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Mosharraf says I plan to meet party chief to explain my position

By Nazmul Ashraf
State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharraf yesterday said he has nothing to tell the press about suspension of his membership from the Jamalpur district committee of Awami League.

"I plan to meet the party chief, prime minister Sheikh Hasina and the general secretary Zillur Rahman to explain my position. I prefer not to comment on the matter which I will settle at the party forum," he told The Daily Star last night.

In an unanimous move on Saturday, the Jamalpur AL suspended the state minister and accused him of acting against the discipline and interest of the party. It alleged that Mosharraf's misbehavior with the party MPs from the district and undermined the district body. It also accused him of selecting non-locals for the next general elections.

All the five other AL MPs from Jamalpur were among the 47 of the 55-member district committee that took the action against Rashed Mosharraf, also president of Krishak League, AL's peasant wing.

Mosharraf however termed the district committee's action as childish and contrary to the party discipline. "I belong to a

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Steps to prevent Ershad Shikder from fleeing country

From Staff Correspondent
KHULNA, July 18: The government has passed an order on all border checkpoints and airports to prevent 'top terror' Ershad Ali Shikder from leaving the country.

Shikder is wanted in several cases of murder and other crimes.

The order was passed yesterday with immediate effect, said a press release issued from the office of KMP commissioner today.

Members of the law enforcing agencies have also been put on alert on all border checkpoints and airports. Plainclothes law enforcers have been deployed at all key points in the city to nab Ali.

Ershad Ali, Commissioner of Ward No-21 in Khulna city, forcibly married the wife of a top leader of the ruling party recently. It is alleged that she was compelled to divorce her husband who is also a renowned businessman. She was arrested as a suspect in a murder case a week after her second marriage and three days after Ershad had gone into hiding after allegedly murdering Jubo League leader Khalid Hossain.

Shikder joined Awami League quitting BNP in 1997 but was expelled in May. There were four murder cases and 19 other criminal cases against him when he joined AL.

Despite several raids, police failed to arrest him.

Taka loses value again

US dollar becomes costlier by one taka

By M Anwarul Haq

With exports facing real strains, the central bank yesterday in a major devaluation raised the price of the dollar by one taka.

This was the third major downward revision of the Bangladesh currency in the last 13 months. It was devalued by 85 poisa on July 5 and again by Tk 1.40 on October 15 last year before the current revision yesterday.

The devaluation was seen by most exporters as a boon to their export earnings while economists cautioned that currency depreciation without increasing competitive edge and foreign import dependence would lead to inflation and make goods expensive.

Following yesterday's devaluation, the Bangladesh Bank's buying and selling rates for US dollar will be Taka 49.35 and Taka 49.65 respectively. The buying-selling middle rate will now be Tk 49.50 in place of Tk 48.50.

The latest dose of devaluation has lowered the external value of the Bangladesh currency by 2.06 per cent. Finance Minister SAMS Kibria said the devaluation was aimed at making exports competitive, which had been giving declining signs.

According to available figures, the growth in garments which is highest income earning sector came down to 12 per cent this fiscal against a 23 per cent growth in the previous fiscal.

"It has been done to keep the proper valuation of our currency. It was also done to keep our exchange rates in the right place. I don't want the taka to be overvalued or undervalued. This (devaluation) is the judgement made by the Bangladesh Bank which I endorse. It has been done in slow doses," Kibria said, giving his reaction on the latest devaluation.

Kibria hoped that the new exchange rate would help exports and remittances received from abroad.

Since the present government took over in June 1996, the taka has been devalued by more than 18 per cent against the dollar. The value of US dollar was Tk 41.75 when the AL

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No signs of JFK Jr, his wife, others

HYANNISPORT, Mass. July 18: An air search resumed at daybreak today over the Atlantic Ocean for John F Kennedy Jr, his wife and her sister, missing and feared dead in a plane crash — the latest tragedy to befall America's most famous political dynasty, reports Reuters.

The hunt by Coast Guard vessels had continued through the night off the Massachusetts resort island of Martha's Vineyard where the single-engine, six-seat Piper Saratoga that Kennedy was flying went down late on Friday.

Debris from the Kennedy plane — including luggage and a prescription pill box — was found at sea and washed up on



AFP file photo of John John Kennedy and his wife Carolyn Bessette.

Train carrying defence cargo derails

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, July 18: Three bogies of the Dhaka-bound goods train loaded with defence cargo derailed at Chittagong port this morning, port sources said.

No damage to the defence cargo imported for the army and the airforce, was reported. Port sources said the bogies derailed at the time of shunting at around 9:40 am.

Later, the loaded defence cargo was shifted to other bogies of the train, the sources added.

The defence cargo was unloaded from the ship MV Karen Cat which came under attack of pirates at the outer anchorage Wednesday night.

Khoka, 24 others get anticipatory bail

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to BNP city convener Sadek Hossain Khoka and 24 others accused in constable Farhad murder case, reports UNB.

The order to attach movable property of the accused, excepting three, has also been stayed by the court.

The order to attach property of three ward commissioners accused in the case has already been executed by the police.

A High Court Division Bench comprising Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and Justice Mohammad Nurul Islam issued rule asking the government to show cause within 8 weeks why the 25 accused surrendered before the High Court should not be granted anticipatory bail in two criminal cases, one under the Explosive Substance Act and another for murder of Farhad.

Constable Farhad died when a bomb hurled at near Zero Point in the city on July 7.

The court in its order granted the accused an interim bail till disposal of the rule or filing of police report, whichever is earlier.

Khondaker Mahbubuddin

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Rubel murder Mukuli Begum 'ill', case again adjourned

By Court Correspondent

The Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions' Judge Court yesterday adjourned the proceedings of Rubel Murder Case till July 27 as Mukuli Begum, one of the 14 accused in the case, could not appear before the court 'due to illness'.

According to a C.I.D. investigation, Shamin Reza Rubel, 24, a BBA student at Independent University, was picked up by Detective Branch personnel from a place near his residence on July 23 last year and was subsequently tortured to death in custody the same day.

Yesterday was fixed for deposition of Abd'ur Robb, father of

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JCD leader Newton arrested from jail gate again

By Staff Correspondent

Said'ur Rahman Newton, vice-president of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) central committee was arrested for the sixth time yesterday from the Dhaka Central Jail gate, a JCD press release said.

Newton was released from the jail after court granted him bail in all under-trial cases but was arrested from the jail gate again.

He was later taken to Lalbagh and Mirpur police stations. However, no information was available regarding filing of the new case against him.

The ruling party has filed 21 cases against him so far.

He was arrested from the jail gate in a similar way five times before, the press release added.

N'ganj JCD president held in city

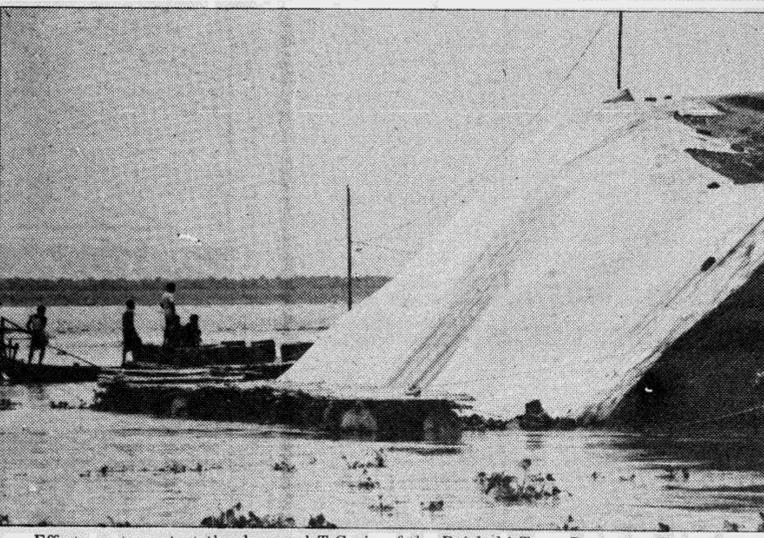
From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, July 18: The president of Narayanganj district Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal was arrested after an exchange of fire between police and a gang of criminals in Bijoyganj area in the capital this evening, police said here.

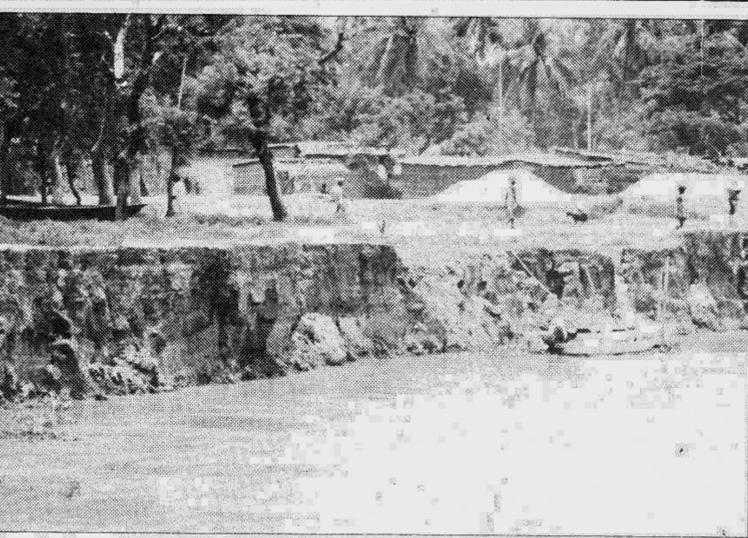
The arrested, Zakir Khan is an accused in about 25 cases including a murder case. A pistol with six rounds of ammunition were recovered from him, police added.

Zakir was attending a secret meeting with some criminals inside a building. Sensing the presence of police, he and his accomplices began to fire at them. Police also responded with gunshots.

At one stage Zakir was arrested but his accomplices managed to escape. Police were interrogating him at Narayanganj Sadar thana till the filing of this report.



Efforts on to protect the damaged T-Groin of the Rajshahi Town Protection Embankment from further erosion. (Right) The embankment and lands in Shishu Ban area in the city being washed away by the Padma.



The embankment and lands in Shishu Ban area in the city being washed away by the Padma.

2000 ft of dam washed away

Vast areas in Luxmipur go under water

By Special Correspondent

As the flood situation further improved yesterday with the major rivers falling, swirling waters from the Meghna washed away about 2000 feet of its embankment at Luxmipur, flooding houses and croplands in a vast area since Saturday night.

The Padma eroded a bazaar in Manikganj and is threatening Hariampur police station, reports received in Dhaka said.

In Comilla, the Gumti fell further yesterday but new areas in Chandina, Daudkandi and Muradnagar thanas were flooded.

Fair weather for the last few days contributed to fall of the rivers. The Padma began to fall yesterday although it remained above danger level at Bhagyakul in Munshiganj, the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said. The Meghna marking a slight fall

remained 1 cm above the red mark at Bhairab bazar, the Surma and Kushiara in Sylhet region also stayed above their danger levels, rising yesterday due to overnight rains. The Matamuhuri in the South Eastern Hill basin rose but stayed below danger level.

The Meghna still in spate washed away about 2000 feet of its embankment at Burihat in Luxmipur. Earlier, monsoon rains had caused a breach in that portion of the embankment, partially damaged by last

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Breach in Gumti dam Stern action if anyone found responsible, warns PM

By Special Correspondent

BURICHANG (Comilla), July 18: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today said that anyone found responsible for the breach in the embankment on the river Gumti would be brought to book, reports BSS.

Hasina, who flew here this morning from the capital to see the extent of damage caused by the breach, was addressing the affected people at Ebdaturpur village under Burichang thana.

She said that a committee has been formed to probe the causes of the breach in the embankment. She, however, said that responsibility of looking after the embankment also lies

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No major repair of dam Fear grips residents of Rajshahi town

From Abdul Wadood

RAJSHAHI, July 18: Residents are alarmed that Rajshahi city may go under water if there is severe flood this year as work for repairing the damaged groins and the Town Protection Embankment started late.

Renovation of the damaged portions began in the first week of June but dumping of sandbags and cement blocks are of little use because most of those are being washed away by strong current in the Padma, city dwellers said.

Two arms of the T-groin were almost washed away and about five kilometres of the century old 18. km embankment were damaged by last year's devastating flood. The

city will go under more than five feet water in case of a severe flood if the damaged portions can not be repaired immediately, residents fear.

Different political parties and socio-cultural organisations are staging demonstrations in the city almost every day, demanding adequate steps for protecting the city.

The renovation work began late this year due to delay in floating tenders. Water Development Board officials said.

In case of a flood of last year's scale, the embankment will not be able to bear the pressure, if it can not be repaired soon, WDB officials and city dwellers said.

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State minister 'excluded' from official talks

By Staff Correspondent

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury was not included in the team during official talks with the visiting Myanmar foreign minister held on Saturday or other programmes during the visit reportedly at the suggestion of Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, sources concerned said.

Myanmar Foreign Minister U Win Wung arrived in Dhaka on Saturday on a three-day official visit.

Chowdhury attended all previous official talks with visiting foreign ministers at home and also while on trips abroad, as part of the normal diplomatic protocol. His exclusion from the present talks raised eyebrows since Chowdhury is also the current Chairman of BIMSTEC. He was instrumental in launching the BIMSTEC, of

which Myanmar is an important member.

Informed sources said that the chasm between the Foreign Minister and the State Minister is "widening", which is affecting normal activities in the ministry.

When contacted for comments on his absence from the talks, Chowdhury said, "I am disappointed and surprised. There has been a break in the usual practice. If there had been any reason for any departure from the normal practice, at least I should have been informed. This is the least one can expect from a responsible and respectable institution like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)."

Chowdhury declined to make any comment on handling of the talks by the Foreign

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Robin back home, still sings

By Nazmul Ashraf

He was full of fun, prancing and singing all the time; muttering in Chittagonian dialect while responding to some queries. The innocence of childhood was all there in the face.

Robin—so said the five-year-old boy as he introduced himself.

"I was put on the back of a camel and I started crying in fear. I fell down (from the camel's back) after the belt (tying me with the camel) tore. My leg was broken. Doctors (at the hospital) then took my care," says Robin, who was used as a camel jockey in Dubai.

Dispelling all uncertainties, Robin came back home in a Bi-man flight at 11 yesterday morning. He is now being looked after by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA).

The tiny tot showed a scar on

his broken right knee. But he could not say more about his harrowing times in the middle-eastern country.

Always restless, Robin was talking with The Daily Star correspondent with at the Mirpur Road office of The BNWLA in cooperation with the ministries concerned made it possible for the boy to return home.

He could not remember how he was taken to Dubai. All that he could say was: I rode aeroplane twice.

He could answer some of the questions about his family though. "My father's name is Nasir. I've mother, brothers, but no sister," he said with his eyes glittering. "Yes, I want to go back home."

But he does not know where the home exactly is in Chittagong.

"The boy will be kept at Proshanti (a shelter for home-

less children run by the association at Mirpur) until his parents or guardians can be traced," said Mominul Islam Suruj, a BNWLA official.

Robin made newspaper headlines in the UAE and Bangladesh after he met the accident while being used as a camel jockey in Dubai late last year. An AFP-creeded report in December 1998 said the boy was trafficked to UAE by one Quasem, a Bangladeshi citizen living in Dubai. In Quasem's passport, it was stated that the boy was his son whose name was Mubin Quasem.

The sad story of Robin was revealed in Dubai when he was under treatment at a hospital for his broken leg.

Meanwhile, BNWLA executive director, Salma Ali, has sought cooperation of all about the whereabouts of the boy's family.



Robin

Petrobangla to settle 'Sangu budget dispute' with Shell

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla has decided to resolve the dispute with Shell Oil over the 178 million dollar Sangu budget through discussion or, if necessary, arbitration.

The Sangu budget dispute remains unresolved since late 1997 when Cairn Energy (now Shell Oil), developer of the gasfield, came up with a budget of 264 million dollars for development of the off-shore Sangu gasfield.

Petrobangla had originally approved a budget of 178 million dollars in '96 following

revision thrice. The budget covered a contingency expenditure of 25 million dollars.

But surprisingly, Cairn increased the budget on its own without any consultation with Petrobangla and came up with a 264 million dollar budget late in '97, claiming that the previous budget was prepared erroneously.

At that time, Petrobangla cross-checked some of the expenditure claims of Cairn and found that it was showing inflated costs. Cairn then revised the budget down to 247 million

dollars, saying again that it made a mistake.

Ever since, Cairn and its Sangu gas field development partners Halliburton Brown & Roots and Shell Oil have been claiming that the original budget was erroneous and that the new budget reflected the exact expenditure for Sangu development. Cairn told the government that it could check the pricing of the equipment installed in Sangu system in international market and see whether Cairn's expenditure was justified.

Petrobangla, however, responded to Cairn's claim saying that revision of the budget was not acceptable as it was never consulted. Besides, the original budget was approved after thorough review and it had a 25 million dollar contingency expenditure option - enough to support any unprecedented project cost hike.

Although the issue remains unresolved, Cairn and Petrobangla did not bring up the issue in their Joint Management Committee (JMC) meetings. Petrobangla sought

some clarifications regarding the budget hike but Cairn did not respond.

The Sangu field started supplying gas to the National Grid from mid '98, nearly two months behind the schedule, with a daily supply of 60 million cubic feet of gas per day (mcmd). It was supposed to produce 160 mcmd of gas but could not as one of the six gas wells turned dry and another turned irregular.

Now, as Shell has taken over operatorship of blocks 15 and 16 from Cairn, Petrobangla has

decided to solve the issue once for all.

Sources concerned said that Petrobangla would try to resolve the problem amicably on the basis of guidelines in the Production Sharing Contract (PSC).

"But if Shell behaves like Cairn, Petrobangla will be left with no choice but to seek international arbitration as per PSC terms," said one source.

Meanwhile, a top official of Petrobangla claimed that the 11.67 million dollar budget for

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Prayer Timings

July 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4:10	4:15
Johr	12:50	1:25
Asr	4:55	5:05
Maghrib	7:00	7:05
Esha	7:55	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation