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EC approves \$33m aid package for Bangladesh

The European Commission (EC) has finalised a 33 million US dollar aid package for Bangladesh, an official message received from Brussels said in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

The aid-package consists of 175,000 tonnes of cereals and 3.96 million US dollars in cash for the flood-affected people.

It said EC would also give further humanitarian assistance of 2.2 million US dollars for emergency relief.

The message said, the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), a branch of the European Commission has decided to post one of its offices in Dhaka from early October this year to coordinate humanitarian assistance programme in Bangladesh.

The mission also agreed in principle to permanently close the file of all irregular GSP certificates issued in Bangladesh from 1994-96 which could not be verified during the Commission's fact finding mission to Bangladesh in November 1996. To help the flood-affected Bangladesh, the mission also agreed in principle to close the file of GSP certificates issued since January 1997.

Make BAPEX partner in all blocks: Petrobangla

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla has recommended to the Energy Ministry to develop and strengthen the Bangladesh oil and gas exploration — BAPEX — by giving it a 15 per cent "carried over partnership" with different foreign companies in all the blocks, sources said.

A Petrobangla team, which visited Malaysia a couple of months ago to participate in a training by Malaysian oil and gas company Petronas, made this official recommendation and a presentation to the Energy Ministry earlier this month.

The recommendations took into consideration the Malaysian model of oil and gas sector development. The sources said, like Bangladeshi Petrobangla, Malaysian Petronas was formed in 1974 and both the organisations have their own exploration front — BAPEX and Petronas Carrigali respectively. Due to Malaysian govern-

ment's pragmatic policy, Petronas Carrigali — which hardly had any expertise and human resources in the beginning, has now become one of the leading oil and gas companies in Asia, operating in more than 14 countries. In contrast, due to lack of guidance and drive, BAPEX is now on the verge of breaking up although it had a lot of experienced and trained manpower, the sources noted.

The Petrobangla team recommended that in order to make Petrobangla and BAPEX as strong as Petronas, the government should make BAPEX a partner with various foreign companies in all the Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs).

Petronas Carrigali has now become a big institution by becoming partners of different multinational oil companies working in various Malaysian blocks, the team noted. The Malaysian government had made it mandatory for all for-

ign oil companies to give Petronas 15 per cent partnership on carried over basis.

An official said, "Now Petronas can operate on its own and train others (like Petrobangla) how to deal with foreign oil companies."

The Petrobangla team further recommended, under the light of Malaysian model, that the government should not allow the oil and gas companies to choose at random any third party contractor to work for them. Instead, the team suggested, the government should make a list of prospective third party contractors on the basis of their track record and efficiency. The foreign companies should choose their contractors from the list.

This will provide a scope for local operators to work with these oil and gas companies. Besides, this would also help control cost hike of any oil and gas scheme undertaken by the PSC contractors," said a source.

The sources said that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has also emphasised developing and strengthening the BAPEX side by side with allowing foreign oil and gas companies to explore and develop different blocks. The Prime Minister recently asked BAPEX to submit work plans to drill two development wells in Salda field.

In the last 10 years, BAPEX was given funds to drill only 3 wells although it has very high success rate. Beside the high crisis for exploration activity, BAPEX was ignored over the years and its experts are leaving the organisation to work in foreign companies in Bangladesh and abroad. The sources said that besides the lack of morale among its employees, BAPEX's growth has been retarded by its organogram and trade union activities.

Arsenic pollution natural, not man-made, British experts say

By Naimul Haq

Arsenic contamination of groundwater that has put millions of lives at risk in the country is "natural and not man-made", according to laboratory tests of water samples and field investigation conducted recently by a team of experts from the British Geological Survey (BGS).

The study negated the earlier belief that arsenic, already deposited in the soil, combines with groundwater when atmospheric oxygen "invades the aquifer" in response to a lowering of water level by extraction.

The Daily Star obtained a copy of the BGS report, based on the test results and investigation.

The tubewells thought to have caused the biggest environmental damage to the nation is now a wrong concept and is no more a valid point," a scientist of the BGS team told this correspondent.

The BGS team tested over 9000 samples of groundwater collected from shallow and deep tubewells at various depths

across the country and conducted field investigation to investigate the origin of arsenic contamination of groundwater in Bangladesh. Some of the laboratory tests were conducted in Bangladesh and some in the UK.

"There are clear evidences that the arsenic contamination is natural," said Peter Ravenscroft, Team Leader of Mott MacDonald International, a British agency which worked under the BGS in conducting the tests and field investigation.

The government has already declared the problem of arsenic contamination of groundwater a national disaster.

Arsenic-rich sediments came from the upper reaches of the Ganges covering the areas of Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal and were deposited in lower riparian Bangladesh during the ancient Pleistocene time, the report said.

Soil samples collected from both shallow and deep aquifers confirmed presence of arsenic at various concentrations, the report said.

Laboratory analysis of the soil and water samples indicate that "arsenic contamination was 'prominent' in shallow aquifers and 'little' in deep aquifers. Fifty-four per cent of the samples collected from deep aquifers were found containing contamination below the WHO safety limit of 0.01 mg/L. Ninety-two per cent of the samples collected from shallow aquifers contained contamination below the Bangladesh standard of 0.05 mg/L, it said.

Arsenic is mostly found in high concentration in the depth level between 30 and 100 feet, it said.

Geological and hydrogeological studies, carried out by the British scientists, show that arsenic poisoning is caused by separation of arsenic-rich iron oxyhydroxides that are derived from weathering of base metal sulphides.

The depth distribution of arsenic is noticeable as it increases. Most of the very high, for example more than 0.25

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FBCCI asks for one-day weekend to recoup losses

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) yesterday sought a six-day working week to overcome the losses caused by the floods, reports UNB.

"If the Prime Minister can work for six days a week, we think we all can also do the same in this time of need," FBCCI President Yusuf Abdullah Harun said while urging for reintroduction of one-day weekly holiday instead of a two-day one.

The FBCCI President told Overseas Correspondents' Association, Bangladesh (OCA) members at a press briefing yesterday afternoon that "we are ready and so are our workers, but we need an official announcement so that other sectors can join us."

He said employment opportunities have to be created through development work to increase the purchasing power of the people.

"The food supply is sufficient and price is stable, but the most

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Boats which were the only mode of transport in many areas of the city during the floods are now lying abandoned on the dirty sludge on roads. The picture was taken from Mugdapara area yesterday. — Star photo

5 more army camps withdrawn from 2 CHT dists

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Sept 26: Five more army camps were withdrawn from two hill districts — Khagrachhari and Rangamati — as part of a phasewise closing of some security camps in line with the peace accord signed between the government and the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS), security sources said today.

In continuation of the process, the five camps were withdrawn from interior areas of the two districts last week.

Earlier, in the first phase, five army camps were withdrawn from the two districts, the sources said.

As a result, about 500 troops were pulled back from the 10 camps to the headquarters of the districts.

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Low over Bay

By Special Correspondent

The hot and humid weather persisting for the past few days has made life unbearable for many, especially the flood-hit city dwellers.

Loadshedding, mosquitoes and scorching heat added to their miseries since the last downpour on Monday.

The humidity was increasingly felt following appearance of a low over the Northwestern Bay on Thursday.

It could be bad, said meteorologist Sajedur Rahman about the hot and humid weather, which he thinks is a sign of a depression.

The meteorological department last night said that the low was centred over west central Bay of the Andhra coast.

If the low turns into a depression and moves towards Bangladesh it could be bad, Sajedur Rahman said.

Last year about this time there had been a similar low which developed into cyclonic storm and struck Bhola and the coastal islands without causing much damage, he said.

The meteorological department said that the hot and humid weather would persist today, the weather remaining mainly dry. Rain or thunder-shower accompanied by gusty

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Rival BCL faction at JU stages comeback

By Staff Correspondent

The members of a BCL faction, ousted from the campus by those of a rival faction, yesterday staged a comeback to the Jahangirnagar University campus and "captured" all the five residential halls for male students.

They also assaulted one of the seven accused of rape and one of the six accused of abetting them — all belonging to the rival faction.

The other accused were missing from the campus yesterday.

The authorities of JU had earlier served showcause notices on the 13 BCL leaders and activists, asking them to reply by 3:00 pm Sunday. The notices were served on the basis of the Fact Finding Committee's report.

The two assaulted are Mahmudul Alam Babu, vice president of BCL unit at JU and Habibur Rahman Barkat, organisational secretary of the unit. They came under attack at about 2:30 pm, soon after the faction led by Shamsud Touhid Kakor had "captured" the halls. Both were

injured and sent to the Orthopaedic Hospital in the city.

A tense situation prevailed on the campus. Many students were seen leaving the halls.

Police were deployed on the campus.

The Vice Chancellor was holding a meeting with the administrative officials till the filing of this report last night.

The BCL faction, known as 'Kakor group', that 'captured' the halls yesterday expressed its solidarity with the ongoing movement of JU students.

It also declared the 13 accused as 'persona non grata' on the campus and announced its acceptance of Sheikh Nuruzzaman, President of JU unit of BCL, as their leader.

Meanwhile, in separate press conferences on the campus, leaders of Ganatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO) and General Students Unity (GSU) claimed that the two BCL leaders were assaulted because of 'intra-party feud'.

They stressed that the as-

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Durga Puja begins today

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, begins in the country today, reports UNB.

Mahanagar Sarbojanin Puja Committee has drawn up a five-day programme to celebrate the festival.

Puja organisers, however, decided to celebrate the festival in a simple way to save the money for flood-affected people.

The Hindu community will begin their puja celebration by observing the Shasti today. The Saptami, Astami, Nabami and Dasami will be celebrated on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday respectively.

The festival will end with the immersion of the image of Durga. It will be followed by a colourful procession in the capital. The procession will start from Dhakesari Temple at 4 pm on Thursday.

The puja committee arranged the programme of religious songs on the day of Astami, competition of Arati on the day of Nabami and blood donation on the day of Dasami.

Two shot dead as rival soccer fans clash in Khagrachhari

KHAGRACHHARI, Sept 26: Two youths were shot dead and 40 others injured as rival soccer fans clashed in Dighinala today, reports APB.

Authorities had to call out army personnel to calm the rioters.

The dead were identified as Nikhel Chakma, 24, of Babuchhara village and Juddomoni Chakma, 25, of Dighinala thana headquarters.

The warring sides, witnesses said, were divided as tribals and non-tribals following a quarrel between two youths — one Bangalee and the other Chakma.

The two victims' relatives, who brought them to Sagar Hospital, claimed that they were killed in police firing. Doctors at the hospital also said the two succumbed to bullet wounds at about 7:30 pm.

Police, however, said they did not open fire.

Wanted criminal stabbed to death in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Sept 26: An alleged terrorist, wanted in six criminal cases, including murder, abduction, extortion and possession of illegal arms, was stabbed to death by unidentified assailants at Najumeah haat under Hathazari thana this morning, police said.

Police said three assailants came in a motorcycle attacked Abdur Rahim alias Abdullah when he arrived at Najumeah haat.

They fled the scene after stabbing Abdur Rahim who instantly succumbed to his injuries, witnesses said.

Later police recovered the body and sent it to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

Bimala helpless as PM's order goes unheeded

By Nurul Kabir

Does the Prime Minister know it?
Perhaps, the answer is no.

But Bimala Sarker, a 55-year-old housewife, knows that even the country's top executive could not help her. What she does not know is what to do next or where else to go now to get her problems solved.

Anyone in Bimala's situation would have felt similarly helpless, when an order of the Prime Minister is ignored by the district-level bureaucracy.

Exposed to various types of unbearable disturbances by a local club for the last several years, Bimala Sarker made a written appeal to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for remedies. The Prime Minister's Office duly asked two ministries to take necessary steps to solve the problems. The ministry concerned referred the matter to the Dhaka DC's office. But 18 months after the PMO's order, Bimala's problems remain un-

addressed. Rather, the relevant document shows, the district administration is busy illegally solving problems of the club against which Bimala had complained to the Prime Minister.

Bimala Sarker had been living in a three-storied building on 74 Shankhari Bazar road of the city since 1975. Her husband, a government employee who has recently gone on retirement, obtained almost the entire house on lease. But the government leased out the front side of the building's ground floor to a local club named Aponjon.

In July, 1994, the club authorities managed to secure permission from the district administration concerned to carry out 'some small repair work' in its part of the building, of course without 'distorting the structure.'

"But the club went far beyond its jurisdiction. Its so called repair work pushed the building on the verge of collapse. Still titled, the building is somehow standing with the second floor substantially damaged and the third floor developing a couple of dangerous cracks.

Bimala's husband had lodged a complaint with the DC's office. The ADC asked the Aponjon to stop the repair work. Enraged by the step, the Aponjonmen went to the extent of throwing 'bombs' on the second floor where Bimala was still living with her family members.

Bimala's son, then a teenager, went to the local police. Allegedly reluctant to accept specific cases, the police registered three general diaries. But none of the accused was arrested for obvious reasons. Aponjonmen have reportedly changed political colours three times over the last decade.

After the bomb attack on

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All rivers fall below red marks

All rivers of the country's four basins were flowing below their respective danger marks yesterday, officials of the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said, reports BSS.

Most of the rivers in the Brahmaputra, the Meghna and the south-eastern hill basins registered further fall while the rivers of the Ganges basin marked both fall and rise, the officials said. In all the country's 46 representative monitoring points the levels of water were below red mark yesterday.

Disaster Management and Relief Ministry officials said normally returned to 44 out of 52 flood-hit districts, while the situation was gradually improving in the rest eight.

With the recession of the flood waters, the country is now

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German polls Kohl-Schroder tough contest likely

By Staff Correspondent

Some 60.5 million Germans will go to the polls today to elect members of the federal parliament, the Bundestag, and the Chancellor who would lead their country for the next four years.

The main focus is on two politicians — incumbent Chancellor Helmut Kohl, candidate of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), and his challenger Gerhard Schroder heading the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

If the voters choose to elect Kohl, they will be voting for continuity and stability and if they rally behind Schroder, they will be seeking a measured but a marginal change, say observers.

Although opinion polls have put Schroder a few points ahead of Kohl, the gap has narrowed down in recent weeks.

Helmut Kohl represents

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Cabinet decides not to sack Bihar govt

NEW DELHI, Sept 26: The union cabinet today decided not to press for federal rule over the eastern state of Bihar after the president returned its recommendation for the dismissal of the state's socialist government, AP quoting domestic news agencies reported.

The government wanted to fire elected officials on the basis of a report by State Governor Sunder Singh Bhandari that said Bihar, considered India's most lawless state, was rife with financial mismanagement and failure of law and order.

After four days of consultations with constitutional experts, President KR Narayanan Friday ruled that the situation in Bihar did not warrant its dismissal. The Rashtriya Janta Dal enjoys a majority in the

state legislature.

"In deference to the wishes of the President, the cabinet decided not to pursue the matter," Home Minister Lal Krishna Advani said, the Press Trust of India reported.

President KR Narayanan has upheld democratic and constitutional provisions by returning to the Cabinet its recommendation for imposition of federal rule in Bihar state, said Rabri Devi, Bihar's top elected official.

Narayanan's assent was necessary for the dismissal to be enforced but he can turn down a Cabinet proposal only once. The Indian constitution says if the federal Cabinet reiterates its decision, the president will have no choice but to accept it.

The cabinet's decision came

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Import of LPG cylinders BPC to probe alleged irregularities

From Iqbal Siddiquee

SYLHET, Sept 26: Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) has formed a 3-member committee to probe the allegation regarding irregularities in importing 35,000 LPG cylinders at higher prices.

An official at the BPC headquarters in Chittagong told this correspondent over telephone that the corporation at its meeting held last week formed the 3-member committee headed by the Director (Marketing and Distribution) to probe the alleged irregularities in importing the 35,000 LPG cylinders from Malaysia at a higher price than the market rate in 1997.

The cylinders were imported at a cost of 24 US dollars each whereas another 20,000 cylinders are being brought this year at 17 dollars each.

The probe body is expected to visit Sylhet in the first week of October, the BPC official said.

Meanwhile, BPC has fi-

nalised the retail price and the company price of LPG after long dispute with the dealers.

The Sylhet Division Petroleum Dealers' Association pressed the BPC for reducing the LPG price, which was earlier fixed at Tk 2,600 for only the dealers in Sylhet division. Where as, it is Tk 1,860 in Chittagong as elsewhere in the country.

BPC initially reduced the price to Tk 2,000. The dealers' association again submitted a memorandum demanding that the retail price of LPG be further lowered. Finally, BPC, in principle, agreed to further lower the price last week.

BPC has arranged to supply LPG cylinders to the customers in the remote areas of Sylhet, where the gas supply network is yet to be introduced. For the purpose, a LPG Fractionation Plant had been installed at the

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