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Status of Forces Agreement with US to be signed soon

By M Anwarul Haq

Bangladesh is expected to sign the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the United States of America shortly paving the way for strengthening military cooperation between the two countries, diplomatic sources said.

The agreement will provide legal cover for the movement of US Armed Force personnel and military hardware and supplies to Bangladesh in times of emergencies, particularly during relief operations after natural disasters.

The signing of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) would also enable Bangladesh to receive quick supplies of men and materials which are at the dis-

posal of the US Pacific Command based at Hawaii, the second largest US military operation after NATO, the sources added.

An informed diplomat explained that SOFA would provide a sort of 'umbrella agreement' between the Armed Forces of the two countries to expand military cooperation and create opportunities for participation in bigger training exercises. Bangladesh military is already engaged in training exercises in conjunction with the US Armed Force and the proposed agreement would significantly strengthen military relationship, he said.

After signing of the SOFA,

Bangladesh would be the first country in South Asia to have access to US Defence support services, which is seen as 'very useful' for meeting the country's need during an emergency situation. Besides, Bangladesh would be able to obtain 'vital logistical support,' a senior official pointed out.

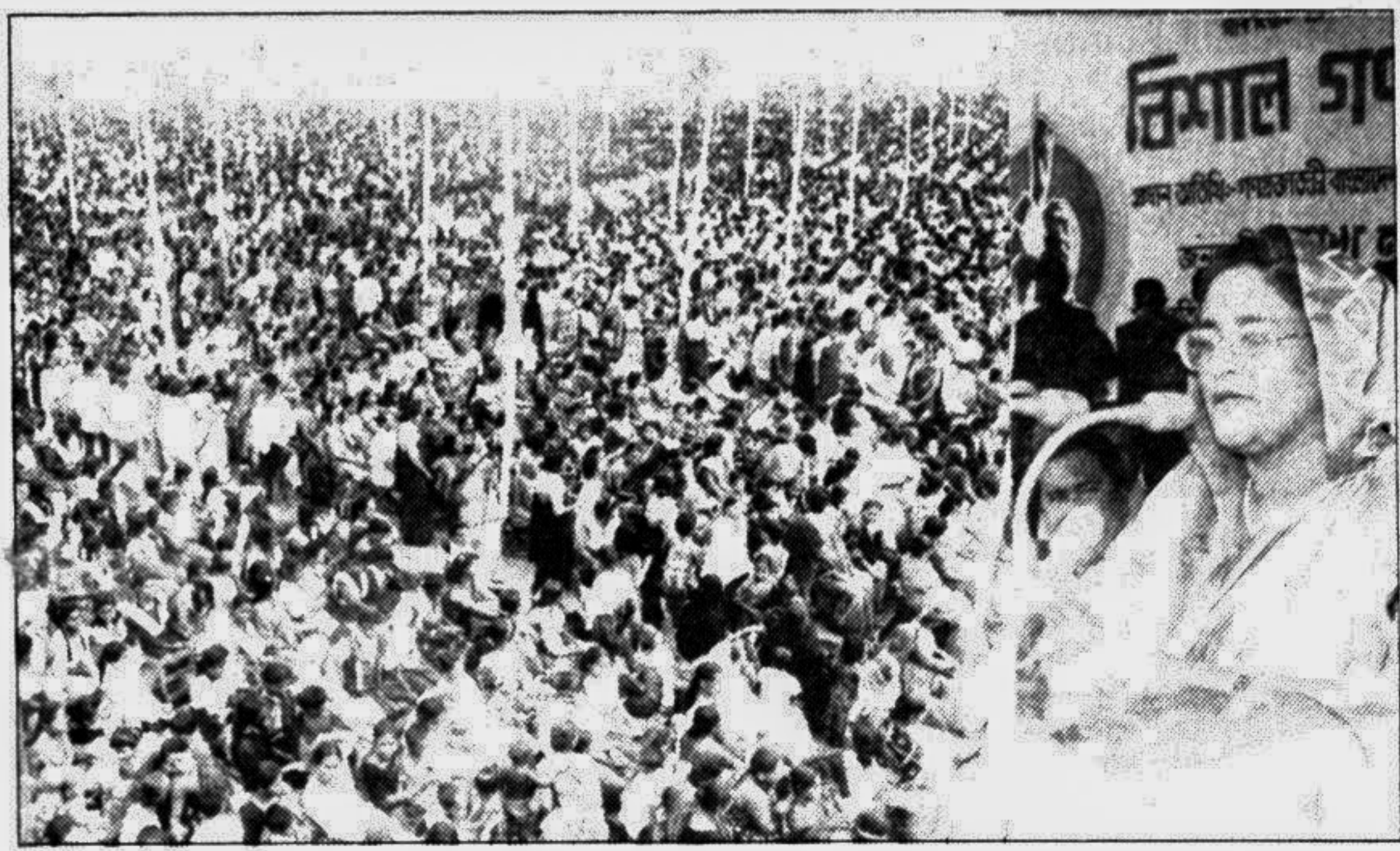
At the UN peacekeeping conference held in Dhaka last February, Bangladesh was selected as the venue for the setting up of a training centre for the UN peacekeeping forces. The US is one of the biggest promoters of the UN peacekeeping operations and Dhaka's participation in several peacekeeping missions were internationally

applauded.

The US Armed Forces rate the professional skills of Bangladesh Armed Forces very high, said defence analysts. According to them, it was exemplified on various occasions when US and Bangladesh military personnel were engaged in various peacekeeping missions and training programmes.

Negotiations are now in the final stage to sign the Status of Forces Agreement. Talks on finalising the draft of the agreement earlier hit 'snags' due to certain suggestions made by the Bangladesh side.

The Special Affairs Division, Defence Ministry and the



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing a huge public meeting at Rangamati yesterday. — PID photo

Congestion at Ctg Port

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, May 16: Severe congestion at Chittagong port is forcing foreign cargo vessels to overstay, causing those to incur huge demurrage, sources said.

Container ships and foodgrains carrying vessels are the worst sufferers. Five foodgrains carrying ships are now at the port jetties awaiting unloading while three others are at the outer anchorage, port officials said.

Space problem at the port sheds to accommodate containers and slow unloading of foodgrains by labourers have caused the congestion, port sources said. The labourers are on a go-slow programme following a tussle with stevedores.

See Page 12 Col 1

India for 'umbrella' accord on route transit for buses, trucks

By Staff Correspondent

The Indian government's proposal of an 'umbrella agreement' on route transit for buses, trucks, will be discussed at an inter-ministerial meeting on Tuesday, according to official sources.

The Indian government sent a proposal to Bangladesh recently for considering an umbrella agreement on route transit, an official of the foreign ministry told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Indian proposal suggested transit route for passenger bus as well as loaded trucks. The routes are to be agreed upon by both the sides, the official said.

Earlier, the cabinet decided to allow transit route for passenger bus between Dhaka and Ajmer through Daulatdia and Jessore.

The meeting, to be chaired by the principal secretary to the prime minister, will be attended by officials of the ministries of foreign affairs, home affairs, commerce, law, justice and parliamentary affairs, communications and the NBR.

Akram to lead today's match against Kenya

Sports Reporter

Skipper Akram Khan will be back holding the reins as Bangladesh, eyeing for their maiden success in One-day Internationals, take on Kenya in the second match of the Coca-Cola Tri-nation Series at the Lal Bahadur Shastri Stadium in Hyderabad today.

Akram missed the first match against India last Thursday because of a back-injury for which he has been tak-

ing painkillers.

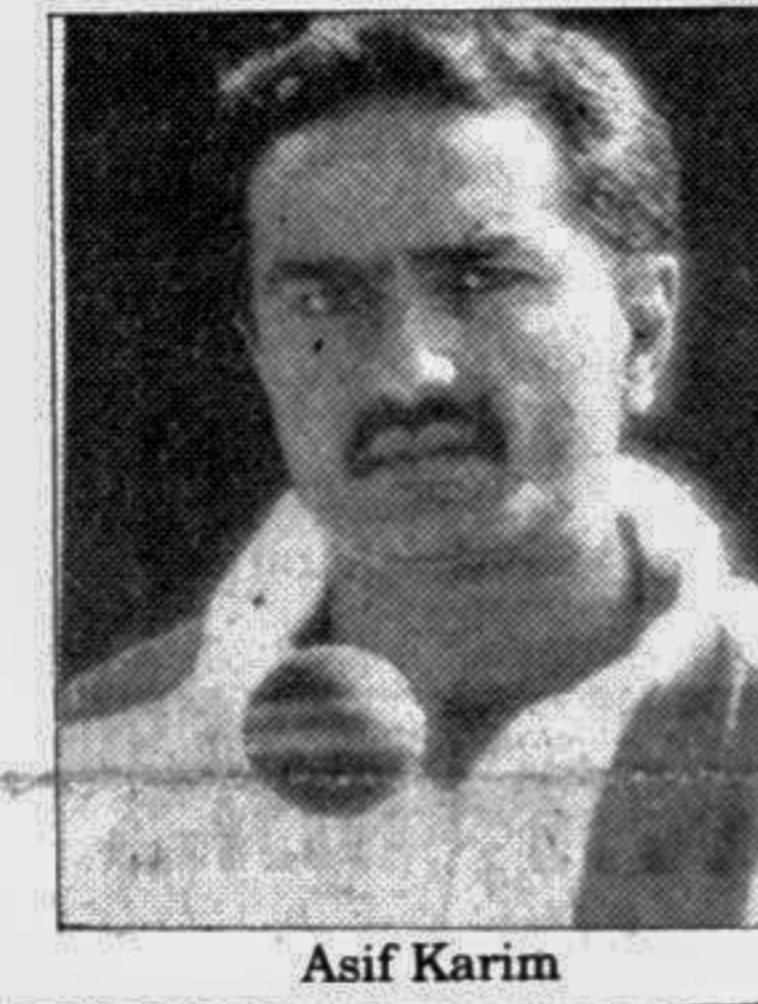
The day-night affair will begin at 4.30 pm BST with ESPN, an American satellite TV network, covering the match live from the capital of the central Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

The match will also renew the rivalry between Bangladesh and Kenya, the two rookies in the big league who were awarded

See Page 12 Col 8



Akram Khan



Asif Karim

Govt destroying economy, says Khaleda

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday accused the government of destroying the country's economy and political stability during its nearly two years' rule, reports UNB.

Those who do not believe in independence and sovereignty had created an anarchic situation in the country by enforcing 177 days of hartal while in opposition, Begum Zia said in her statement read out at the biennial council of Jatiyatabadi Krishak Dal.

The BNP chairperson was scheduled to attend the council as chief guest, but could not turn up due to illness. The council was held at the Engineers' Institution in the morning.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury was present as chief guest at the opening session on her behalf.

Begum Zia said the country's development has been suffering a serious setback due to slide in share prices, crises in liquidity in banks, lack of confidence of the foreign investors and deterioration of law and order.

The Opposition leader said the prices of essentials, includ-

See Page 12 Col 1

BNP yet to finalise details of long march programme

By Nazmul Ashraf

BNP is yet to finalise details of the programme for its long march towards the Chittagong Hill Tracts on June 9.

A lengthy meeting of the party's National Executive Committee (NEC) yesterday debated on the strategy, meeting sources said.

The NEC meet, after debating on two options, left it upto party chief Begum Khaleda Zia to finalise the strategy in consultation with the party's National Standing Committee members.

The long march and token hunger strikes at all the districts on May 20 were announced demanding scrapping of the CHT accord and the bills passed for its implementation.

The first option, discussed at

See Page 12 Col 1

Resist unrest aimed at hindering CHT development: PM

RANGAMATI, May 16: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today assured the people of the hill districts of massive development work with restoration of peace in the region, reports UNB.

She called upon them to build up resistance against those who are opposing peace and trying to create unrest in the country.

They want unrest and bloodshed to hinder the development of the hill region, the Prime Minister said, pointing to the long march planned for June 9 by the BNP led seven-party alliance.

Addressing a public meeting at the Old Court Building ground Sheikh Hasina said, "You should build up resistance to those opposing peace and security."

This was her first visit to the hill district after the passage of the CHT bills in Parliament.

Dismissing the opposition demand for scrapping the CHT peace accord, the Prime Minister said "They want it to continue unrest and bloodshed. The Prime Minister noted

with satisfaction that peace has been restored in the region after two decades. She said massive development work will now be taken up in the region.

Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak, Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah, Labour and Manpower Minister MA Mannan, Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Engineer Mosharrar Hossain, Minister Kalparanjan Chakma and Chittagong City Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury also addressed the meeting presided over by Dipankar Talukder MP.

People from all walks of life, including huge number of tribal men, women and children attended the meeting.

Prime minister said, only the illegal arms and drugs traders support unrest in the CHT because they want to make money keeping the people in a chaotic situation.

The peace accord is to ensure peace and security of all the people of the region," she said calling upon all the tribal

See Page 12 Col 2

Trial production of gas from Sangu begins today

CHITTAGONG, May 16: The trial production of natural gas from offshore gasfield "Sangu" is likely to begin from tomorrow, Petrobranga sources said, reports UNB.

According to the sources, the supply of gas from the Sangu field will gradually increase from 60 million to 110 million cf per day.

With the increase of supply from the newly developed Sangu gasfield, the Bakrabad Gas System Ltd (BGSL) will be able to fulfill the demands of 230 million cf of gas everyday for the Chittagong region.

Initially 60 million cf of gas

See Page 12 Col 2

N-test: Pakistan keeps its options open

ISLAMABAD, May 16: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif kept India and a nervous world guessing today about whether he would authorise the country's first nuclear test in retaliation for India's 'reckless' five trials, report agencies.

"In the face of these ominous developments, which pose an immediate threat to our security, we cannot be expected to remain complacent," Sharif said in a letter to the Group of Eight (G8) industrialised states meeting in Birmingham, England.

Foreign Ministry secretary Shamshad Ahmad voiced Islamabad's disappointment at the G8 communique on India and said its failure to agree to US appeals for harsh economic sanctions showed that the group was divided.

"That only shows that they are divided, it's a very weak response, we hope that the sooner they realise their weaknesses the better it will be for regional stability and peace but also for the global peace and security," Ahmad said.

The Birmingham communique said the Indian tests had affected relationships between New Delhi and each country,

condemned India and appealed for regional restraint.

Ahmad said Pakistan had not taken a final decision but was keeping its options open. "I should say that there is no question of any renunciation of our options," he said.

"We have made it clear that we have never acted in haste and we will not act in haste or

in madness and we will take a measured decision which will be determined by the compulsions of our national security," he said.

Also today Pakistan's ambassador to Russia said his country would sign the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty if rival India disarms its nuclear weapons.

While we still adhere to the objectives of non-proliferation, the question of joining these treaties will depend on India's response to the international community's demand to reverse the course of action it has taken," Ambassador Mansoor Alam told the interfax news agency in Moscow.

Earlier, US President Bill Clinton urged both India and the US Senate to adopt a global treaty to ban nuclear testing and said India was on the wrong side of history in exploding test nuclear devices.

Meanwhile, an Indian government official today refused to rule out further nuclear tests.

"How can I or anybody be aware of the future," Pramod Mahajan, political advisor to Prime Minister Atal Behari Va-

See Page 12 Col 4

Inside Today

Article

The state of the banking sector

Can Private and Public morality be different?

Column: Insight

by Kabir U Ahmad

Page 4

Focus

Law and Our Rights

The currency crisis, human rights and the media; and The saga of Harun; Another instance of police brutality?

Page 5

International

Rioting spreads to other Indonesian cities

Page 6

Business

Footwear manufacturers do not want to pay VAT

Textile engineers seek withdrawal of duties from all raw materials

Pages 8,9

Suharto willing to go, but in a 'constitutional way'

JAKARTA, May 16: Rioting that swept through Jakarta spread across Indonesia, gripping the country's second largest city and several other key localities, report agencies.

The government today banned television broadcasters from airing their own news reports about the demonstrations and violence.

Instead, television stations must show news footage provided by the official government news channel, Televisi Republik Indonesia, according to an official directive sent to news stations.

Meanwhile the death toll from rioting, arson and protests this week in the Indonesian capital climbed towards 400 today as more charred remains were recovered from burnt shopping centres.

Rescuers found 113 charred bodies in the ruins of a three-storey shopping mall torched during rioting, according to latest police and Red Cross figures, as the grisly search for more

bodies continued.

President Suharto was quoted as repeating his willingness to step down, if that's the will of the Indonesian people.

Suharto said today that he would step down if the people no longer trusted him and demanded his resignation in a constitutional way, the Chancellor of the Indonesian University, Budi Santosa, quoted

See also page 6

Suharto as telling a delegation of academics.

The 76-year-old Suharto also plans to reshuffle his Cabinet, Speaker of Parliament Harmoko said after meeting with the president. Indonesians, beset by rampant inflation and growing poverty, are likely to see such a move as purely cosmetic.

Foreigners were streaming out of the troubled nation jostling for seats on planes chartered by their own governments.

Military columns of armoured personnel carriers crisscrossed the city, with loudspeakers blaring "we are friends of the people." The capital, patrolled by soldiers, was quiet after four days of riots.

Thousands of university students marched through the Surabaya city center, at one point occupying the state-run radio station and broadcasting their demands for political reform.

Some people attacked and looted a shopping area. They also burned down the office of the only showroom of the Timor car, the troubled automobile project run by one of Suharto's sons.

The Jakarta post also reported unrest in the major cities of Bandar Lampung and Palembang on Friday.

Witnesses said there was widespread destruction in the central Javanese city of Solo, after mobs swept through town on Friday.

See Page 12 Col 2

Girl raped at Sadarghat Terminal: 1 held

By Staff Correspondent

A seven-year-old girl was raped underneath the pontoon of the Sadarghat Launch Terminal in the city yesterday.

The alleged rapist, identified as Harun, 40, was caught red-handed by local people at about 12:30 pm, police said.

The girl was taken to safe custody, police said, adding that she is likely to be sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for medical examination today.

Police said Harun, a rickshaw van puller, lured the girl showing her a ten taka note and took her underneath the pontoon where he violated her. Some people saw the incident and informed others at the terminal.

Then a section of people rushed to the spot and caught Harun. Later, the girl and Harun were handed over to police. Harun is likely to be produced before the CMM's court today.

A case was filed with Kotwali thana in connection with the incident yesterday.

Low formed over Bay

A well marked low has formed over South-west Bay, reports UNB.

It is likely to intensify and move in a west north-westerly direction, said Storm Warning Centre.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to hoist distant cautionary signal number one.

Temperature may come down soon

By Special Correspondent

The unusual heat wave, with temperatures above the 30-year average, is expected to subside soon.

According to the Met Office, the day temperature is likely to fall by one to two degree Celsius today. But the relief columns of monsoon rain remained away in the Bay of Bengal. It sucked away the wet air and clouds from the Bangladesh coast, leaving the country reeling under sultry weather, meteorologists said.

They said the heat wave that sent temperatures high above the monthly average of 32.9 to 36.7 degree Celsius, had been caused by the lack of southerly moisture-laden winds from the Bay.

The day temperature cooled down late yesterday afternoon after a trace of rain fell by a

See Page 12 Col 3

Alleged rape attempt at court bldg: 2 arrested

By Staff Correspondent

A bodyguard of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate and a night guard at the CMM's court were arrested for allegedly attempting to violate a teenage girl inside a room of the court building yesterday morning.

Police identified the bodyguard as Zahurul Islam, 30, a police constable, and the night guard as Taslim, 32.

However, a peon of the court Abul Bashar who was also allegedly involved in the attempt on the girl was absconding till last night.

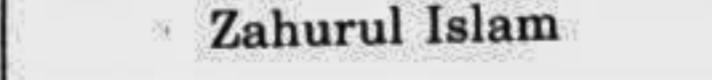
The girl, aged about 15, was

sent to the 'safe custody' after she recorded a judicial statement before a metropolitan magistrate following the incident, police said.

Zahurul and Taslim were caught by police and some people when the girl cried out for help from inside a clerk's room on the second floor of the court building at about 9:30 am. But Bashar somehow managed to escape, police said.

Police and court sources

See Page 12 Col 7



Zahurul Islam



Taslim

Meghnaghat power project PDB urges ministry to take decision on AES

By Sharier Khan

The Power Development Board has urged the Energy Ministry to take a decision regarding the Meghnaghat Power Plant Project as there has been no progress in negotiation with the US company, AES, over it in nearly eight months.

The PDB request was made last month.

AES was the lowest bidder for the 450 MW Meghnaghat Power Plant but the project implementation authority, PDB, has been disagreeing over a number of technical issues which has created the stalemate.

Three are two major points of disagreement. One of those in that PDB has been insisting on a 10 month Initial Operation Period (IOP) of the power plant offering free electricity while AES, which had earlier made this proposal is saying that the length of the IOP (10 months) should not be mandatory. The other point of disagreement is

that the PDB has been asking AES to provide ABB brand machinery while AES remains firm on giving 'ABB or equivalent' machinery.

In a bid to end the stalemate, the Cabinet Committee on Purchase in early March approved AES's proposal of a level power tariff of 0.027 kilowatt hour under certain terms and conditions and instructed the PDB to sign an agreement by.

Under the first condition, AES can not reduce the IOP period from 10 months and it will supply free electricity during this period. AES would also build the plant with ABB machinery.

Under the second condition, AES can reschedule the commercial operation time ahead of the original schedule but it can not decrease the 10-month IOP period.

Following this decision, PDB asked AES to respond. On

See Page 12 Col 3

'Rangamati Betar' opens

RANGAMATI, May 16: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated a full-fledged radio station in this tiny hill town today, saying that it will play an important role in expansion and preservation of tribal culture in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, reports UNB.

"I hope, Rangamati Betar would contribute to establishing a bridge of friendship and harmony among tribal and non-tribal people," she said.

Inaugurating the eighth full-fledged station of Bangladesh Betar, she said today is the day of joy for the people of the Hill Tracts including Rangamati.

The 10-KW station, built at a cost of Tk four crore, will cover audience in 7,000 square kilometre areas. The station will broadcast three hours programmes in its own daily.

See Page 12 Col 2

BCL worker shot dead in Tongi

GAZIPUR, May 16: An activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League was gunned down by a group of miscreants near the Dour Bridge in Tongi here last night, reports BSS.

A group of armed miscreants fired at Reazul Islam alias Titu, 30, an activist of BCL near the Dour Bridge, about 11 pm when Reazul along with Gazipur district BCL secretary Kazi Elias and three others were passing the area, police said.

Reazul died on the spot, police added.

The body of Reazul was handed over to his relatives after autopsy at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue today.

He was a resident of Noagaon under Tongi pourashava and an active worker of BCL Tongi thana unit.

Kazi Elias filed a case with Tongi thana accusing some leaders of the Jatiya Party. None was arrested so far.

10 hurt as police, SSC examinees clash in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 16: At least 10 persons were injured when some school students including SSC examinees clashed with police and transport workers at Bahaddarhat in the city at noon today, witnesses said.

The students had first attacked the Chittagong Education Board office near Bahaddarhat protesting cancellation of SSC examinations on two papers held recently, police said.

The students pelted stones at the Board office damaging some window panes, police said. Police chased them away using batons and arrested 25 students from the spot.

Later, the agitating students damaged some transports at Bahaddarhat bus terminal and also clashed with transport workers, police said. Police again chased them away and brought the situation under control.

JU admission 36 to vie for each seat in 1st yr Hons

By JU Correspondent

At least 36 students will vie for each seat for admission in first year Honours courses in Jahangirnagar University this year (1997-98 session).

Sources in the Admission Committee told this correspondent that for about 1000 seats, 36,528 application forms were received; 8,622 in 'Ka' unit (Science Faculty), 12,500 in 'Kha' unit (Social Science Faculty), 6,728 in 'Ga' unit (Arts Faculty) and 8,778 in 'Gha' unit (Life Science Institute).

The date for the admission test is yet to be decided, the sources added.

Last year, 32,225 application forms were received for the same number of seats, the sources said.