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Last span of JMB to be installed today

TANGAIL, Mar 22: Construction of the Bangabandhu Bridge will be completed with the installation of its last span tomorrow, reports UNB.

However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to formally open the bridge on June 23 after construction of the approach roads.

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju will be present at the bridge site tomorrow when the last span will be installed.

Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority will organise a function at Bhuapur in Tangail district to mark the occasion. It will be addressed by the communications minister.

Undertrial prisoner dies at DMCH

By Staff Correspondent

An inmate of Dhaka Central Jail died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday morning.

Police identified the dead as Jalil Khan, 55, son of Zinnat Ali Khan of Kotwali thana in Kushtia.

Jalil was an undertrial accused in a women repression case. He was arrested from Mymensingh. Lalbagh police said.

After he fell sick at the jail yesterday morning, he was admitted to the DMCH where he died at about 9:30 am. The body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy.

An unnatural death case was filed with Lalbagh thana in this regard.

Alleged dacoit killed during gunfight with police in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 22: An alleged dacoit was shot dead during a shootout with a contingent of police and Gachhi High School field last night.

Police said the dead was identified as Md. Harun, 45. Harun was accused in seven criminal cases.

Police said the half-an-hour long shootout began at around 12:15 am between a group of dacoits and a police contingent.

A large contingent of police raided the school field on receipt of secret information while the dacoits gathered there for committing dacoity.

Police recovered one rifle, one gun and some ammunitions after other the dacoits fled from the scene at one stage of the fighting.

Pawar Leader of the Opposition

NEW DELHI, Mar 22: Sharad Pawar, leader of the 141-member Congress Party in the Lok Sabha, has been recognised as the Leader of Opposition in the House by Speaker P A Sangma, reports PTI.

According to a bulletin issued by the Lok Sabha Secretariat, Pawar's recognition has been effected from March 19 under the provisions of Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977.

Congress is the second largest group in the Lok Sabha after BJP which has a strength of 179.

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A STREET LIFE: A destitute mother sleeps on the pavement of a city street while her children take care of themselves. — Star photo by Amran Hossain

Unscheduled debate in JS

Rape is social problem: AL People's life insecure: BNP

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Sangsad yesterday witnessed an unscheduled debate over the country's deteriorating law and order, increasing incidents of rape and price hike of essentials.

Depicting a bleak picture of the country's social and economic situation, the Opposition bench MPs said that the government had totally failed to provide security to lives and assets of the citizens.

In this regard, the Opposition bench MPs had specially mentioned the deteriorating law and order, repression against women and rape of minor girls, and the hike in food price.

The Opposition lawmakers demanded a general discussion on wages to improve the situation.

The Treasury bench members launched a counterattack against the BNP, accusing the party of making substantive contribution to the deterioration of law and order and the price hike of essentials.

On the increasing incidents of rape women and minor girls the ruling party MPs said that it was a social problem and all the political parties should combat the phenomenon on the basis of consensus.

Some seven BNP, four from the Opposition BNP and three from the ruling party, took part in the unscheduled debate.

UNB adds: Maj (ret'd) Hafiz (BNP-Bhola) said prices of everything have gone up while people's life has become 'cheaper' under the Awami League

rule. The government cannot avoid its responsibility by shifting the blame for its failure to the previous government, he said.

Hafiz, who is also a BNP Whip, said if members of parliament cannot discuss the pressing issues of the raping of minor girls, rising prices of essentials and lawlessness, then Parliament becomes meaningless.

He demanded immediate discussion on rape and law and order situation in the country.

Another party Whip, Mashur Rahman (BNP-Jhenidah), said the lowest quality of rice is now selling at Tk 15 per kg, price of salt once shot

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Alleged violation of accord BNP may seek Speaker's intervention

By Nazmul Ashraf

A BNP delegation is likely to meet Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury in a day or two to seek his intervention for proper implementation of the accord signed between the party and the government, highly-placed sources in the party said last night.

A meeting of the BNP National Standing Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party last night decided that the party would "reconsider" whether to continue attending the parliament sessions if the Speaker "fails to take steps" for proper implementation of the accord. The Speaker is also a signatory to the accord.

On Thursday, a four-member BNP delegation also met the Speaker to lodge its complaint against the government's alleged violation of the accord, signed on March 2.

Last night's meeting of the Standing Committee, chaired by BNP chief and Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia, also postponed the party's April 1 grand rally in the capital as the government was yet to announce its decision on selection of a city street for holding public rallies. Besides, inadequate preparations by the party for arranging such a big rally and the coming Eid-ul-Azha were also taken into consideration while postponing the rally, meeting sources said.

Almost all the members of the Standing Committee attended the meeting. Party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan left the meet half-way due to his sickness.

The meeting, held at Begum Zia's Minto Road official residence, lasted for about two hours from 7:30 pm.

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Hunger strike by BUET students

By Staff Correspondent

A group of Architecture students of BUET yesterday started a fast unto death demanding cancellation of the new admission rules in the Architecture Department.

The students started the hunger strike at about 3 pm in front of the university auditorium.

Earlier, they met Education Minister ASHK Sadek at his Jatiya Sangsad office at Noon and submitted a memorandum demanding cancellation of the new admission rules. The minister advised them to accept the new rules for this year only, sources said.

Meanwhile, BUET Registrar Mohammad Shajahan in a notice issued yesterday evening banned all types of gathering, meetings, assembly or stay on the campus and in the areas adjacent to the Central Shaheed Minar. The BUET auditorium where the hunger strike is near the Shaheed Minar.

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Two housemaids raped in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two young housemaids were raped in separate incidents in the city.

A 14-year-old maid was raped allegedly by a young man at the house she worked at Natunpara under city's Demra thana Saturday.

Quoting the FIR filed by the victim with Demra thana yesterday, police said Nazimuddin, a young male member of the family she worked for, raped her when she was washing clothes in the bathroom of the house at about 11 am on the day.

The other inmates of the house were outside during the incident, police said.

Demra police are likely to

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Rape at court bldg Obayedul gives confessional statement

By Staff Correspondent

Obayedul Matbar, accused of raping a six-year-old girl at the CMM's court building on March 10, recorded a confessional statement before a metropolitan magistrate yesterday afternoon.

The court sent Obayedul, 25, to the Dhaka Central Jail after recording the statement under Section 164 of the Penal Code, court sources said.

Metropolitan magistrate AKM Abdus Salam took about four hours to record the statement. Before recording the statement the magistrate told the accused, "you are not bound

Suspect in rape of 7-yr-old girl produced in court

By Staff Correspondent

The suspect in the rape of the seven-year-old school girl in the old part of the city on Friday, was produced before the court and later sent to jail yesterday.

Sutrapur police produced the suspect, Mizanur Rahman, before the court.

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Is the gas reserve big enough for export?

By Shahrier Khan and Inam Ahmed

Does the country have enough gas to export?

The decision-makers of the government and geologists sharply differ over the question. The former say its potential reserve is big enough for pipeline export. But the latter put forward evidences to claim that the reserve is barely sufficient to meet domestic consumption.

Energy Minister Noor Uddin Khan and other decision makers have been repeatedly saying that the country's gas reserve is as large as 50 to 80 trillion cubic feet (TCF).

The decision makers, on several occasions, said that their idea about the possible gas reserve was based on interactions with the foreign oil companies working in country as well as expert opinions.

"Bangladesh is floating on gas," the Energy Minister told The Daily Star several times. "There is so much gas that Bangladesh will become very rich once we start to utilise it."

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria, who also shared the

same view, told The Daily Star last week that since a number of foreign companies would soon start to strike these potential gas fields, the country must immediately start working on gas export.

Otherwise, he felt, the domestic market would be 'oversaturated' with gas supply and it would be a 'total loss' for the country if gas was not exported.

On the other hand, Petrobangla's oil and gas experts and independent geologists sharply differ with the decision makers' estimate of gas reserve. Even predictions from foreign oil companies — including Shell Oil — do not support the estimate given by the decision makers.

According to Badrul Imam, Chairman of the Geology Department of Dhaka University, and experts of Petrobangla, the current proven gas reserve of around 10.8 tcf could at best be doubled if all blocks were explored.

He said that there are currently 21 production wells in the country while the success

ratio of striking gas was one in every three exploratory wells. On this basis, he said that in order to double the present reserve, at least 75 exploratory wells should be drilled.

"But the present statistics on the geological structure show us that there is only 6 such untested prospective spots and even if I am very much optimistic, the number of such spots would hardly exceed 40. Forty spots means only 13 recoverable wells," he said.

Shell Oil predicted in the bid document for the Second Round Block Bidding that there was a possibility of striking new proven gas reserve of 30 tcf.

An expert of the British High Commission at a press conference recently gave a similar figure differing with the present proven gas reserve and said that Bangladesh now had 8 tcf of gas.

Petrobangla's gas experts are very cautious about quantifying the amount of potential gas reserve saying that any such forecast could only create confusion. They said that per the

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23 rape incidents in two weeks

By Masud Arif

At least 23 women and minor girls were raped and three of them were killed in last two weeks in the country.

The victims included girls aged between six and ten, school girls, teenaged garments workers and housewives, according to reports.

The incidents occurred in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Jessore, Bogra, Sylhet, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Savar.

Incidents of rape sharply increased in the last two years. Police records showed 1,336 rape cases in 1997, 525 in 1996 and 718 during 1993-96.

Talking to this correspondent, a senior official of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday said there should be exemplary punishment for the culprits through speedy trial.

Chargesheets against a number of persons accused in rape cases had been submitted

to courts but "those were stuck in the process of trial."

A high ranking police official, however, said records of less number of rape cases earlier does not mean there were fewer such incidents. "May be, more incidents are reported to police now than before. People are feeling encouraged to inform police about any repression against women," he said.

He explained that of the reasons for increase in incidents of rape may be eviction of brothel houses in many places in the country.

The only red-light area in Dhaka city, which was known as Kandu Patti at English Road, was evicted last year.

There was a public outcry after a six-year-old girl was raped inside a police barrack on the first floor of the Dhaka Metropolitan Magistracy building on March 10.

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BNP demands JS discussion on gas export

By Staff Correspondent

Former Commerce Minister M Shamsul Islam, speaking on a point of order in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, criticised the government for its "future plan" to export gas to India.

Quoting a Daily Star report published on the day on the government plan, the BNP lawmaker demanded a full scale discussion in the parliament prior to taking a decision on the issue.

None from the Treasury Bench rose to contradict the report while Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid, who was in the chair, asked the Opposition member if the government was really planning to export gas.

Sajeda should quit for untrue statement in JS: Obaidur

By Staff Correspondent

BNP lawmaker KM Obaidur Rahman has asked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to "arrange the resignation" of Environment and Forest Minister Syeda Sajeda Choudhury for what he said issuing an untrue statement in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Rising on a point of order, Obaid challenged the minister's statement the other day claiming that the government had stopped permitting extraction of timber from the reserved forests.

Showing a document, the BNP legislator told the House that one Waliur Rahman was given the permit of extracting 50,000 maunds of timber from the Sundarbans in January. Waliur Rahman later sold the permit to one of his relatives, the BNP MP claimed.

Obaid also blamed the Environment and Forest Minister for destroying the environment of the country instead of protecting it.

The minister was, however, not present in the House at that time, but the PM was.

Convening body of DU JCD dissolved

By DU Correspondent

The Convening Committee of the Dhaka University unit of the Jatiyatibadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) was dissolved yesterday.

In a statement last night, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anney and Habib-Un-Nabi Sohel, the president and general secretary of the JCD, said that the council of the DU unit would be held on April 20.

A five-member preparatory committee has been formed for successful holding of the council.

The members of the preparatory committee are: Monwar Hossain Rana, ABM Mosarraf Hossain, Shahabuddin Laitu, Monir Hossain and Nasrullah Khan Junaid.

Members of the dissolved convening committee were not accommodated in the preparatory committee.

200 shops, 25 houses gutted in Rangpur

RANGPUR, Mar 22: About 200 shops and 25 houses were gutted in a devastating fire that broke out last night at Taraganj Bazar, about 32 kms from Rangpur town, reports BSS.

The fire originating from a tea stall immediately engulfed the entire area and gutted the shops and nearby dwelling houses.

16 projects involving Tk 1617.22 cr approved

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday approved 16 projects involving Tk 1617.22 crore including a project aid component of Tk 822.31 crore, reports UNB.

The approval was given at an ECNEC meeting held at the NEC Bhaban with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

The projects include Ramshil Kafulabari Flood Control Project, Bangladesh Canada Farm to market enterprise development project, Pisciculture entrepreneurs project through national package programme, Arsayan housing and self-employment programme for the landless people and Census-2001 project.

Setting up of cantonment public schools and colleges at Dhaka (for girls), Rajendrapur, Mymensingh and Sylhet cantonments, Policy leadership and advocacy for gender equality, construction of Shikharpur and Darika bridges on Faridpur-Barisal highway, Widening of Joydevpur, Maona-Mymensingh roads, Construction of Mymensingh town bypass road, Modernisation of Dhaka Metropolitan Police control

room, Construction of Archaeological building, Procurement of Ten-metre gauge electric locomotive (amended), Rehabilitation of Bangladesh Railway bridges, Maddyapara Hard rock mining project and Biani Bazar-Koilastila gas and condensate pipeline project.

The meeting was informed that under Arsayan project 30,000 houses would be built for the homeless and landless people of the country involving Tk 164 crore. Under the project the inmates would also be given lands for cultivation purpose.

The ECNEC was further informed that a total of 125 houses were built under the project in the coastal areas.

The project, which is a brainchild of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is being executed by the PM's office under the supervision of the Armed Forces Division. The Project is expected to be completed by the year 2002, the ECNEC was told.

Ministers, cabinet secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, concerned secretaries, governor of the Bangladesh Bank and senior officials were present.

Aurora advocates peaceful co-existence

By Staff Correspondent

Lt Gen (ret'd) Jagjit Singh Aurora, now on a visit here, said yesterday that neighbouring countries in the region should strive for peaceful co-existence.

"War can give temporary solution. After having gone through wars, time has now come for the neighbours to live peacefully and seek sustainable solution to problems," said the retired Indian General who had accepted the surrender of the Pakistani occupation forces led by Gen. Niazi on December 16, 1971 in Dhaka. Aurora was the chief of the Bangladesh-India Joint Command during the Liberation War.

Aurora, now 81, was delivering the 'anniversary lecture' as guest of honour at the Liberation War Museum at Segun Bagicha in the city. The museum, established on this day in 1996 under private initiatives, celebrated its second founding anniversary yesterday.

Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) Ak Khandakar who was Deputy chief of Bangladesh Liberation Force during the war, and Prof Anisuzzaman, both members of the museum's 'Authentication Committee' also addressed the function while the museum's



General (Rtd) Jagjit Singh Aurora speaking at a discussion on the premises of Muktiyoddha Jadughar (Liberation War Museum) in the city yesterday. — Star photo