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Paris Consortium Draft of country memorandum approved

The Cabinet approved the draft of the country memorandum to be placed in the meeting of Bangladesh Development Forum April 19-20 in Paris, reports UNB.

The approval was given in a Cabinet meeting at the PM's Office yesterday with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Donors make a review of the country's economic performance and make fresh aid commitments in the annual meet, better known as Paris Consortium.

The meeting also approved IRR-Boro and Maize Procurement Policy '99 ahead of the dry season food crop harvests.

The procurement target has been fixed at 1.50 lakh metric tons of IRR-Boro paddy and 3 lakh MT of rice while 5,000 MT of maize.

The government procurement price for per kg paddy and rice has been fixed at Tk 8.25 and Tk 13 respectively while Tk 7 for maize.

CJ turns down Beximco plea for case transfer

Star Report

The Chief Justice yesterday turned down a Beximco plea for transfer from Court Number 6 of the High Court the writ case regarding removal of four Beximco directors from the boards of AB and IFIC banks.

The four had earlier filed the writ challenging the notices for removal of the four directors of Beximco from the IFIC and AB Bank boards.

The four — Sohel F Rahman, Salman F Rahman, M A Quasem and Iqbal Ahmed — had been served notices to vacate their respective posts in the boards as they failed to repay loans.

Beximco lawyer Rafique-ul-Huq later filed an application for transfer of the case from Court-6 as his clients expressed apprehension about fair trial in the court.

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Overdue loans Morshed Khan, 3 directors of AB Bank served notices

The chairman of AB Bank, M Morshed Khan, and three directors have been served with notices for cancellation of their directorships for non-payment of overdue loans worth Taka 40 crore, reports APB.

The three directors are Morshed Khan's uncle-in-law Golum Halim, brother Jashimuddin Khan and brother-in-law Ashgar Karim.

The Bangladesh Bank served the notices under Section 17 of the Bank Companies Act, which says loan defaulters cannot act as directors of scheduled banks. They have been asked to repay their overdue loans within two months for retaining their directorships, official sources said.

Earlier, the bank's vice chairman Ramzul Siraj and

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President assents to four bills

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday gave assent to the four city corporation bills passed in the current session of Jatiya Sangsad, reports UNB.

The bills are The Dhaka City Corporation (Amendment) Bill 1999, The Chittagong City Corporation (Amendment) Bill 1999, The Khulna City Corporation (Amendment) Bill 1999 and The Rajshahi City Corporation (Amendment) Bill 1999.

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Prayer Timings

March 23		
Fajr	5:30	Jamaat
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrib	6:20	6:23
Esha	7:30	7:35

Source: Islamic Foundation

Sunday's HC verdict CMM's court comes to a standstill

Star Report

The Metropolitan Magistrate in the city yesterday did not transact normal business other than handling the cases of persons booked by different police stations during the last 24 hours.

It followed a High Court verdict on Sunday declaring appointment of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate in 1992 and subsequent appointment of two CMMs unlawful. The verdict followed a writ petition filed by a lawyer.

Confusion prevailed in the

CMM court where 17 Magistrates perform various duties including prosecution. Only one Magistrate was found working in his desk.

People and lawyers who had cases had to leave the courts as normal business was not handled.

Sources said CMM K M Abdullah brought the situation to the knowledge of higher authorities and awaited instructions but did not get till the evening.

Law officials said they are

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Hearing adjourned till Apr 19 AL, BNP leaders reply to rule on hartal

Hearing of government and Opposition submissions on the High Court rule seeking to prohibit pro and anti-hartal activities was adjourned till April 19, reports UNB.

The adjournment came after the two sides made their depositions yesterday.

The Attorney-General prayed for adjournment to reply to the remarks made by the BNP Secretary General in his 110-pages reply to the *suo moto* rule.

Mahbubey Alam, the counsel for Awami League General Secretary and LCRD Minister Zillur Rahman, submitted the reply of the ruling party leader to the court.

Zillur responded that pro-hartal activities like processions, provocative slogans cre-

ated undue pressures on the people, hampering their normal works.

"Pro-hartal activists used arms and explosives forcing people to keep indoors," says the government reply pointing to frequent shutdowns being enforced by the BNP-led opposition combine to press their demands.

Hartal pickets, he said, hurl bombs and explosives on street shops, establishments and public gatherings. They set fire to cars and other vehicles.

"The pro-hartal elements committed cognizable offences and it's the duty of all citizens to protect themselves from their (opposition) criminal acts."

The Awami League leader

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US envoy suggests gas export to India

By Staff Correspondent

Contrary to what the prime minister and the leader of the opposition in parliament recently said about gas export, US Ambassador John C Holzman suggested yesterday that Bangladesh should now consider gas export to India as the domestic gas consumption alone would not bring about economic breakthrough.

"Even at the present low world petroleum prices, the export of 500 million cubic feet of gas a day, which would amount to about 3.6 tcf (trillion cubic feet) over 20 years, would earn Bangladesh about 450 million dollars each year," Holzman told a seminar in the city participated by politicians, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, lawyers and other professionals.

"Any domestic use should at least match these earnings," he said.

Holzman termed gas export issue a "secondary question" but hinted that without any prospects for gas export, foreign oil companies would lose interest in Bangladesh since the local gas consumption alone could not ensure quick return for their "high risk" investment.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia said in press interviews last week that Bangladesh's natural gas is not for export, now or in near future.

The ambassador referred to the interviews and said, "The real issue is how to use the gas reserves as an economic and development multiplier so that the economy will grow faster and this nation will rise to the ranks of middle income countries by the year 2020."

"These are important policy statements and reflect the common wisdom in Bangladesh on gas export," he said.

Holzman was the keynote speaker in the seminar on "Developing Bangladesh's Gas Resources" organised by Bangladesh Institute of Law and

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Ex-army chief Mahbubur Rahman joins BNP Lodge protest with Delhi against Bangabhumti activities: Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in parliament Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday alleged that "criminals" of the so-called Bangabhumti movement were conspiring against Bangladesh and had planned the recent major incidents of killing in the country while staying in Indian territory.

"The government is engaged in a deep-rooted conspiracy to split Bangladesh into pieces and hand it over to India," the former prime minister said addressing a big public meeting at the Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday.

"As part of that conspiracy, the government has already handed over the CHT region, one-tenth of the country, to the terrorists, armed and trained by India for decades."

"A Bangla daily, Bhoror Kago, has said they (Bangabhumti movement activists) have threatened to declare Swadhin Bangabhumti comprising 10 southern and western districts on March 26 from Delhi. This is an outcome of signing of the CHT agreement against the country's interest and constitutional provisions," Begum Zia said.

"This news is highly dangerous. Country's independence and sovereignty are now facing a serious threat."

The conspiracy against the independence and sovereignty of the country came to light when Bangladesh's Prime Minister was addressed as Chief Minister during her recent visit to Calcutta, she claimed.

The BNP Chairperson urged the government to "speak out what is happening inside and outside regarding Bangladesh's sovereignty" and advised it to send a strong protest to the Indian government immediately as the "so-called Bangabhumti movement has threatened to declare independence and form a government in exile."

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A smiling Opposition Leader Begum Khaleda Zia along with former army chief Lt Gen (Retd) Mahbubur Rahman at the BNP public meeting at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday.

—Star photo

Newspapers to remain closed for only 6 days a year: BSP

Newspapers will now remain closed for only six days — three days for Eid-ul-Fitr and three days for Eid-ul-Azha — a year, a Bangladesh Sangbadpatri Parishad (BSP) press release said yesterday, reports BSS.

The decision was taken unanimously at an emergency meeting of the BSP on Sunday. The meeting took the decision after having discussions regarding newspaper holidays in other countries.

The newspaper offices will remain closed on the occasion of the coming Eid-ul-Azha for three days beginning on March 28, the press release added. Therefore, no newspaper will be published on March 29, 30 and 31.

Meanwhile, an emergency meeting of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) will be held at 5 pm at the National Press Club today to discuss the situation arising out of the unilateral decision of the BSP.

Shazneen's father cross examined

By Staff Correspondent

Latifur Rahman, father of murdered teenager Shazneen, was cross examined by the lawyer of maids Parveen and Minu, both accused in the Shazneen murder case, for the second day yesterday in the court of Metropolitan Sessions Judge AK Roy for about two hours starting from 11 am.

All the six accused were produced before the court yesterday. Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23 last year. A murder case and another case under the Woman and Children Repression Prevention Act, 1995, was filed with Gulshan thana regarding the brutal killing.

In charge sheets of both the cases, police accused seven per-

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Fire incidents in three districts 4 killed, 480 families homeless

Three children and an old woman were burnt to death and 130 others injured in three fire incidents in three districts yesterday, reports UNB.

Some 480 families rendered homeless due to the fire incidents.

In Rangpur, two brother and sister, and their grandmother were killed and about 100 others injured when a devastating fire broke out at a slum at Babupara in Kotwali thana in the afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Sony 6, and Rony 4, children of one Shahid of the slum, and their grandmother Salma Khatun, 60.

The fire also gutted 250 shanties leaving 250 families homeless.

Fire Brigade sources said the fire broke out at about 2:45 pm and extinguished at about 9 pm. The cause of the fire could not be known immediately.

In Faridpur, a minor boy was burnt alive and 25 others were injured in a devastating fire at a slum in Lalan Nagar of the district town.

Police and witnesses said the fire which broke out at about 7:30 pm gutted 150 houses.

The victim was identified as Biplob, 2. The injured were admitted to different hospitals and private clinics.

Cause of the fire could not be known immediately.

Fire brigade units from Faridpur and Rajbari with the help of local people brought the blaze under control at about 9

pm. Meanwhile, two persons sustained burn injuries and 80 shanties were gutted when a fire broke out at Jimkhana slum at Narayanganj town yesterday afternoon.

Some 100 chickens of a poultry farm were also roasted alive and five shops damaged in the fire.

Three firemen were seriously injured when angry people beat them up as they reached at the spot late from the nearby fire station.

Witnesses said the fire originated from the kitchen of one Jesmin in the slum behind the Mondalpara fire station.

Firemen Almas, Manik Mia and Mojibur were admitted to Narayanganj hospital.



OSCAR WINNERS: (From L to R) Best Actress Gwyneth Paltrow for "Shakespeare In Love," Best Supporting Actress Judi Dench for "Shakespeare In Love," Best Supporting Actor James Coburn for "Affliction" and Best Actor Roberto Benigni for "Life is Beautiful" pose for photographers at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles during the 71st Annual Academy Awards Sunday.

—AFP photo (Story on page 5)

'Parliament should help strengthen govt's financial accountability'

By Staff Correspondent

The Parliament, as a bridge between the government and the people, should play the key role in making the budgetary process transparent to strengthen the government's financial accountability.

To this end, the parliamentarians should debate and influence "budgetary goals and assess government programmes and expenditures on the floor of the Parliament and at its committees on finance and public accounts."

The suggestion came at the on-going five-day regional seminar on "Parliament and Good Governance: Towards a New Agenda for Strengthening Accountability in South Asia", at the BRAC centre in Rajendrapur, Gazipur.

On the third day yesterday, the seminar dealt with the Parliament's significant role in the process of budget and the financial accountability of the government.

Transparency Interna-

tional, Bangladesh; Parliamentary Centre, Canada and World Bank are jointly organising the seminar.

Dr Steven Langdon, senior associate of the Canada-based Parliamentary Centre, presented the keynote paper on "The Budget Cycle Process". Hafeezuddin Khan, Comptroller and Auditor General of Bangladesh and Nepalese MP Silpyari Mulmi Karmacharya delivered lectures on the topic --

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Rape incident

British HC likely to meet Nasim tomorrow

Amid a heightening controversy over the alleged rape of a British woman, the High Commissioner of UK in Bangladesh, David C Walker, is likely to meet Home Minister Mohammad Nasim later this week.

The matter of rape of the British woman would be discussed among other things, JP Geddes, Second Secretary of the British High Commission, who looks after political and press matters, told UNB yesterday.

He indicated that the planned meeting might take place tomorrow.

The UK authority confirmed the British woman was raped by four policemen at a police station in Dhaka and Consul Geoffrey Fairhurst wrote a letter to the Inspector General of Police on December 21, 1998 informing him of the incident.

Asked whether the High Commission had sought investigation, Geddes said they had only wanted to inform the IGP since they had no further details of the lady and the incident.

First unit of Raosan plant reactivated

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 22: The first unit of Raosan 210 MW power plant resumed generation of electricity from this morning after remaining shut for about three days.

PDB sources said the unit was reactivated at 11 am today while the second unit still remained closed.

But efforts were on to reactivate the second unit as early as possible to cope with the power crisis prevailing here, they said.

Proposed strike at Ctg port postponed

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 22: The 22 trade union bodies of Chittagong port have postponed their work abstention programme scheduled to begin from 8 am tomorrow at the port.

The unions earlier announced the work abstention programme for four hours daily to press home their demand for cancelling the permission for installing a private port at Patenga by an American company.

The work abstention was postponed today following a fruitful discussion with the state minister for shipping recently, according to a press release of the trade union bodies.

Transport workers clash

One shot dead, 100 shops damaged in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Mar 22: One person was shot dead and seven were injured, 100 shops and 20 vehicles damaged during a clash between van drivers and transport workers at Phultala here today.

The clash was identified as Shajahan Ali, 36, a leader of the Phultala unit of Khulna District Bus Workers Union, Shajahan succumbed to his bul-

let injuries at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

Of the injured, three persons are still in coma at the KMCH while others were admitted to Phultala Thana Health Complex.

The clash ensued when a Khulna-bound bus hit a van carrying the van driver Faruque, 24, injured, police and

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Zimbabwe, Kenya meet today

The return-leg matches of the Tri-Nation Meril International Cricket Tournament begins today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium after a rest day yesterday, with favourite Zimbabwe taking on Kenya, reports UNB.

The 50 over-a-side match will start at 2 pm. Bangladesh Television will telecast live the match while Bangladesh Betar will broadcast the running commentary like previous matches.

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