeting on Thursday and explained everything related to the visit. It seemed that she was convinced by the explanation I put forward," the state minister said.

On his request to permit him to go to Singapore again very soon, the Prime Minister, however, asked him not to 'go for the time-being', he said.

Abul Hossain admitted that he had gone to Singapore on

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AL activist shot dead in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Aug 8: Jabbar Fakir, 30, an activist of Rupsha Thana unit of Awami League was gunned down at noon today in an abandoned house at Nalhati.

Police said the killers belonging to outlawed Sarbahara party also killed his father and elder brother at midnight on June 4 this year at village Nandapur.

5 chargesheeted for violating four sisters

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Aug 8: The five persons who were arrested on the night of August 1 on charge of violating four sisters at Sonarpar village under Siddhirganj thana were chargesheeted today under the Women and Child Repression Act, 1995.

Siddhirganj thana police submitted the chargesheet in the court of Sadar Thana Magistrate (South), police said.

Medical tests of the four sisters done on Monday, showed 'positive results' and the reports were handed over to the district police super on the following day, police said.

The chargesheeted persons are: Aminul Islam, Mohammad Selim, Abdul Halim, Ali Akbar and Abdul Ahad Siddhar.

Salman committed suicide, servants tell CID

Three servants, who worked at the house of Salman Shah, yesterday told CID investigators that the filmstar had committed suicide, reports UNB.

All the three — Monwara, Dolly and Abul — denied that they were confined in bathroom and Salman was killed, contradicting what Reza Ahmed said in his confessional statement to the court.

Monwara was brought to the office of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) from a city slum while Dolly from Comilla and Abul from Nawabganj.

They once again narrated the 'suicide episode' of the popular hero. Earlier, they gave similar statements to Ramna police and the Detective Branch.

The three were later freed by the CID.

Teenaged girl raped in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Aug 8: A

teenaged girl was allegedly raped by her cousin today at Palegram village in Bashkhal thana, reports UNB.

Sources said one Sarwar, son of Guramia of the same village, forcibly entered the residence of Shahaz Begum, 14, at noon and raped her. Shahaz's mother was out of the house during the incident.

Shahaz and her mother went to the thana to register a case in this connection, but the police refused to accept the case without any evidence.

When contacted, local police declined to admit the incident.

Water crisis

Barricade, clash with police in Bangshal: 25 hurt

By Staff Correspondent

At least 25 people including seven policemen were injured when about one hundred residents of Bangshal in the city clashed with police while demonstrating against water crisis in the area yesterday.

The agitated local people put barricade on the busy North-South Road at the Bangshal Crossing for about three hours till 3 pm. They took to the streets complaining that there was no water supply in the area for two days.

Police said the clash began as the demonstrators pelted bricks on police who tried to remove the road barricade. A police vehicle was also damaged.

At one stage police lobbed tear gas shells and resorted to baton charge to disperse the demonstrators.

The injured people were treated at local clinics. The injured people were treated at local clinics. The injured people were treated at local clinics.

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Residents of city's Bangshal area demonstrating yesterday demanding smooth supply of water by WASA.

Rupsha Bridge: Japanese team visits soon to study project

An official Japanese fact-finding mission will visit Bangladesh shortly to study Japanese aid for the construction of the Rupsha Bridge.

A Japanese diplomat here told UNB that the mission's visit will be a follow-up to the official talks between Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Japanese counterpart Ryutaro Hashimoto.

The talks were held on Tokyo in early June when Hasina went to economic giant Japan on a six-day official visit.

Hirotugu Haguda, Counselor in the Japanese embassy, said that Prime Minister Hashimoto had promised Hasina to despatch a fact-finding mission on Rupsha bridge.

Although no specific date for the visit has been finalised yet, but the mission is certainly coming to Dhaka by December this year, he said.

Evaluating Sheikh Hasina's trip to Japan from June 1-6, Haguda said the visit was very

well-timed and appropriate as it marked the silver jubilee of Dhaka-Tokyo diplomatic relations.

The Japanese diplomat said Bangladesh Prime Minister's visit had contributed to the deepening of bilateral and political dialogues between the two countries.

During the official meeting, he said, both Hasina and Hashimoto reaffirmed their intention to bolster the existing friendly relations, intensifying cooperation in various fields.

Haguda said the Japanese prime minister appreciated the reforms undertaken by the new government of Sheikh Hasina on economic liberalisation here. Hashimoto was also impressed by Hasina's earnest desire to work for political stability and economic growth in Bangladesh.

Asked about the Japanese assistance for the proposed Ganges barrage project, Haguda said, "We will look into the matter in consultation with other

donors and international organisations."

He mentioned that during Hasina's visit, an agreement was signed by the two sides on protection and promotion of investment to facilitate more investment from Japan and increase confidence of the Japanese investors in Bangladesh.

He said it's a very important step to provide a legal frame for the Japanese investment activities in Bangladesh. Once the agreement is approved and finalised by the Japanese parliament, investors from Japan will be assured on their investment in Bangladesh and vice versa.

Besides, Soichiro Toyoda, Chairman of Keidanren, the most powerful business association in Japan, has agreed to come to Dhaka responding to the request by the Bangladesh Premier during her meeting with top leaders of Japanese industries and trade.

Replying to a question, Haguda said the visit was very

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'Bangla will be reintroduced in A-level exams'

A British minister has assured that Bangla will be restored as a subject in the 'A' level examination, reports UNB.

British Secretary of State for International Development Clare Short gave the assurance, considering the matter with a positive outlook following a request by Education Minister ASHK Sadique.

The Bangladesh minister, now in London, requested the British Secretary of State on Wednesday to restore the subject in the 'A' level exam to help the Bangla speaking people, said a PID handout.

Bangla has recently been excluded from the 'A' level exam in Britain that created problems, particularly for the Bangladeshis residing in Britain.

The two ministers exchanged views on the education systems of the two countries as well as British assistance to primary and adult education in Bangladesh.

Cong apologises for mosque demolition

CALCUTTA, Aug 8: India's Congress (I) Party apologised here on Friday for failing to stop Hindu fanatics destroying a mosque five years ago which led to 2,000 deaths in religious rioting, reports AFP.

It was the first public apology by the party after thousands of Hindu zealots tore down the 16th-century mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya in December, 1992.

A party resolution at the start of a three-day convention here said "Congress regrets its inability to carry out the legal responsibility in protecting the Babri Mosque".

Hindu nationalists claimed the Babri Mosque had been built on the site of a Hindu temple.

The destruction triggered the worst orgy of Hindu-Muslim clashes since India's partition in 1947. Thousands more were injured.

The Congress government's failure to prevent the incident alienated millions of Muslims

from the party, which was voted out of power last year.

Meanwhile, the party launched a scathing attack on India's fragile minority government today and pledged to return to power with its own government, Congress president Sitaram Kesri, who keeps Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral's government afloat with his parliamentary backing, said: "My message today is to strengthen the Congress and wrest power from the opposition."

Kesri told 4,000 delegates at a sports stadium complex here: "This is not our government nor are we of the government."

"We are not partners. We are merely helpers. We reserve the right to criticise and control this government. There can be no compromise on that. I believe strongly that the future belongs to the Congress."

Kesri, whose 40-minute speech was greeted with thunderous applause, added, however, that the Congress

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