

PCJSS hails passage of CHT bills

From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 10: Parliamentaary Chattogram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) has thanked the government for the passage of CHT Regional Council Bill and three other amendment bills on the three hill districts by the Jatiya Sangsads.

In a press release signed by PCJSS leader Rupayan Dewan said that the misgivings regarding the CHT bills have been removed as government has assured to amend the inconsistencies in the passed bills by the first week of June.

PCJSS urged all political parties along with the government to extend their support and cooperation to remove the inconsistencies in the CHT bills and to help implement the CHT peace accord.

Hasina urges G-8 to address concerns of LDCs

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon the industrialised nations to give due consideration to the concerns of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), reports BSS.

In a letter to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who is the current chairman of G-8 (Group of Eight industrialised states), Sheikh Hasina said while the process of globalisation presents an unprecedented opportunity for growth and prosperity, it may also accentuate inequality in poorer countries.

Expressing apprehension over the negative impact of globalisation, she said unless effective preventive and remedial measures were taken, certain parts of the world could become marginalised, the letter said.

Detention of 11 BNP activists declared illegal

A division bench of the High Court yesterday declared illegal the detention of 11 opposition BNP activists who campaigned against the CHT accord, reports BSS.

The bench comprising Justice K M Hasan and Justice M Latifur Rahman made the rules absolute after hearing eleven separate writ petitions.

Barrister Moudud Ahmed appeared on behalf of the petitioners, said a press release.

The detenus Jubo Dal leaders in Khagrachari were Alaudin Alal, Hanif Miah, Sheikh M Ibrahim, Masud Rana, M Shahjahan, Harunur Rashid, Nurun Nabi and Abdul Latif and JCD leaders Golam Sarwar Shilum, Badul Alam Bodu and Sukumar Barua.

Tk 12 lakh worth of gold bars seized at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

The Customs authorities at the Zia International Airport seized 25 gold bars worth about Tk 12.28 lakh from a couple, passengers of a Saudi flight, yesterday.

Airport sources said out of suspicion they scanned the luggage of the couple who arrived from Saudi Arabia on a Saudi flight which landed at ZIA at 10 am.

After ascertaining existence of gold inside their luggage, officials recovered 25 gold bars weighing 10 tola each from their luggage, the sources added.

A departmental case was filed with Customs House in this regard.

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Train collision kills 17 in Laksam

Ctg Mail rams detached wagons of goods train: Compartment smashed, engine damaged

By Staff Correspondent

At least 17 people were killed and 30 injured when the Chittagong Mail from Dhaka rammed into some detached wagons of a goods train at a place between Naoti and Nangolkot railway stations in Laksam early morning yesterday.

Eleven wagons had got detached somehow and were standing on the track off Naoti station while the engine and some wagons of the goods train reached the station. The driver and the station authorities did not know that some wagons were left behind.

Sixteen of the victims died on the spot when the passenger train hit the standing wagons with a big bang at 4:52 am, badly damaging the engine and smashing a second class compartment next to it, railway sources said. Six of the eleven wagons were also badly damaged and derailed.

The Chittagong Mail left Dhaka the night before hit the wagons nearly half an hour after the Tejgaon-bound goods train had reached Naoti station, leaving behind 11 out of its 52 wagons.

Railway sources said, the 11 wagons from the rear portion of the goods train, coming from Chittagong Port, had got detached at a place some two kilometres from Naoti, with the driver knowing nothing about it. The goods train had reached Naoti station at 4:18 am and was standing there to allow the Chittagong Mail to pass.

Getting clearances from Naoti rail station, the Chittagong Mail advanced only to face the disaster.

As an immediate action, the Station Master on duty at Naoti and the guard of the goods train have been placed under suspension.

The sources said it is being suspected that the guard of the goods train, whose guard brake was left with the detached wagons, might have been sleeping at that time.

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sonnel, Abdur Rashid Majumder, and two women. Another woman identified as Anowara Begum, 50, died at Nangolkot Thana Health Complex (THC), the sources said.

Of the injured, seven were rushed to Comilla Medical College Hospital, eight to Nangolkot THC, three others to Laksam THC while the rest were released after first aid.

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Wreckage of bogeys of the passenger and the goods train.

— Star photo

JS session likely to be prorogued tomorrow, BNP unlikely to return

By Nazmul Ashraf and Reaz Ahmad

The current session of the Jatiya Sangsads is likely to be prorogued on Tuesday with little possibility of BNP's return to the House.

Lawmakers of the main opposition BNP, who had staged a stormy walkout protesting the Speaker's decision limiting discussion on the CHT bills on May 3, did not go back to the House till May 6 when the session was adjourned for five days.

BNP also abstained from attending yesterday's meeting of the JS Business Advisory Committee (BAC) that decided on the prorogation and the session was adjourned for the remainder of the current session, meeting sources said.

Asked about his party's abstention from yesterday's BAC meet, Chief Whip of the Opposition Khandakar Delwar Hossain attributed this to the Speaker's non-compliance with their request to convene the BAC meeting before the CHT bills were passed.

Holding a meeting after the purpose was served is nothing but an eye wash ... They did everything in the House unilaterally and deprived us of our

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PM visits train accident victims, assures help

ASHKAMTA, Comilla, May 10: After hearing the news of early morning train accident, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina rushed to the spot today to console the survivors and see the destruction caused by the tragic mishap, reports UNB.

At least 17 people were killed and some 50 others injured in the accident which took place near Naoti Station in Laksam.

Cancelling her scheduled programmes in the capital, the Prime Minister flew in Nangolkot, three kilometres from the scene of the accident, and visited the Thana Health Complex where eight seriously injured people were receiving treatment.

The critically injured passengers were referred to the Comilla general hospital.

At Nangolkot thana health complex, Hasina expressed her sympathy to the injured people who were groaning in pains in the hospital beds. She asked the attending doctors to take proper care of the victims.

From the hospital the Prime Minister went to the spot, Ashkamta, where the twisted compartment of the passenger train was left beside the track. Four bogies of the goods train were also derailed to the accident.

The progress of reforms in the financial sector and public administration were also seriously criticised by the donor document. The financial sector remains fragile. Capital inadequacy is currently estimated at Tk 133 billion and this will rise if fundamental reforms are not undertaken immediately. The government has been attempting to reform the financial sys-

'Business confidence appears fragile' Donors blame political situation, leadership

Star Report

Donors sit with the government tomorrow to review the economic progress against the backdrop of what they said lack of business confidence because of confronting political situation and frustration about political leadership.

"Business confidence appears to be fragile because of confronting political situation, toll collection and frustration about political leadership both in power and in opposition," said a World Bank-Asian Development Bank joint report prepared for the meeting.

The meeting is scheduled for one day and the WB will lead the donors' community.

The joint report of the WB and ADB called 'Bangladesh Economic Change and the Policy Agenda' is highly critical of the government's economic and reform management. It observed, "The economic environment remains uncertain and a sense of urgency is missing in policy making. The financial sector remains vulner-

able with non-performing loan accounting for a third of loan portfolio."

The report questioned the government's willingness to off-load the loss making SOEs. "The government's position on privatisation remains unclear since very few enterprises have been handed over to the private sector. There is also uncertainty about the direction of economic policy. Privatisation programme is virtually at a standstill, financial sector reform has slowed down, and no significant change has been made in trade regime during the last two years."

The progress of reforms in the financial sector and public administration were also seriously criticised by the donor document. The financial sector remains fragile. Capital inadequacy is currently estimated at Tk 133 billion and this will rise if fundamental reforms are not undertaken immediately. The government has been attempting to reform the financial sys-

tem with donor assistance, but progress has been slow," it noted.

Despite formation of special task forces in the Bangladesh Bank and financial institutions, the loan recovery efforts need to be significantly intensified, it pointed out.

The donors called for enabling legislation and actions against defaulters and said viable institutions should be restructured or closed down.

Public administration reform committee has virtually become non-functional following the resignation of its chairman, they said urging the government to appoint a new chairman.

The donors also pointed out that there has been no progress in setting up efficiency unit in the Prime Minister's Office and regarding appointment of ombudsman. Separation of lower judiciary from the executive is yet to be accomplished.

The WB-ADB document also

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No step yet to exploit gas from 'common reserve' in Salda

By Inam Ahmed and Sharier Khan

The government is showing total indifference to a proposal by BAPEX to exploit gas from a common reserve. Bangladesh geologically shares with India near Kosba in Brahmanbaria.

BAPEX had already struck a small gasfield in Salda river area under Kosba thana in 1996. It has been pursuing the government for about one and a half years to allow it to drill two more wells to expand data base and increase gas supplies from the structure.

But the government hardly took any interest in the BAPEX proposals. Recently, in order to win over the decision makers, BAPEX has revised its proposal — slashing one out of the two proposed wells.

While decisions are stuck up due to bureaucratic red-tapism, the Indian side has been extracting gas from the common reserve through several wells for the last 10 years. The delay is depriving Bangladesh of exploiting the natural resource found in the geological structure named Rokhlyi situated in Salda in the country's eastern part bordering India, according to official sources.

According to energy experts, when such common deposits are found, the countries concerned sit with necessary data to determine who owns how much gas. This is necessary for systematic extraction of the natural resources.

But Bangladesh is not even well equipped with data for such meetings with India because its data base is inadequate. "We have information gathered from only one well," said a source. "We need to dig more wells to gather enough information so that we can sit for negotiation with India. This is why BAPEX proposed the digging of wells."

This structure starts in In-

dia, enters Bangladesh and then runs back to India by another side," said Dr Badrul Imam, Chairman of Geology Department, Dhaka University. "The natural gas flow will favour India if we don't tap the resources," he noted.

The Salda-1 gasfield was drilled at a cost of Tk 25 crore (or 6.5 million US dollars), a low cost operation by international standard. BAPEX drilled about 2100 metres and hit a 0.23 trillion cubic feet gas reserve.

BAPEX submitted a Tk 105 crore project in mid-1996 for drilling two 'development gas wells' in Salda and an 'exploratory well' in Sikai under a three-year plan. This plan was stopped at the pre-ECNEC level and it was suggested that BAPEX should submit two separate proposals for Salda and Sikai.

Accordingly, BAPEX proceeded with a Tk 60 crore plan for Salda. This passed the pre-ECNEC stage. But at the ECNEC meeting a few months ago, the project was turned down saying 'only one development' could be approved, one source said.

By that time, BAPEX had See Page 12 Col 3

Buddha Purnima today

Buddha Purnima, the most sacred religious festival of the Buddhist Community, will be celebrated across the country today, reports BSS.

The festival commemorates the anniversary of birth of Lord Buddha.

The day is a public holiday. National dailies will publish special features on the occasion while Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television will put up special programmes.

Different Buddhist organisations have drawn up elaborate programmes, including recitation of verses from the Tripitaka, discussions, colourful rallies, Pradip Puja and cultural functions.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia in separate messages conveyed their good wishes to the Buddhist community of the country.

Bangladesh Puja Uddayan Parishad also conveyed its good wishes to the Buddhist community.

Bangladesh Boudhha Krishi Prachar Sangha yesterday launched a three-day programme in celebration of the day at Dharmarajika Buddha Bihar at Kamalapur in the city.

The decision will be taken

only after examining the contract documents," said the State Minister.

Informed sources said the government might go for strong measures against Occidental if any proof of negligence was found for the recent leakage of gas in Lakkatura gasfield.

Meanwhile, sources said that inauguration of the Sangu off-shore gasfield will be delayed further as the operator company, Cairn Energy, is yet to ensure full-pledged operation of the gasfield.

The government and the operator company are yet to reach consensus on the amount of gas to be supplied to the Bakhrambad grid from the field.