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Bangladesh Theatre brought out a colourful procession in the city yesterday to mark its eleventh founding anniversary. — Star photo

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Down to Earth

Fire fright in garments industry

By A S M Nurunnabi

From the incidence of repeated fire outbreaks in city's garments factories, knowledgeable quarters have identified some specific causative factors. To recall the origin of the industry, it may be noted that the industry started from the early part of the eighties. Thereafter, the industry witnessed a fast growth. The contribution of foreign investors in this field has also been significant. It is said that 60 per cent of export earnings of the country comes from this sector. It has opened up new opportunities for employment of a large number of persons, predominantly women who constitute 85 per cent of the workforce in this industry.

The main factors cited as responsible for fire incidents in the industry include defective electric equipment, a wiring, locked main gates of the factories, suffocating atmosphere in the factories, inadequate fire-fighting management and inefficiency in fire control. The major part of responsibility for this poor state of affairs may be laid at the door of the factory owners and concerned agencies for their default in enforcing relevant rules and regulations and the overall attitude of indifference in ensuring fire security.

The Factory Act of 1965 contains clear and specific provisions for ensuring the security of the garments workers. There are also other related rules and regulations, along with labour law. Inspite of all this, it has been observed that, by and large, such regulatory enactments are being violated with impunity by factory owners.

For examples, buildings which are not meant for garments factories are being used as such. Even the approval of the competent authority necessary for establishment of a garments factory is not sought and obtained. Other mandatory requirements such as provision of fire-fighting equipments, fire alarm, alternative exit/escape routes in case of fire or other emergencies are not met in many garments factories.

According to the sources in the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department, 13 fire incidents occurred in 11 garments factories during the period from January, 1997 to October 15. As a result of these fire incidents, 42 garments workers lost their lives and hundreds were injured.

One of the sad aspects is that the fear syndrome about fires sometimes becomes more potent and it is mainly the cause for increasing the number of casualties during the fire incidents. Due to absence of adequate facilities for quick escape, the fear or fright syndrome tends to operate constantly in the minds of the garments workers. In this situation, a fire alarm even for a small fire incident or a false alarm sends the workers to run in panic for escape through the narrow exit routes that leads to stampede. In most cases, it was noted by observers that the casualties are more due to stampede rather than the actual fires.

It has been observed that one of the main causative factor for fires in the factory is electric short-circuit and defective machines. Since all these machines are run by electricity, it is very important that such machines are checked for repairs or servicing at stipulated intervals. But such exercises in most case are hardly undertaken, leading ultimately to fire hazards.

Another complicating factor is that since most of the garments factories are housed in unsuitable and risk-prone buildings on narrow streets, the fire-tenders of the Fire Service fail to reach the spot.

The only redeeming feature is that some of the factory owners have lately become more conscious of their responsibilities in this regard. It is reported that they have already adopted realistic measures for the prevention of fires. With this objective, the workers are being given suitable training for dealing with such situations. On each floor of the factory, fire-fighting equipment has been installed and the workers have been given training how to handle such equipment. On each floor, emergency telephone numbers have been inscribed and alternative staircases for quick escape and fire-suppressing materials like sand and thick coverlets have been provided.

The bottom line is that fear syndrome about possible outbreaks of fire in garments factories is more damaging in its psychological effects on the workers and as such adequate practical measures need be taken to dispel such fears, apart from adoption of adequate fire-fighting mechanisms.

US aircraft carrier

From Page 1
The crisis is serious. France wants a way out of the crisis, but its all in the hands of the Iraqis'.

Clinton said, 'The sanctions will never be lifted as long as he does not comply' with the UN resolutions.

Meanwhile, the US embassy in Kuwait has asked American citizens to keep their passports ready and remain in touch with the embassy in view of the escalating tensions over Iraq.

'We are monitoring the situation with Iraq closely,' said a statement issued by a US embassy official. A copy of the Nov 10 statement was obtained today by The Associated Press.

In view of current tensions we reiterate our standing advice to all American citizens to keep required documentation available and to maintain contact with the embassy,' the statement said.

France today used unusually harsh diplomatic language to press Saddam Hussein to back down in his standoff with the United Nations over weapons inspections, but stopped short of explicitly calling for 'use of force against Iraq.'

Aricha ferry service disrupted for 5 hours

MANIKGANJ, Nov 14: Aricha-Natakholia ferry service was disrupted for five hours today due to thick fog, reports BSS.

Four big ferries — Shahjalal, Amanat Shah, Bir Shreshtha Jahangir and Keramat Ali — with hundreds of passengers and vehicles were stranded on the river Jamuna from 3 am to 8 am today. BIWTC officials said.

Besides, 1,800 vehicles were stranded at the Aricha, Natakholia and Daulatdia ferry ghats till this afternoon due to the dislocation of ferry service.

PM: Tungipara

From Page 1
also create problems during the UP elections.

She called upon the people to remain alert against any trouble, saying the polls might be disturbed by 'those who do not want peace and can kill people and police without reason.'

People's voting rights have been established in the country after a long struggle. Hasina said urging all to remain vigilant so that none can snatch the right again and disturb the electoral process.

The people will have to remain alert so that none can snatch away their rights of franchise which they have established at a huge cost,' she added.

The Tungipara Thana Health Complex having a 31-bed modern hospital has been built at a cost of Tk 8.82 crore with financial assistance from the World Bank.

Khaleda: AL has no right

From Page 1

in the Jatiya Sangsad was addressing a big public meeting at the NS Government College ground here today. The meeting was organised by the district unit of BNP to protest the killing of BNP leader Zahid Hossain Mukul who was also the chairman of Bipro Belgharia Union Parishad in Sadar thana.

Mukul was killed by unidentified assailants on October 28 while he was returning home after election campaign.

The BNP chief blamed Awami League terrorists for the killing and termed the present government as 'terrorist'.

She said, the ruling party has failed to provide security to lives and property of the people. The BNP chief also condemned 'all other acts of terrorism by AL and police' and demanded trial of those responsible for the killing of Zahid.

Turning to the CHT issue, Begum Zia said, 'We will foil the conspiracy against CHT the same way we fought for independence in 1971.'

She said, 'the agreement with the terrorists will go against the country and its interest... If it is signed, the Kaptai hydro-electric and Raazan thermal power plants and Chittagong seaport will be threatened.'

Referring to the accusation of obstructing peace, the BNP chief said, 'We obviously want peace, but not by selling out the country.'

Chaired by the district unit convenor Advocate Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar, the meeting was also addressed by Aminul Haq, Akbar Hossain, Shahajahan Shiraj, Quazi Golam Morshed MP, Fazlur Rahman Patal MP, RCC Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, Nadim Mostafa MP, Alamgir Kabir MP and Shirajul Islam Shiraj.

After the meeting, Begum Zia addressed a workers' meeting at Natore circuit house in the evening. She will address public meeting at Joypurhat tomorrow.

Cabin crew

From Page 1
different items. The customs officials made a seizure list at that time. But the Biman management came to know about the incident after about a week.

Sources concerned said, the Biman Authority, in the show-cause notice had warned the crew of stern action if he failed to give satisfactory reply to the management within three days from the date of issuance of the notice.

A Deputy General Manager of Biman's Administration Wing issued the show-cause notice on November 11.

Dharpur court granted three-day remand for further interrogation.

A police official informed The Daily Star last night that Shajahan, Saiful and Marium were brothers and sister. They, along with some other people hired a house at Dharpur and were involved in illegal dealing of fire arms. The gang rented the first floor of the three-storey building about two months ago.

Demra police arrested the five during a raid on the house at about 11:30 am on Thursday.

Bus strike in Patuakhali from today

From Staff Correspondent
BARISAL, Nov 14: Patuakhali Bus Owners Association and workers union will go on strike from tomorrow demanding withdrawal of a case lodged by executive engineer of the Public Works Department.

The owners and the workers today decided that bus service will remain suspended at the Patuakhali district headquarters from tomorrow.

Clash over Urs: One stabbed to death in Sylhet

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Nov 14: A young man was stabbed to death while five others were injured in a clash over Urs at a shrine at village Tetil last night.

One Shahabuddin sustained serious wounds along with others and succumbed to injuries at the Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital today.

Magurchhara gas well

From Page 1
Block 14.

As it is proceeding with other exploratory works in the three blocks, Occidental has submitted revised budgets for both the PSCs. The revised budget for Magurchhara is under these budgets.

Sources said that the revised budget for Moulvibazar-1 includes Occidental's post disaster expenses — drilling of the relief well, mobilisation or rig, social rehabilitation, etc. — in Magurchhara under Block 14.

The Magurchhara disaster severely damaged inter-district rail and road links, forestry and ecology in about five square kilometre disaster area and some areas of adjacent tea gardens. Besides, the explosion and uncontrolled flow of gas through innumerable sub-soil leakages have polluted the air there.

Now, Occidental is sealing the root of the exploded well by sinking a relief well.

The Energy Minister could not be contacted over telephone despite repeated attempts on Thursday and Friday for his comment on the Probe Committee report and Occidental's revised budget.

Occidental had begun the drilling in that spot on June 2. This is the first drilling by this US company which is operating in the Surma valley under a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) signed on January 11, 1995.

According to experts, the explosion took place due to high pressure which could be avoided if it was properly monitored. Besides, the well was weak in design.

'We could have handled this well and avoided an explosion,' said a geologist working with Petrobangla. 'BAPEX had faced similar situation in Shahabzpur in 1994 and was able to control it.'

Bus service

From Page 1
The government is likely to take its decision on the proposed direct bus service under a Motor Vehicle Agreement between the two countries within a fortnight.

Prior to the joint meeting, officials concerned of the ministries of communications, foreign affairs, finance, home affairs, defence and the internal resource division will meet with the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister's office in the chair to finalise the issue, the sources added.

Earlier in September, a two-day meeting between officials of Bangladesh and India was held in Dhaka for finalising an agreement on proposed Dhaka-Ajmer direct bus service. During that meeting the Indian side sought modification of some provisions of the draft agreement.

They had said that the proposed route would pass through five Indian states for which permission would be required from the respective state governments.

Ctg int'l Trade Fair '97 begins

CHITTAGONG, Nov 14: An eleven-day Chittagong International Trade Fair '97 under the auspices of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCI) began here today, reports BSS.

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain inaugurated the fair as the chief guest while Chittagong City Mayor Alhaj A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury attended the function as special guest.

The function chaired by chamber president Jafrul Islam Chowdhury MP, was addressed, among others, by Vice Mayor of Zibo Municipality under Shandong province, China, Zu Zhe-shan, representative of German Confederation of Small Business and Skilled Crafts (ZDH), Engineer M A Rahman, and senior vice-president Kamaluddin Ahmed.

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'If the government takes these steps, we are eager to hold dialogue and join the proceedings of the Jatiya Sangsad,' said the BNP Secretary General.

When contacted, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim told The Daily Star that according to the Home Ministry report none of the cases against BNP lawmakers, leaders and workers were of 'political nature.'

'Still, we told them (BNP) that names of BNP lawmakers, except three, could be dropped from the cases. Besides, we will consider 14 other cases lodged with various thanas in the city. But, cases for crimes like murder, possession of arms and corruption cases can not be considered.'

At ten last night, Nasim, however, said that he was yet to get any communication from BNP through a messenger, as claimed by Mannan Bhuiyan.

Nasim told this correspondent that parliamentary standing committees on ministries would be formed tomorrow keeping posts vacant for BNP lawmakers. 'Names of AL, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami lawmakers will be incorporated. Posts will be left vacant so that BNP lawmakers can join at a later stage, if not now,' he added.

The 7th Jatiya Sangsad went into its maiden session on July 14 last year. Article 246 of the JS Rules of Procedure reads, 'Parliament shall, as soon as may be, after the inauguration of each new parliament, appoint the standing committee on each ministry.'

2 more dredgers

From Page 1
measure. Out of six, one is stationed at Aricha ghat, one at Natakholia ghat, three at Daulatdia and one near a single route channel' some three km south of Aricha ghat.

Ferry service in the routes was disrupted thrice in 15 days last month due to 'low draft'. Several ferries ran aground in the channels, affecting movement of other ferries.

The authorities concerned were blamed for failure to keep the routes navigable.

Standing bodies

From Page 1
The fund could be used in international market research and for training of personnel, organising workshops and conducting survey for overall development of the garments industry, they noted.

Quddus informed the WB team of the difficulties they had been facing in increasing export and expanding the market. He sought cooperation from WB and other international financial organisations in this regard.

He stressed the need for removal of different barriers to expansion of export and for a 'quota-free' international market.

Service marks

From Page 1
that the service mark will be eligible for registration by this Act as trade mark.

Enhancement of penalty for various types of infringement of trade mark has also been proposed.

The LC took up the review of the Trade Marks Act and the Merchandise Marks Act on representations made by various bar associations.

Albright

From Page 1
leave the following afternoon.

On arrival, she will be received by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad and will be taken to Sonargaon Hotel, where she will be staying.

The following meeting, Abdus Samad Azad will call on her at the hotel suite and hold official talks on matters of bilateral interest.

The Secretary of State will have a working breakfast meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Ganabhaban, beginning at 8:30 am.

Foreign Ministry officials said the talks will focus on strengthening bilateral relations and expanding commercial ties with particular reference to the energy sector.

Dhaka last year exported to the US goods worth 1.3 billion dollars, 65 per cent of which comprised garments. It imported items worth around 300 million dollars, mainly comprising machinery and industrial products.

Albright will also call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed and meet Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Begum Khaleda Zia.

The Secretary of State will also visit a city school for child garments workers run by the Bangladesh garments industry. Meanwhile, extensive security measures are being taken for the visit of the Secretary of State. An advance US security team is due to arrive in the city shortly, which will coordinate security matters with local officials and agencies.

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Garments workers brought out a torch procession in the city yesterday in support of their strike on November 80. — Star photo