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73
days to the
3rd Millennium

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PM in Sydney: Official talks tomorrow

SYDNEY, Oct 18: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina flew in here today to begin a five-day tour with a mission to expand economic ties with Australia, reports UNB.

Australian Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs Rhiplu Ruddock MP received Sheikh Hasina on her arrival at the Sydney Kingsford Smith International Airport on the first-ever bilateral visit to the continental country by a head of government of Bangladesh.

Dozens of Bangladeshi expatriates chanted slogans welcoming the Prime Minister as the aircraft of Biman Bangladesh Airlines landed at the airport at around 6:45 pm (local time).

"The main agenda of the Prime Minister's visit is to expand trade and investment between Dhaka and Canberra," See Page 11 Col 4

Election issues

Opposition did not turn up for talks with EC

By Staff Correspondent

Mainstream opposition parties including BNP did not turn up yesterday to discuss matters relating to the City Corporations and Upazila Parishad polls with the Election Commission.

Leaders of two political parties having representation in the government headed by Sheikh Hasina, however, attended the meeting.

The EC had earlier invited leaders of the mainstream political parties to exchange views on various aspects relating to the up-coming elections of the city corporations and upazila bodies. BNP, Jatiya Party led by H. M. Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote declined the offer for talks.

However, the Jatiya Party led by Communication Minister Anwar Hossain Monir and the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal of Fisheries Minister A. S. M. Abdur Rab yesterday met the Election Commission.

Members of the two delegations separately told the Commission.

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Tangail-8 bypolls

Nomination papers of 33 valid

From Our Correspondent

TANGAIL, Oct 18: Nomination papers of 33 candidates out of 35 filed for Tangail-8 by election were declared valid today.

The nomination papers of two independent candidates — SM Enayet Karim and Md Ali Azgar — were found invalid during scrutiny and cancelled, said on EC official.

Of the 33 candidates, 25 are independent, including the main contender, expelled Awami League leader Abdul Kader Siddiqui Bir Uttam.

Shawkat Momen Shahjahan is contesting for ruling Awami League while Kazi Ashraf Siddique and Mirza Aminuzzaman for Jatiya Party (Ershad), and ASM Rafiqul Islam Khan for JP (Mizan-Manju).

Earlier, on Sunday, the last day for submitting nominations, 35 candidates, including two women, deposited their nomination papers for the constituency covering Bashail and Sakhipur.

The last date for withdrawal of candidature is October 26.

Inside Today

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Big Setback for Congress: Half a Victory for BJP

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Prayer Timings

October 19

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4:30	5:00
Jorh	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:10	4:25
Maghrib	5:38	5:42
Esha	7:45	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Generals order troops pullout from border

C'wealth suspends Pakistan

LONDON, Oct 18: Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth today and barred from the group's heads of government meeting in South Africa next month because of last week's military coup, reports Reuters.

In a statement released at the end of talks in London, ministers from the eight-nation Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group said they "unanimously condemned the unconstitutional overthrow of the democratically elected government of Pakistan."

"The group has decided therefore that the Pakistani military regime should forthwith be suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth, including the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, pending the

restoration of democracy in the country," it said.

The Commonwealth ministers also called on the military regime in Islamabad to announce immediately a time-frame for the restoration of democracy. It agreed to send a mission to meet the Pakistani regime, which will consist of ministers from Canada, Barbados, Ghana and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Pakistan began pulling troops away from its tense border with India today, one day after new military ruler General Pervez Musharraf promised a "unilateral military de-escalation", army officials in Islamabad said.

The pullback was dismissed by New Delhi, which stepped up accusations that Islamabad was behind "cross-border terrorism".

Pakistani officials said the troops were being pulled back only from the international border and not from the Line of Control dividing disputed Kashmir.

"Orders have been issued and the return of forces that had been moved to borders in the last few months has already started this morning," spokesman Brigadier Rashid Qureshi said.

India shrugged off the pullback.

"It is imperative that Pakistan should cease its sponsorship of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India," Indian foreign ministry spokesman Raminder Singh Jassal said in a statement.

The United States said it welcomed the troop pullback

and other pledges made in a speech by Musharraf on Sunday to restore democratic rule but lamented that no time frame was set.

"We would hope that sooner — and much sooner than later — that there would be a fulfillment of the pledge to return to democratic rule," US Defence Secretary William Cohen said in Bahrain during a Middle East tour.

US President Bill Clinton said today he was pleased by the "conciliatory tone" Pakistan's new military ruler took toward India but disappointed that Gen. Musharraf set no timetable for a return to democracy.

A lot of what he said on the substance, including the conciliatory tone he took toward India, See Page 11 Col 5

42 tonnes now held up at Ctg port

1100 MTs of vetch imported in last four months

Star Report

The Chittagong Customs has stopped delivery of 42 tonnes of imported vetch worth about Tk 9 lakh.

The delivery was stopped soon after the government banned import of the toxic item on Sunday. Deputy Commissioner of Chittagong Customs Al-amin Pramanik told The Daily Star Bureau Chief in Chittagong yesterday.

The consignment was imported from Australia by Faruq Traders of Munshiganj, Dhaka, Pramanik said.

Import of vetch, a grain so far marketed in the country as lentil, was banned for toxicity which impairs eyesight, affects human tissues and can even cause latherism.

A total of 1100 tonnes of vetch were imported during the last four months of the current fiscal, and 6,410 tonnes during the last fiscal, other sources in Chittagong Customs told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile Commerce Ministry sources here said they have requested the Ministry of Health to take necessary action against importers of vetch under the Food Act after ascertaining toxicity in vetch.

Asked whether the quantity now in the market will be withdrawn, one source said, "The government is seriously considering the matter. A decision will be taken after the level of toxicity is ascertained."

The ministry has also re-

quested the Australian embassy here to furnish information regarding toxicity in vetch and whether it is a food item or a fodder. It has also asked for a list of vetch exporters in Australia, the sources said.

The ministry sent samples of vetch to Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute (BSTI), Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR), Nutrition Research Institute of Dhaka University, and Bangladesh Food Research Council (BFCR) on Thursday for test but results are yet to be obtained, they said.

Import of vetch is banned in India, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and some other Middle East countries since 1992, it was learnt.

Storm triggers countrywide rain

By Special Correspondent

The country experienced intermittent rainfall since Sunday in the wake of a cyclonic storm that made a 'landfall' over the Indian state of Orissa early yesterday.

A low forming in the West Central Bay last week developed into a cyclonic storm having a gust of 85 kph and maintained its steady course towards the north-west. It started lashing the Orissa coast late Sunday evening and "completed the landfall at 3 am yesterday" a senior weatherman said.

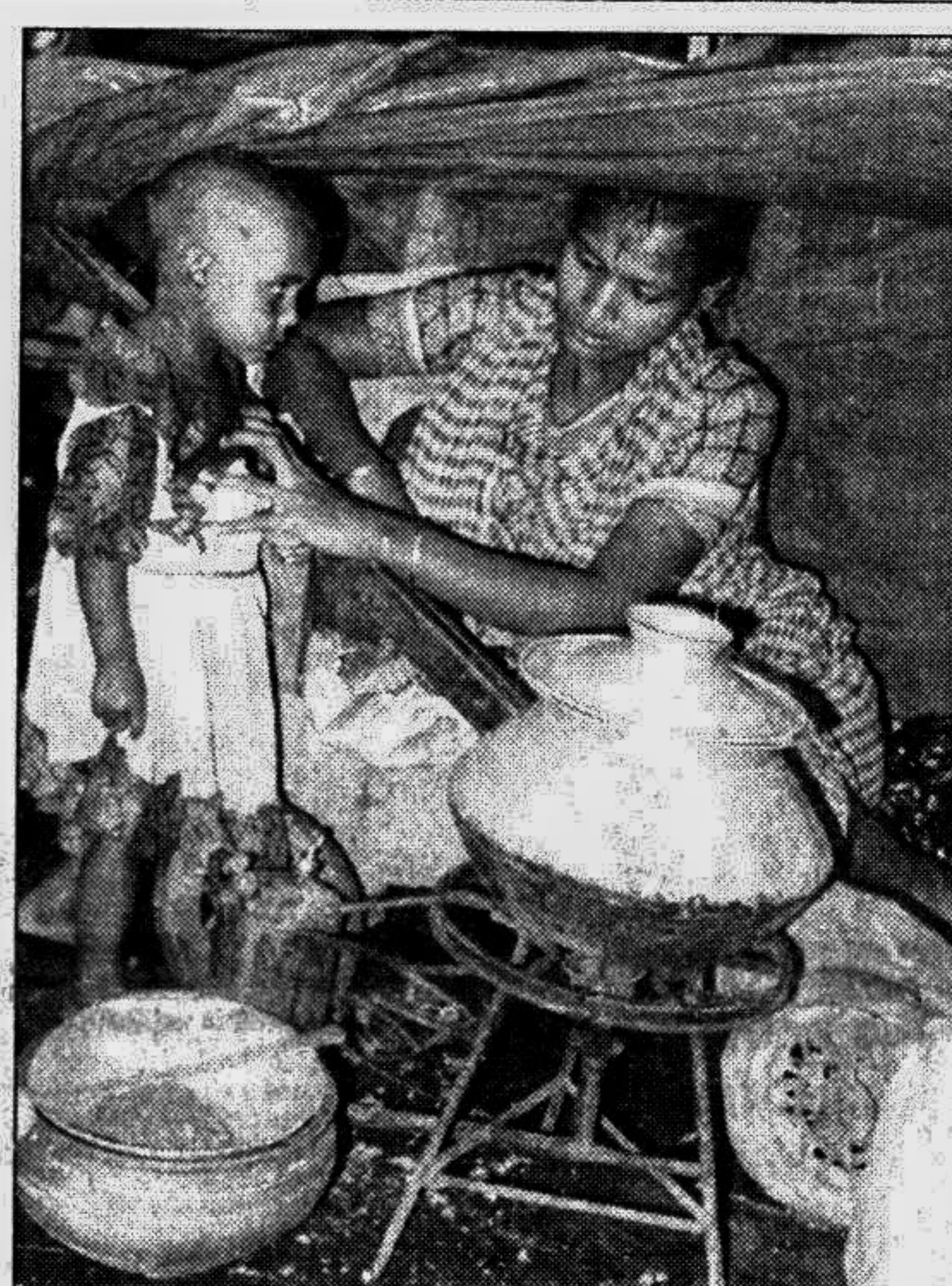
The cyclonic storm triggered heavy to moderate rainfall in the country throughout yesterday as it turned into a land depression over Orissa, West Bengal and Bihar in India, making a north-easterly move. Met Office said last night.

Under its influence, rains are likely today with a lesser intensity as the land depression gradually weakens.

The rainfall totalling 99 mm from 6 pm Sunday to 6 pm yesterday in Dhaka disrupted normal life. It particularly affected the poor who sleep on pavements and made life difficult for vendors and laborers.

During the same period the

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A destitute family takes shelter under a makeshift polythene tent during day-long drizzle yesterday.

— Star photo

16 killed as cyclone hits Orissa

BHUBANESWAR, India, Oct 18: At least 16 people were killed when a massive cyclone hit the eastern Indian state of Orissa today, causing widespread destruction, a minister said, reports AFP.

"We are still gathering information about the destruction caused in various parts of the state. So far 16 people have died," state chief minister Giridhar Gamang told reporters.

"Ten of those deaths occurred in the southern Behrampur district due to house collapses," he said.

The coastal state was lashed by torrential rains and strong winds up to 200 kilometres an hour, forcing the authorities to evacuate thousands of people from low-lying areas.

The cyclone caused havoc across the coastal region, inundating villages and crops and

paralysing road and rail transport as well as communications.

A national highway linking Calcutta with the southern city of Madras, which runs through the region, was blocked by uprooted trees.

Gamang said he had asked the prime minister for help from the Indian army and paramilitary forces to rescue those stranded along the coast.

Six of the deaths occurred in Orissa's Ganjam district and three people were seriously injured when a tree collapsed on them, he said.

Several houses were damaged in Berhampur city. A cyclone warning system located near the port town of Gopalpur was destroyed by the storm.

Orissa officials told AFP an ancient fort at Gopalpur was "severely damaged" by the winds overnight Sunday and one of its walls had crumbled.

The Gopalpur fort is a tourist attraction. There was no immediate word of damage at a nearby Indian missile testing ground near the sea.

In the neighbouring state of West Bengal, about 10,000 people were rendered homeless after heavy rains lashed the state.

The Press Trust of India said vast regions of the state were inundated and weather office had forecast heavy rains for the next two days.

The cyclone also brought torrential rains to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh state.

In Orissa, the authorities shifted 4,000 villagers to safer places Sunday. Many were housed in state-owned schools. Fishermen had been warned not to venture into the choppy sea.

In Andhra Pradesh, about 3,000 villagers were moved out of low-lying areas.

Meeting with Khaleda German MPs told of AL's 'misrule'

By Staff Correspondent

The visiting German Parliamentary Delegation yesterday evening called on the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia and discussed with her the current political, economic and parliamentary issues of Bangladesh.

Brigitte Adler headed the 5-member delegation.

Khaleda Zia briefed the visiting delegation on the issues and said that the ruling Awami League, which had once introduced one-party BKSAL rule, had again resorted to undemocratic and anti-people activities.

She said that although the AL spoke of democracy, in actuality the party-government was engaged in various anti-democratic activities. The ruling party had already snatched people's fundamental and democratic rights and had been taking important decisions without any discussion with opposition parties in parliament, she added.

The opposition leader said the government had signed important treaties and agreements with foreign countries without

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Tk 3331 crore agri loan for current fiscal

The government will disburse Tk 3,331 crore as agricultural loan during the current fiscal, which is Tk 326 crore higher than actual disbursement last year, reports UNB.

This was disclosed yesterday at the first meeting of the national committee to monitor and review agricultural loan.

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria presided over the meeting at the Finance Ministry.

Alternate president of the committee, Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury was present.

The Cabinet Division formed the committee headed by the Finance Minister on October 6.

During the last fiscal year (1998-99) Tk 3,005 crore was disbursed as agricultural loan against a recovery of Tk 1,996

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Power supply situation worsens

By Staff Correspondent

Power supply situation in the country worsened yesterday as a number of units in major power plants remained closed due to mechanical problems, according to PDB sources.

But they declined to specify the quantity of load shedding in the country yesterday.

The control room at Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA) office however said that Dhaka and its adjacent areas had a deficit of 118 mw power.

In the city, many areas including Gulistan, New Market, Azimpur, Shahbagh, Farmgate, New Elephant Road, Kalabagan, Mogh Bazar and Malibagh area experienced load shedding yesterday.

Some adjacent areas including Fatullah, Postagola, Jatra-bari, Demra, Amin Bazar, Tongi and Joydebpur also came under load shedding yesterday.

A PDB source said power generation in nine units remained suspended since 9 am yesterday. These are Ghorashal-3, Shikhabaha (thermal plant), Shiddhirganj-4, Rouzani-2, Ashuganj Gas Turbine-2, Haripur-2, Fenchuganj Gas Turbine-1.2 and the thermal plant.

Ghorashal-6 and Ashuganj-4 units were generating less power than usual. Power supply through the Ashuganj-Comilla 230 KV line was disrupted.

Fuel price won't be increased 'before next election'

By Staff Correspondent

The government has finally decided not to increase prices of petroleum products considering its political implication, sources said.

"Petroleum prices are unlikely to be increased before the next election," a highly placed source in the Energy Ministry said yesterday seeking anonymity.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) recently made a strong plea for 30 per cent increase in prices of petroleum products and the government was considering the proposal. But the government finally rejected the proposal "fearing public reaction", the source said.

Moreover, the government also considered the fact that it did not keep its promise to reduce domestic prices when the price of crude in the international market fell earlier, he said.

However, sources in BPC still claim that it will incur a loss of Tk 800 crore till March-April next if domestic prices are not increased. Crude price has gone up beyond 25 dollars per

barrel in the international market and it will rise further, they claimed.

But industry insiders rejected BPC's claim, saying the price now hovers around 21 dollars per barrel and will not show an upward trend in the next one year.

Besides, even if the price in the international market reaches 25 dollars, the present local prices are "enough to avoid losses", they said.

In 1997, the government enhanced petroleum prices by 60 per cent on the ground that crude price exceeded 25 dollars per barrel from 16-18 dollars earlier. While raising the prices, the government had promised to reduce those in the event of a fall in the international market. But the government did not keep its promise although the price in the world market fell to as low as 8 dollars a barrel in the following months.

The government earns about Tk 2000 crore annually as duty from import of petroleum products.

Addl IG Rahim denies link with Shikdar

Staff Correspondent

Additional IG of Police Abdur Rahim Khan, in a rejoinder yesterday to a Daily Star news item headlined "Former cop names Additional IG as Shikdar's patron", published in its October 15 issue, denied any link with Shikdar and never having taken any benefit from Shikdar.

Our news item said that on the basis of a letter circulated by a former police inspector Abdus Salam, who claimed to have served under Khan during his tenure as commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan police, had alleged that he was one of those who had received benefits from Shikdar.

The additional IG termed the news item as "totally false and baseless".

"I do not know Mr Abdus Salam, who is reported to be a former police inspector of KMP," he said.

The rejoinder by Khan said, "During my short tenure as Police Commissioner, Khulna, from 23-10-94 to 3-5-95, local AL leader and ward commissioner Muslim murder case was registered. I had ordered arrest of Ershad Shikdar in connection with this case."

While trying to arrest

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HC grants bail Police asked not to harass Shaheda Obaid

By Staff Correspondent

The Vacation Bench of the High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail and ordered police not to arrest or harass Shaheda Obaid, wife of BNP leader KM Obaidur Rahman MP, till the hearing of a petition by her after reopening of the Court.

The Bench comprising Justice Mohammad Sirajul Islam gave the order after two days of hearing.

Shaheda Obaid, who is Chairman of English department at Narsingdi Government College, prayed to the HC for anticipatory bail apprehending arrest and harassment by law enforcing agencies for her alleged involvement in a reported plot to kill the prime minister.

According to a report by the official news agency BSS, Shoab Chowdhury who is now in custody confessed to police that he had several meetings with Shaheda Obaid about the plot to kill the prime minister and 30 others.

Advocate Mahbubur Rahman, counsel for Shaheda, in his submission said that since her name was not in the FIR, a conspiracy was being hatched to implicate her in the case to arrest and harass her in the name of interrogation.

Additional Attorney General Advocate Mahbubey Alam submitted that the petitioner had no imminent danger of arrest or harassment and the case is under investigation.

11 wrecked ships still sunken in Ctg port channel

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 18: At least 11 wrecked ships are still sunken in the Chittagong Port channel in Kamaphul.

This was disclosed by chairman of Chittagong Port Authority Commodore Golam Rabbani while exchanging views with the newsmen here today.

Rabbani informed that steps were being taken to salvage three of them shortly.

"But the vessels are not hampering ship movement as they were removed from the risky areas of the channel", he said.

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Shikdar confesses killing five 'smugglers'

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Oct 18: Ershad Shikdar today confessed killing five 'smugglers' on the same day at Skid Ghat in February last year as his relations with them became strained over payments.

He named the six victims as Altaf, Kachi, Barek, Hashem and Babu. All of them hailed from Jessore town.

They were confined in a room for the whole day in his ice factory and killed at midnight, Shikdar said during interrogation by senior police officials in the KMP headquarters. His confessional statements were tape-recorded.

The bodies were dumped into Bhairab river. The murders were committed in presence of Shikdar's bodyguard Noor-e-Alam, 'Jama' Faruk, Liaquat Lashkar and Nasir Khan, Mazharul Huq, DC (South) of Khulna Metropolitan Police said quoting his statement.

The 'smugglers' used to supply drugs including heroin and Indian sugar to Shikdar.

When their relations became strained sometime in January

last year because of Shikdar's 'irregular' payment, the smugglers stopped deals.

In the third week of February, Shikdar called them in his ice factory in the name of payment of all outstanding dues.

The smugglers responded to his call in good faith and came to Khulna by train. Shikdar received them warmly and showed utmost hospitality, serving them with rich food, wine and women for the whole day, keeping them in an air-conditioned room in the ice factory.

At night, they were taken to the killing spot near the old water tank in the Railway colony area and killed one by one.

They were strangled and then beaten with heavy stones before being shot dead.

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