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Voices of protest
Theatre artistes march to condemn Jessore bombing. —Star Photo: Amran Hossain

Urea traders turning the screw on farmers

By Reaz Ahmed

As farmers strive for a bumper production of boro paddy to recoup the loss of Aman due to the devastating floods last season, a section of fertiliser traders has resorted to manipulation of fertiliser price taking advantage of the situation.

Reports from the rice-rich northern districts say that in many areas farmers have to pay much higher prices for urea as they badly need the chemical fertiliser for 'top dressing prior to the Boro harvest.'

Growers expect a substantial increase in boro production this season due to rise in acreage and favourable weather and soil condition after the floods. But unscrupulous traders are charging price of Tk 370 for a 50-kg bag of urea fertiliser instead of the normal price of Tk 270 to 280.

According to official sources, the demand for urea has increased so much that dealers sold 3,55,000 tonnes of urea in February this year compared to 2,95,000 tonnes in February last year.

Finding the trade lucrative again, several hundred fertiliser dealers who had withdrawn their deposits with the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) one year back, returned to the old business over the last two months, sources said.

As a result, the number of fertiliser dealers in the country has now risen to 3,000 from some 2,650.

The Industries Minister, in a recent announcement, slashed down the dealers' deposit to Tk one lakh from Tk two lakh.

The Food and Agriculture Minister, however, blamed the Opposition for temporary rise in fertiliser price saying that their repeated hartal calls caused disruption in transportation of fertiliser. "When we were in the opposition and used to call hartal, we exempted fertiliser carrying trucks and oil tankers. But, they (opposition) aren't sparing anything," he said.

The minister claimed that prices have settled down again at a reasonable level.

Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA), which represent the dealers did not admit that fertiliser price has gone up. Its leaders argued that due to heavy demand for trucks for carrying foodgrains in bulk, truckers raised the carrying charge for fertiliser by at least 20 per cent.

BFA executive secretary Abdul Baten, however, said that hartals created a panic and fertiliser prices 'behaved erratic' for few days.

Four die in bus-truck collision

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Mar 11: At least four people were killed and 40 others injured in a road accident on Dhaka Sylhet highway near Ayet Ali Textile Mills at Khadun under Rupganj police station here this morning.

According to police, the accident took place when a passenger bus carrying mostly students of Murapara Degree College from Narasingdi fell into a road side ditch after a head-on collision with a Dhaka-bound truck at about 9:45 am.

Three students — Shahadat Hossain, 21, Kabir Hossain, 22, and Lemon, 25 — died on the spot. They were coming to their college to cast vote in the student union election. The another victim, bus driver Noor Hossain, succumbed to his injuries on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The seriously injured 25 people were admitted to DMCH. Of them, the condition of Kabir, 60, Bimol, 30, Mamun Miah, 40, Suraiyah Akhtar, 40, Mahmood Ali, 18, Zahangir, 32, Khoka, 22, Quamrul, 25 and Noor-e-Alam, 25, were stated to be critical.

The truck loaded with bricks, however, managed to escape following the accident.

A case was filed with Rupganj police station. None was arrested in this connection till filing of this report at 9:00 pm today.



The wreckage of the minibus hammered by a truck. —Star Photo: Sheikh Enamul Haque

Elevated trains to ease Dhaka traffic chaos

By Rafiq Hasan

An elevated, mass rail-transit system will be established in the capital in order to ease traffic congestion, enhance traffic safety and meet the future transport needs of the city.

According to sources, the system, the first of its kind, will be set up by private enterprise.

The ministry of communications has invited proposals for establishing the network in Dhaka metropolitan area from well-known local and international firms.

"Proposals have already been invited from the reputed firms to set up the mass rail transit system in the capital on the basis of Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) or Build, Operate and Own (BOO)," said a senior official of the ministry.

Response to the first phase of proposals will be received within the 31 May and inaugurated the same day in presence of the bidders or their representatives.

The main objective of the elevated mass transit system will be to augment the existing traffic capacity of the city and it would not obstruct or reduce the capacity of the surface roads over which the rails will be built, the official said.

"If necessary, the government will undertake acquisition of additional land, removal of existing structures and relocation of utility services," the proposal said.

The elevated vehicles, in order to be more environment friendly, will be required to use electrical energy instead of combustion energy from fossil fuel.

In its invitation letter, the ministry also informed the firms that the bidding would follow a two-stage process.

In the first stage of bidding, the government would consider the technical, investment and business proposals of the companies.

Technical and financial capabilities of the bidding firms will be adjudged and they would subsequently qualify them for the second stage of bidding.

Qualified bidders will then be invited to attend a conference in Dhaka to discuss and finalise the scope of the system.

The conference will further decide whether the system can be established within the existing framework socio-economic, technical and environmental policies of the government.

The successful bidders will sign a contract with the government. The company will be allowed to charge the facility users fare, tolls, fees, rentals and other charges that would enable it to recover the costs of implementing and operating the project.

The companies that intend to participate in the bidding process were also asked to submit proposals elaborating their technical expertise, investment mode and prospective plans to establish and operate the elevated rail system.

Jessore hartal protests terror

From Special Correspondent

JESSORE, March 11: A half day hartal was observed here today protesting the bombing at an Udichi concert on Sunday that left eight people dead and over 100 injured.

Called by the Sachetan Nagorik Samaj (Conscious Citizens Society), the hartal emptied rickshaws and other small transports. However, very few rickshaws were plying until 12 noon.

Shops and business were closed during hartal hours. Black flags, a symbol of mourning, were seen flying at different parts of the town.

Members of Bar Association held a discussion and brought out a silent procession to protest the killing.

Hundreds of young people also brought out a mourning procession. Some of the youths had slogans painted on their bare chest expressing contempt against the bombers.

Chander Hat, a cultural organisation, held a concert at the District Bar Association premises. Young artists rendered songs, demanding action against the yet to be identified bombers, at the programme.

Sammilito Sangskritik Jote (SSJ) held a condolence meeting with the vice president of Jessore SSJ Fakire Alam in the chair, at the townhall maidan where the bombing took place. Addressing the meeting, Udichi central committee president Syed Hasan Imam demanded removal of the Jessore SP for his negligence of duty.

Khaleda accuses govt of Jessore bomb blasts

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday accused the government of Jessore bomb explosion on Sunday that left eight people dead and more than 150 injured, reports UNB.

"Opposition or fundamentalist forces do not possess grenade. It is with the government and they have committed this act," Khaleda said. "The army experts have ascertained that the explosion was caused by grenade."

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament was speaking at a reception accorded to JCD president, Habibun Nabi Sobel and general secretary Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu on their release from jail, in front of her official residence in the evening.

"Jessore killing was a pre-planned action. After carrying out the plan, the government is putting the blame on the opposition and Islamic forces in a bid to divert public attention," she said.

The former prime minister said the ruling party is carrying out such incidents in a planned way to barter away the country's sovereignty to India and thus cling to power.

Drug dealers attack police, kill one woman

By Staff Correspondent

A young woman was killed and at least fifty others, including eight police personnel, were injured when a group of drug traders attacked police following the arrest of two drug traders on Wednesday near a slum at city's Kamalapur area yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Nurani Begum, 20.

A rickshawpuller, Rafiq, received bullet injuries on the chest. Two sub-inspectors, Kanchan and Najim, also received injuries during a battle that lasted for more than two hours at the Titipara slum under Sabugbagh thana in the city.

Rafiq was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in critical condition.

According to locals and hospital sources, the incident took place after drug traffickers and slum dwellers started a procession to protest the arrest of two people on Wednesday evening.

When the police arrived at the scene, the gang started throwing crackers at them.

In response, the police lobbed a number of tear gas shells to disperse the attackers. The attackers then hurled a large number of crackers on the spot, which resulted in injuries to at least fifty people, sources added.

CMP sends list of 396 terrorists to PM

CHITTAGONG, Mar 11: A report on the city's deteriorating law and order was sent to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today, reports UNB.

The report, containing a list of 396 terrorists of pro-Awami League Chhatra League, BNP's student front JCD, Jamaat backed Chhatra Shibir and NDP, was faxed to the Prime Minister, said a senior police official.

Meanwhile, police arrested 2,702 people on various charges from the city from January 1 to March 7.

DU drops the writing habit

Keep the walls clean, VC urges students

By Abul Kalam Azad

The drive to keep the walls of Dhaka University buildings white has hit snags as the student organisations carry on writing graffiti on the walls.

The DU authorities have been asking the student bodies for the last 10 years or so not to write on the walls, only to see the pleas ignored.

"We are very eager to maintain cleanliness to uphold the image of the country's highest seat of learning. As part of our drive, we have already placed flower tabs in every floor of Arts Building, Science Annex and Curzon Hall," the Vice-chancellor, Prof AK Azad Chowdhury said.

The VC said as part of the clean-up drive, the buildings and the walls were recently whitewashed and the garbage disposed. Modern lighting systems have been installed on the campus while a huge number of rubbish bins have also been kept in front of the departments.

Everybody should help the authorities to keep the university clean. This will create a congenial academic atmosphere on the campus, Prof Azad said. "If we can maintain cleanliness on the campus, it would help us to contain terrorist activities at Dhaka University."

But the student organisations seem least bothered when it comes to keeping the campus clean, resented the VC. "The student organisations are very interested in political issues. They don't care about the interest of the university."

But whenever I urged them not to slap posters or paint graffiti on the clean buildings and walls... they never paid any heed," he said. Student leaders would usually promise that they would never use the whitewashed buildings and walls for slapping posters or painting graffiti and then would not keep their words.

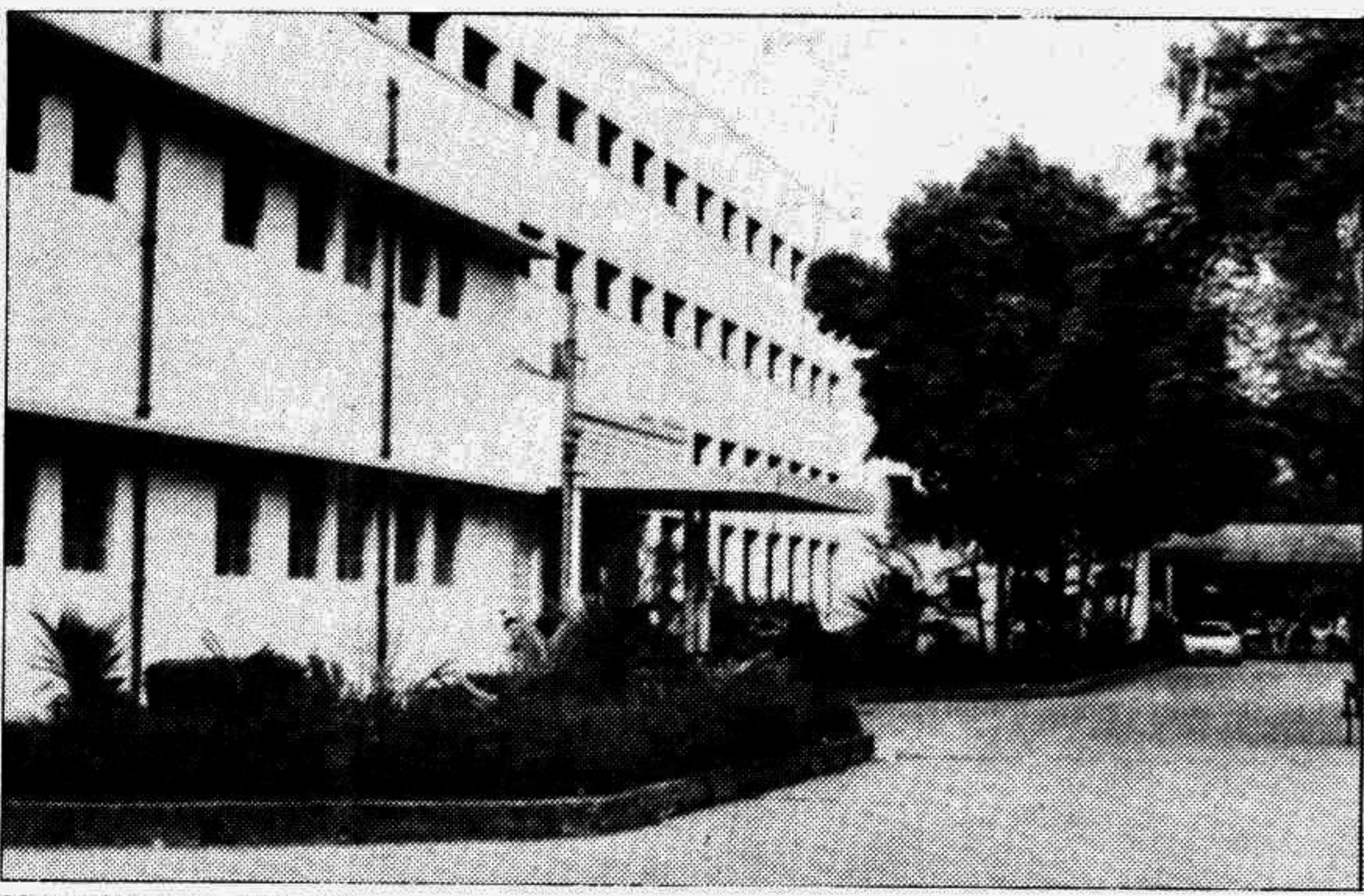
The buildings and the walls were whitewashed last month and student bodies were again asked to spare these from posters and graffiti. But to no avail, the VC regretted.

The student organisations, however, have kept their hands off the Arts Building. This time, it has cost the authorities Tk 50,000 to have the building whitewashed, a DU official said.

Sources said that university authorities have decided to set up billboards at different points on the campus so that student bodies can use these boards for their political slogans and spare the buildings and walls.

The fate of the clean-up efforts will hinge on the response of the student organisations, said a student of political science department of the university.

"But at the end of the day, I do want a nice-looking campus."



No writing on the wall
The Arts Faculty building at DU looks heavenly after its recent facelift. Everyone wishes it would stay that way, and we will be keeping an eye on it to see which group spoils it first. —Star photo

Black smoke devours green space

Gazipur faces environmental disaster

By Morshed Ali Khan, back from Gazipur

Once boasting of a pristine environment with patches of forest and agricultural plots, the area stretching from Joydevpur roundabout to Mouchak is now one of the most polluted areas in the country.

Unplanned setting up of industrial units and brickfields and manifold increase in vehicular traffic on the Dhaka-Tangail road have all contributed to the worst land, air and water pollution in the area.

Thick black smoke from hundreds of brickfields along the road restricts visibility to only about 100 yards even in daylight. The situation is worsened by hundreds of brick-carrying trucks plying on the dusty Kuchha roads leading to the brickfields.

Whatever water is left in the canals, low-lying areas and the river Turag near Baman bridge under Joydevpur thana during this dry period looks pitch black. The level of pollution is so high that the water has turned so. Hundreds of industries along the road and at the BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Industrial Estates Corporation) Industrial Estate at Konabari discharge their deadly wastes directly into the canals, rivers and low lands in the area causing a disaster.

Local people said thousands of trees along the road, which acted as 'some sort of wall' were cut recently to construct the new highway. They said many people, particularly children, in the adjacent villages were now having various respiratory and eye problems.

One Hazrat Ali Dafadar of Katara under Mirzapur thana said although large patches of agricultural lands have been saved by small earth-made dikes, many small patches of land have become barren due to the effluents from the industries. The farmers have shifted to deep tubewells for irrigation, leaving the traditional surface water, said Hazrat, a farmer himself.

"For the last five months these brickfields have been working day and night and the entire area is always dark, our houses are covered with thick dust, rivers in the area are dead and our lands cannot produce anything any more," Hazrat added.

Department of Environment (DOE) officials, who had earlier conducted a scientific study at BSCIC Industrial Estate at Konabari, said that the environmental situation worsened during the dry season. There were more than 600 brickfields in that area but none abided by the law that prescribes using high chimneys equipped with scrubbers and filters. As a result, particulate contents in the emission are very high that can be harmful to humans.

The DOE officials said the deputy commissioners concerned issue licences for the brickfields and it is upto them to check whether the law is respected or not. They said although DOE issues environmental clearance certificates for these brickfields, it is a fact that none respects the law. One official said the brickfield owners often complain that the chimney with scrubber and the filter are too expensive to buy. A set of scrubber and filter costs about Tk 50,000, he mentioned.

About the industrial pollution in the area, Reazuddin Ahmed of DOE quoted the study report and said none of the 86 BSCIC industries at Konabari had any environmental clearance from his office as required by the Environment Conservation Act, 1995. He said the industrial estate was set up in 1987 without any thought of a treatment plant. Several million cubic metres of liquid waste from BSCIC as well as hundreds of other industries along Dhaka-Savar and Joydevpur-Tangail roads flow into the canals, rivers, ponds and low-lying areas.

Quoting the report Reazuddin pointed out the BSCIC authorities had ignored law and gave permission to set up industries without environmental clearance. He, however, said DOE had recently served notices on all the industries requesting them to obtain clearance from his office.

BSCIC Chairman Mohammad Khorsheed Ansar Khan said that none of the 57 BSCIC Industrial Estates in the country had any treatment plant for waste. But now they were not giving permission for any industries without environmental clearance. For treatment plants, they had submitted a Technical Assistance Project Proposal (TAPP) to the ministry concerned, he said.

"A BSCIC committee along with DOE conducted a survey and submitted the proposal to the ministry. Now we are waiting for the approval so that some recommendations can be made on how to set up treatment plants in our estates," he said.

Right arm of a child blown off in explosion

By Staff Correspondent

The right arm of a child was blown off when she was playing with a small 'container' and it exploded at the day care centre at Hosain Mollah slum under Pallabi thana in the city yesterday morning.

The child was identified as Khadija, two and a half year old, daughter of one Shamsul Huq. She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

According to hospital sources she found the container at Pallabi Day Care Centre and started playing with it. Suddenly it exploded and her right arm was blown off.

Hasina leaves for Bahrain Sunday

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will leave for Bahrain on Sunday to pay tributes to the late Emir of Bahrain Shaikh Isa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa, reports UNB.

During her one-day visit, she will meet new Emir Shaikh Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, Crown Prince Shaikh Salman Bin Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa and Prime Minister Shaikh Khalifa Bin Salman Al-Khalifa.

She will also offer *fateha* at the mazar of late Emir.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will also hold talks with the Bahraini leaders on bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern.


Two big bonds in taka, dollar to be issued soon

SYLHET, Mar 11: The government will issue two big bonds in taka and dollar this month for funding country's industrial development, reports UNB.

The local currency bond worth Tk 1000 crore is for the businessmen and the dollar bond worth 200 million dollar for expatriate Bangladeshis.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria disclosed the executive plans to float the industrial development bonds while inaugurating an 8-day trade fair here today.

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