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Road transit accord with Nepal renewed

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed yesterday told the Jatiya Sangsad that the road transit agreement with Nepal has been renewed for one year after India agreed to allow use of its territory for transportation of goods between the two countries following the expiry of the transit agreement on March 1, reports BSS.

Replying to a question by Treasury Bench member Abdul Latif Mirza, he said if the transit agreement with Nepal can be implemented fully, it would earn a huge revenue for the Chittagong, Chalna and Mongla ports.

Tofael said that due to the policies of the past BNP government regarding bilateral

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32 Bangladeshi crew rescued from sinking ship

PRETORIA, Mar 11: South African Air Force helicopters rescued the 33-member crew — 32 of whom are from Bangladesh — of a Maltese-registered freighter on Tuesday as it was sinking off the southern coast, authorities said, reports AFP.

Port officials late Tuesday made a last-ditch attempt to salvage the ship, the Golden Union, dispatching a tug to the area in which the vessel was anchored.

The 12,454-tonne freighter, en route from Pakistan to West Africa with cargo of rice, issued a distress call while going down

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Diesel crisis averted

By Staff Correspondent

The government last week averted a diesel crisis which was triggered by an unprecedented increase in demand in the country.

Sources said that while the average demand for diesel was usually around 3500 metric tons in March-April, the demand dramatically shot up to 7000 tons.

At the same time, the supplier, Petroleum Authority of Thailand (PAT), delayed its delivery by 10 days as the government asked it to enhance the supply on a short notice. PAT is currently unloading the diesel in Chittagong port.

Both the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation and Energy Ministry were worried that it would not be possible to avert a diesel crisis and that it would adversely affect farmers and other economic activities, the sources said.

To avert the 'silent crisis,' the government also by-passed its regulations for importing diesel by signing a contract with US company Exxon without any tender for supply of 40,000 tonnes of diesel on urgent basis. Exxon will supply

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Kailashtila LPG plant begins trial operation

From Iqbal Siddiquee

SYLHET, Mar 11: Trial operation of the Kailashtila LPG Plant began yesterday.

The plant was completed eight months back but the trial operation was delayed for slight modification of the plant and the pipeline from the Sylhet Gas Fields Limited.

The modification was necessary to adapt the plant and the pipeline to a "change in the quality" of gas extracted from Kailashtila well number two, engineers at the plant said.

With the modification, the percentage of extraction of LPG and production of petrol and

diesel will rise now.

They said that the plant is to produce 5000 tons of LPG per year by fractionating the natural gas brought from the Kailashtila well number-2. Two thousand LPG cylinders will be bottled every day.

The plant will also produce 7600 tons of petrol and 8400 tons of diesel as by-product per year. The by-products will be sold to the SGFL.

This will be the first LPG plant in the country to liquefy natural gas for bottling. The gas available in the area, unlike that found in Comilla, Chit-

tagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts is suitable for producing LPG as it is rich in propane and butane, said an official of Petrobangla. LPG is now being produced by the Eastern Refinery in Chittagong from the by-product of oil.

The Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) constructed the plant at a cost of Tk 24 crore.

The bottled gas will be made available to rural people in greater Sylhet region and other parts of the country to meet the demand for fuel.



Sammilita Nari Samaj staged a demonstration in front of the police headquarters in the city yesterday protesting the rape of a minor girl. —Star photo

Magisterial body to probe rape of minor girl, JS told

By Staff Correspondent

The government has formed a magisterial committee to probe the rape of a minor girl in the CMM's Court building in the city on Tuesday, Home Minister Rafiqul Islam told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The committee is headed by the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, the minister said while making a statement on the issue.

He said the magisterial probe body has been formed, instead of a police enquiry committee, for the sake of getting correct information on the incident as a policeman was accused

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Rape of minor girl: PM urged to ensure action

By Staff Correspondent

Different women's organisations yesterday protested the rape of a six-year-old girl in the police control room at the CMM's Court building in the city Tuesday.

The women's bodies urged the Prime Minister and the Home Minister to ensure proper action in this regard.

Sammilita Nari Samaj (SNS) staged a demonstration in front of the Police Headquarters in the afternoon. The Samaj activists held a rally and chanted slogans accusing policemen of the rape.

"Stop police barbarism," read one of the placards carried by the Nari Samaj activists. Other placards carried slogans like "Try the policemen who raped the girl." "We want to know why child rape occurred

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Take stern action against culprits: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the authorities concerned to find out the culprits responsible for the violation of a minor girl in the CMM court area and take punitive measures against them, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister also gave Tk 10,000 for the treatment of the girl and directed the authorities to shift her to the CMH for better treatment.

Hasina, who agreed to bear all expenses for the girl's treatment, also directed them to take all possible care of her.

Aged about six years, Tania was allegedly raped in a police control room in the CMM court building on Tuesday afternoon.

None arrested

Police could not arrest anyone in connection with the rape of a six-year-old girl inside a police control room at the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court building Tuesday afternoon.

Meanwhile, the injured girl, Maria (not her real name), was under treatment at the Dhaka CMH. She was shifted from the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday evening.

Accompanied by her father, a traumatised Maria was gradually improving. Maria, whose mother died about one year ago, used to sleep in different verandahs of the CMM's court building.

Kotwali police had picked up a boy who used to play with Maria from the court building area yesterday afternoon. Police said the boy was in Kotwali thana custody with his mother till last night. Police sources said the minor boy might have witnessed Tuesday's rape incident.

There was a barrack accommodating 15 policemen of Dhaka district police near the

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Narsingdi Jubo League worker shot dead

NARSINGDI, Mar 11: A local Jubo League worker was gunned down here today following intra-party conflict, police said, reports UNB.

The dead was identified as Osman 25, an activist of Shibbagh unit of Jubo League, the youth front of Awami League.

Police said Kabir Sarkar, allegedly dragged Osman out of his house at Shibbagh at 7.30 am, took him to Prasanta Shahar Bari area and killed him.

Two factions of Jubo League led by Kabir and Osman were in conflict for a long time over establishing supremacy in the area.

As the news of killing of Osman spread, his supporters attacked and ransacked the residence of one Bacchu contractor.

They also attacked a printing press of Kabir and set it on fire, leaving 20 workers injured. One of them, Ismail, was admitted to Sadar Hospital in a critical condition.

The body was sent to Sadar Hospital for autopsy. A case was filed with Sadar thana.

JS discussion on Presidential speech It gives direction to nation: AL A round-up of govt's work: BNP

By Staff Correspondent

Lawmakers of the Treasury and the Opposition benches yesterday came up with differing views on the Presidential address in the Jatiya Sangsad. Two Awami League MPs, two from BNP and one from JP took part in the debate on the Presidential address, delivered on the opening day of the current session of the House.

Awami League lawmakers hailed the Presidential address while BNP legislators criticised it. The Jatiya Party MP was critical of the Presidential address as well as of the AL and

the BNP.

Alhaj Mokbul Hossain of AL said that while projecting the development activities of the government the President had given a sense of direction to the nation for future development.

Mokbul appreciated congratulatory the Home Minister for "eradication of hoodlams and extortion from his (Mokbul) Dhanmondi-Mohammadpur constituency", but observed that the country's transport sector was still held hostage by extortionists. "Any commercial transport plying

on the Dhaka-Rangpur route has to pay toll to extortionists at 18 places", the AL legislator said. The situation should be changed soon.

Alhaj Golam Morshed of BNP criticised the government for its "failure" to project people's sufferings and price hike of essentials. He also criticised the Presidential address for "not saying anything about the country's law and order."

Dr TIM Fazole Rabbi Chowdhury of the Jatiya Party said that the President's speech was

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People are fed up with AL rule: Khaleda

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has said her party will launch movement in and outside Parliament to protest the misuse of the government, reports UNB.

"We will sit in Parliament, we will be in the street as well. We will project the actual situation of the country in Parliament and agitate in the street for people's demands," she said.

Begum Zia was speaking at a joint meeting of Comilla Sadar North and Sadar South branches of BNP held at Comilla Shipakala Academy on Tuesday night.

Referring to the defection of two MPs of the party, Begum Zia said the government is conspiring to weaken the BNP. However, she said during the autocratic regime, many had left BNP, but BNP did not lose anything.

Accusing the Awami League of breaking its election pledges, she said people are fed up with its rule.

"In every sector, the government has failed," she said, adding that since radio and television are under the government's control, the ruling party is taking all credits of unfinished tasks of the BNP by cutting red tapes and unveiling the plaques.

Referring to the last general elections, she alleged that Awami League has come to power by snatching the victory of BNP in the 1996 elections.

"We had expected a fair election. We could not understand the conspiracy and vote rigging of Awami League," she said.

Presided over by Comilla South BNP president Mrs Rabeya Chowdhury, the meeting

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JS tidbits

By Nazmul Ashraf

BNP lawmaker M Saifur Rahman wanted to know in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday whether Sylhet Division had been abolished or included in Chittagong Division.

He raised the question in a lighter vein, showing a printed list of the country's administrative divisions, excluding Sylhet Division. The former finance minister hails from Sylhet.

The list giving divisionwise breakdown of thanas selected for construction of bridges was presented in the House by State Minister for Relief and Disaster Management Tahukdar Abdul Khaleque in response to a question.

Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury, who also is from Sylhet, smilingly told Saifur Rahman, "I also share your

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We are outraged, and we must act together to stop it

By Mahfuz Anam

A six-year-old girl was raped, and that also within the premises of the CMM's court. If there was ever a moment to feel outraged by the sheer monstrosity of an act, it is now. If there is even an iota of humanity left in us, if the last traces of decency has still not abandoned us, if we want to cling to even a pale shadow of the cultural heritage that is ours, then let us all together express an outrage that should bring about a national unity and solidarity in truly rooting out this evil from our midst.

We have been noticing a gradual rise of rape and violence against women and children in recent years. This has resulted from a long-standing neglect of the issue of violence against women and also because of a shameful refusal by the authorities to impart exemplary punishment to the perpetrators of these vice crimes.

If we look back over the last five years, and more recently over the last two, we cannot recall a single instance where a rapist, especially a child rapist, has been given any punish-

ment, leave alone an exemplary one, which may act as a deterrent for others. A combination of half-hearted efforts, bungled legal measures, and manipulation by powerful and vested groups have together made a mockery of the process of justice and greatly eroded public faith in the capacity of the societies to protect our women and children.

Just a few weeks back a nine-year-old was raped, which most national dailies reported extensively. Around the same time a

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Plan to increase telephone lines from 5 lakh to 13 lakh

By Rafiq Hasan

The government has planned to increase the number of telephone lines to 13 lakh in the country from about five lakh now within the next two years.

This will raise the ratio of telephone lines to 1:100 people from existing 0.4:100 people.

The new lines will have both domestic and overseas connection facilities, according to officials of the telecommunications ministry.

The target was fixed in the National Telecommunications

Policy '97 which has already been finalised and is likely to be placed before the next cabinet meeting.

Asked whether this ambitious target could be achieved within two years, Post and Telecommunications Secretary Mahub Kabir said it will be possible because work of setting up about 4 lakh new lines have already been completed.

"These new lines will be given connection very soon," he said and hoped that the rest of the lines will be set up within

the stipulated period.

The ten-point draft policy has suggested formation of a Telecommunication Regulatory Commission and given guidelines for extension of telecommunication facility up to village level. It envisages raising the ratio to 10:100 people.

The policy has emphasised improvement of the telecommunication system in the private sector and creation of a competitive environment for expansion and improvement of

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Mushrooming factories, medical centres in city Authorities unconcerned about public health hazards

By Morshed Ali Khan



Welding shops and other commercial establishments in the city's residential areas pose a threat to public health. —Star photo

The authorities are continuing to issue trade licences to small industries, workshops and medical diagnostic centres to be located in the city's residential areas, ignoring threat to public health due to possible emission of toxic gases and radiation.

The problem has remained unattended and many blamed the lack of zoning and government control over the un-planned growth of industries and business centres.

Officials of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Department of Environment (DOE) and Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) admitted that they had no control over the unabated growth of hazardous medical diagnostic centres, industries or workshops in the city.

They said, most of these services or workshops were not equipped with safety measures and people living in the vicinity were constantly exposed to harmful emissions.

Hundreds of welding shops,

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TOMORROW

It was like going back in time when fuel meant firewood collected from forests or dried leaves and discarded paper picked from streets. While there are many individuals for whom time has stood still in terms of their economic position, for most urbanites a day without gas was unthinkable. Read Star Weekend Magazine's Cover Story this week on the gas crisis.

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