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INSIDE TODAY

SOUTH ASIA

The post-election session of the Congress Working Committee proved that party leaders are still busy with Sonia Gandhi, not the party, writes M Abdul Hafiz in Sonia's Introspection

COMMENTS

It is the failure of the SAARC that the idea of sub-regional co-operation appears to make headway, writes Arshad-uz Zaman in Energising the SAARC

INSIGHT

Obstruction to the natural flow of the rivers may have largely contributed to arsenic contamination of groundwater in Bangladesh, writes Thomas E Bridge and Meer T Hussain in Paying the price for smothering the rivers

HEALTH

Leading Indian expert in interventional cardiology Dr Ashok Seth talks to Naimul Haq about the standard of cardiac care in Bangladesh

Dhaka, Delhi to dig into bilateral treasure

Cross-border terrorism, communication links top ministerial talks

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Bangladesh and India yesterday discussed bilateral and regional security issues and problems of cross border terrorism.

The two sides also focussed on opening the entire gamut of multi-modal transportation links between the two countries, including rail, bus service and shipment of cargo by road.

Discussions relating to neighbours, including Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar were also held.

A joint meeting of experts will be held in Dhaka next week to be followed by a meeting of foreign and home secretaries.

Other subjects of bilateral and regional concern were discussed by the visiting Indian State Minister for External Affairs Ajit Kumar Panja with Bangladesh leaders during

calls-on and also at the official level talks between him and his Bangladesh counterpart State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury.

The two sides decided to identify all the bilateral problems between the countries and also make maximum use of their physical proximity to improve communications for "best economic advantage."

They decided to remove impediments in the way of increasing physical links.

The Indian minister, who arrived on a 3-day trip to Bangladesh, had a hectic programme yesterday, including a call-on with the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the Foreign Minister Abul Samad Azad.

Ajit Panja, who is a former central minister of Information and belongs to the Tri-

nomool Congress in Vajpayee's coalition government had a one-on-one meeting for nearly 20 minutes with Abul Hasan Chowdhury, before the two sides met for official talks which lasted over an hour.

After the end of the official talks, the two ministers took questions from newsmen.

Ajit Panja said that both sides "reviewed all the bilateral issues that were of concern to our countries and also other neighbouring countries."

He said that discussions were held on security issues concerning the two neighbours and "also about other neighbouring countries."

Panja particularly mentioned that "important discussions" were held about Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar. He said without elaborating, that it was

important to look regionally since information technology was turning the world in to a global village.

The Indian minister said that the two sides had discussed opening of multi-modal communication system, which would benefit the entire region.

"In the new millennium, the message is to move together and it is the economic content that forms the core issue of bilateral cooperation."

Both the ministers said that a joint statement would be issued at the end of the visit.

The Bangladesh side at the talk, led by Abul Hasan Chowdhury, included Additional Foreign Secretary Dr Toufiq Ali, Director General South Asia, Iftekharul Karim and Dhaka's High Commissioner to New Delhi, Mostafa Faruque Mu-

hammad.

The Indian side, led by Ajit Panja included High Commissioner Dev Mukherjee, Deputy High Commissioner Panaki R Das, Economic Counsellor Hamid Rao and Press Counsellor Riva G Das

Abul Hasan Chowdhury told newsmen, "Bangladesh could be considered as a regional 'communications network hub'. We will offer our cooperation after adequate study. The capacity of our roads to carry the burden of cargo has to be examined," he said, while making an indirect reference to India's proposal for transshipment and transit.

He said Dhaka had asked for reducing trade deficits and discussions for sharing the waters of the common rivers, apart from the Ganges.



Biting dust

A palatial residence, scores of take and powerful friends couldn't stop justice from bringing Ershad Shikder to his knees at the High Court yesterday. (Story on Back Page)

Star photo: Anisur Rahman

Shadow over conference gets longer

Key chamber chiefs decide to stay away

By M Shamsur Rahman and Shahriar Karim

The business community appears divided over the Businessmen's Conference sponsored by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and scheduled to begin tomorrow as the chiefs of four key business bodies have decided not to join the conference.

FBCCI President Abdul Awal Minto, who returned from abroad yesterday, was seen busy trying to convince them to attend the two-day conference.

The conference was arranged to persuade political leaders to avoid politics of confrontation which was weighing too much on the economy and business.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Oppo-

sition in Parliament Khaleda Zia are likely to address the conference.

The FBCCI president along with vice presidents went abroad keeping the other chamber leaders "in dark" about the programmes of the conference, sources alleged. "Through press reports, we came to know that we were selected as speakers at the conference," a top business leader said.

The leaders of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and

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PDB, AES continue to quarrel

No end in sight two weeks after deadline

By Staff Correspondent

The crisis regarding the Meghnaghat Power Plant site continues to remain unresolved even after two weeks of the expiry of the deadline for handing over of the site by the Power Development Board (PDB) to the US company, AES.

Sources said that while PDB claimed the 100-hectare site for the power plant to be ready for being handed over, AES says that the site was not developed 'as per the contractual terms' and it was 'unsafe' for setting up the plant.

AES also said that as per its own project site testing data, if it installed heavy machinery there, it could result in fault in the alignment of the power plant and ultimately the plant could be 'destabilised'.

While the disagreements between PDB and AES have reached a dead end, there had been no negotiation to resolve them. Sources said that AES has asked PDB to resolve the problems by holding negotiations, but PDB had reduced ac-

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Opposition acts on action formula

Circular sent out to form campaign committees

By Rezaul Karim

BNP and other opposition parties started circulating instructions to all city and district units yesterday to form an All-Party Action Council (APAC) soon.

The formation of the APAC at city, district, municipality, thana, ward and union levels across the country is aimed to boost the street protest and quicken the fall of the government.

The secretaries-general of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote signed the circular on January 18. Chiefs of the four parties at a summit meeting on November 30 last year announced to form the APAC at all levels.

The circular consisting of 10 instructions asked for formation of liaison committees at district headquarters with presidents and general secretaries or convenors and joint convenors of district units of the four parties, elected representatives and local eminent personalities.

The circular has given three responsibilities to all units: to conduct a massive mass contact programme, implement all programmes to be announced by the Central Liaison Committee and solve problems that may creep in locally.

Each unit will have one convenor and no more than 101 members.

The circular further asked for constitution of APAC in co-ordination with representatives of opposition (Four Party and Seven Party) alliances, other political parties, groups, eminent personalities, students, workers and professional bodies and those who want to take part in the one-point movement.

It said the APAC in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi cities will also have committees at thana and ward levels while the district committees have units at municipality, thana, ward and union levels.

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Silos stuck with saturated stocks

By Reaz Ahmad

A saturated food reserve has forced the government to go for immediate release of food to save the grains from rotting and making room in the silos for fresh intakes.

Official sources, however, ruled out any possibility of the old stock rotting, provided all food-supported programmes are implemented 'in time'.

An all time record stock of 16 lakh 25,000 foodgrain in the godowns has created a situation to face up to which the government has to sanction additional grains for food-supported development programmes!

Otherwise, the age-old silos would not have any space left for fresh procurements to be stocked, said sources.

A total number of 639 public

sector granaries have got a maximum stock capacity of 18 lakh MT.

But, due to lack of maintenance and renovations the 'stock-capacity' has reduced substantially causing possibilities of the grain quality getting spoiled, if preserved for longer period, that is.

However, after the successive bumper crops in last boro, wheat and Aman, government had to go for vigorous procurement drive to give price incentives to the growers.

Food Ministry sources said that government has raised budget for Food for Works (FFW) programme from 5 lakh 25,000 MT to 7 lakh 5,000 MT to combat the 'saturating stock situation'.

It would be 'political risk-taking' for the government if any grain rots in the silos, said sources recalling such an incident that had occurred in 1994. Mentionably, findings of the government investigation into that rice-rotting scandal has never seen the daylight, though three years have elapsed.

In addition to normal budgetary allocations, government would off-load an additional one lakh MT for works under Local Government Engineering Department and an additional 50,000 MT for works under Water Development Board in January.

According to the Directorate of Food, government would off-take a total of 12 lakh MT grain

in the current dry season under Public Food Distribution System (PFDS).

The allocation would go to infrastructure development works, vulnerable group feeding (VGF), vulnerable group development (VGD) and relief purposes.

To begin with, government had already released some 40,000 MT from the godowns on the eve of the Muslims' holy Eid festival when ministers distributed food relief among poor in their respective districts.

On the other hand, government would have to keep room in the silos for Aman and upcoming Boro storage and also for its food aid programme.

Meanwhile, a Food Ministry

report noted that due to abundant domestic market supplies, the open market price of food grains had fallen in November and early December 1999.

To protect the market price from dropping further, the government has already imposed duties on rice import.

And now reports from rice-rich northern regions suggest that price is picking up gradually, much to the delight of the farmers.

According to a Novartis newsletter, though the prices of paddy are less than the 1998 aman season, farmers are happy with the price range. 1998 was a flood-year and prices were high all through, the newsletter explains.



Filth flows forth

The city's sewer lines choked again yesterday, spewing sewage onto the street in Paltan. Star photo: Sk. Enamul Haq

Renewal of old rivalry

Youngsters take on Kenya today

From Al-Amin

MATARA, Jan 20: Bangladesh renew their rivalry with Kenya in their second Plate group league match of the World Youth Cricket Championship at the Uyanwatee Stadium in Matara tomorrow.

The match of the two old foes is expected to be a fiercely contested one as a win would mean a lot for both.

Bangladesh, fresh after their impressive 7-wicket victory over Namibia, need a victory against their African opponents to move into the semifinals, even before playing the last group match against a strong Zimbabwe.

On the other hand, Kenya, smarting under a six-wicket defeat at the hands of Zimbabwe, are left with only option of beating Bangladesh to stay in the Plate race.

Although Kenya hold a better record against Bangladesh in the senior level of the game, the Hannan-led boys appear

confident to upstage their opponents in their first first-ever meeting at Matara.

"My boys are not bothered with the past. They are ready to take the Kenyans the way they had taken the other teams in the meet", said Bangladesh coach Dipu Rai Chowdhury at the Dickeella Village Hotel today.

Dipu was talking to Bangladesh journalists on his team's return from a training session at Uyanwatee Stadium, 20km away from this tempo-

rary abode of his side. "The Kenyans are a talented side. They love to play their shots. But the wicket here will not suit their batting. And if my

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Indians dominate Day One

By Lenin Gani

Sensational performances by promising teenager Ashok Kumar and Rahul Gangjee powered India to a 1-0 lead.

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ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলা-২০০০ সচিবালয়

রশনি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরো
১২২-১২৪, মতিঝিল বা/এ
ঢাকা

নোটিশ

ঢাকার শেরে বাংলা নগরে আগামী ২৯ জানুয়ারি - ২৮ ফেব্রুয়ারি ২০০০ইং সময়কালে অনুষ্ঠিত ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলায় অংশগ্রহণকারী প্যাভিলিয়ন/মিনি-প্যাভিলিয়ন/স্টল বরাদ্দ প্রাপকদের আগামী ২৬/০১/২০০০ইং তারিখের মধ্যে মেলা প্রাঙ্গণে সকল প্রকার নির্মাণ কার্য সমাপ্ত করার জন্য এতদ্বারা অনুরোধ করা যাইতেছে। অভ্যন্তরীণ রাস্তা নির্মাণের জন্য নির্ধারিত তারিখের পর মেলা প্রাঙ্গণে ট্রাক/লরিসহ কোনো প্রকার ভারী যান-বাহনকে প্রবেশাধিকার দেওয়া হইবে না।

২। নির্ধারিত সময়ের মধ্যে যে সকল বরাদ্দপ্রাপক তাহাদের নির্মাণ কার্য সম্পাদনে ব্যর্থ হইবেন, সে সকল প্রতিষ্ঠান/সংস্থার বরাদ্দ বাতিল করা হইবে।

শেখ মোহাম্মদ ওয়াহিদুজ্জামান
পরিচালক
ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলা-২০০০
সচিবালয়

জিডি-৬১