

The Daily Star

on Friday

Your 20-page
weekend
paper

Wishing the
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3rd Millennium

VOL. X NO. 56 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH 10, 2000

FALGOON 27, 1406 BS

ZILHAJ 3, 1420 HIJRI

20 PAGES PLUS MAGAZINE PRICE: TAKA 9.00

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Despite excitement and enthusiasm revolving around President Bill Clinton's forthcoming visit, the political environment in the sub-continent remains far from conducive for the US to achieve its goals, writes Mansoor Mamoon

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Satellite TV trouble

By Staff Correspondent

Cable television operators declared a nationwide suspension of many popular satellite channels at the Officers' Club yesterday to protest their distributor's price hikes.

When Nation-Wide Communications Ltd. decided to increase its fees, we had no choice but to stop transmitting those channels," said S. M. Anwar Parvez, convenor of the Cable Operators' Association of Bangladesh.

Channels affected by the decision include National Geographic, Star Movies, Star Plus, Star World, Star News, Zee Cinema, Sky News, V International, AXN, and TNT. Nation-Wide Communications Ltd. is the only service provider offering those channels in the country.

The channels have already disappeared from household in certain areas of Dhaka and Chittagong.

Almost 1,500 cable operators from thirty districts attended the conference. In addition to the cable cut, they demanded the government recognise their business as an industry, provide opportunities for bank loans and insurance and register the Cable Operators Association as a business organisation.

Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil said he would try to meet the demands after discussing the problem with the Ministry of Information.

Alleged pickpocket beaten to death

By Staff Correspondent

An alleged pick-pocket was beaten to death and two others were injured by passengers of a bus at Sobhanbagh in the city yesterday, police and hospital sources said.

The dead was identified as Pinto, 25, a resident of a slum near the Orthopaedic Hospital. The injured two are Zakir, 35 and Nayan 25, both from a slum at Argao. They are being treated at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Witnesses said a gang of eight alleged pick-pockets boarded a Gaba-bus bound bus at Gulistan at about 10 in the morning. When the bus reached Sobhanbagh, some of the passengers found their money lost. On suspicion, they caught three of the gang. The rest ran away, the witnesses said.

The three were beaten severely and then handed over to Dhanmondi police. Police took them to DMCH where Pinto was declared dead.

JCD calls hartal on RU campus tomorrow

From RU Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Mar 9: Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of opposition BNP, has called hartal on the campus on March 11 to protest the scheduled visit of Education Minister AHSK Sadek on March 11.

The JCD leaders in a protest rally announced their 'agitation' programme today on the campus. They challenged to prevent the minister from laying the foundation stone of the proposed Sheikh Mujib Hall demolishing Matihar Hall, the oldest building on the campus.

If our hartal programme on March 11 is obstructed, we would call hartal on March 12 also," Taufiqul Islam Tipu, convenor of JCD varsity unit told this correspondent.

However, the Education Minister AHSK Sadek is to visit the campus on March 11 and is expected to lay the foundation stone of Sheikh Mujib Hall to be built on the western part of Matihar Hall.

When contacted, the Vice Chancellor Prof. Sayeedur Rahman Khan said that hartal would not hamper the minister's visit or foundation laying ceremony. "Matihar Hall is only for living for a long time. Only its western portion will be demolished, keeping the rest intact, where the proposed hall will be built," the VC added while denying the opposition's allegation of demolition of the hall.

Our new numbers

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Mobile operators offer to finance BTTB network expansion

US\$ 5 million investment package for some 100,000 lines proposed

By Mustak Hossain

Thousands of mobile phone subscribers will get access to the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board's system under an infrastructure plan submitted by mobile phone operators.

"Four private mobile cellular phone operators have sent a proposal to the Ministry of Post and Telecommunication to boost BTTB's infrastructure with their own resource," said a source, who requested anonymity. "The operators are waiting to find out the terms and conditions under which the ministry and the board would pay them back."

Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd., GrameenPhone, Telecom

Malaysia International Bangladesh and Sheba Telecom will invest \$5 million US in the project, adding more than 100,000 channels to the board's network.

About 100,000 mobile phone subscribers would be able to access the board's phones once the project was complete. The board would work with the operators as a supervisory authority.

"The ministry is examining the private operators' proposal and will make its recommendations," said a ministry official.

There are about 70,000 mobile to subscribers in the country. However, the current system prevents them from calling

ambulances, fire-fighters or police in case of emergency. Subscribers pay Tk 1,100 annually to government.

GrameenPhone, the country's largest mobile phone provider, has stopped providing cellular connections with the board's access, while Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Ltd. allocate connections only for the board's incoming calls.

"We cannot provide new connections with BTTB's access due to interconnection constraints," said a PBT sources.

Telecom Malaysia and Sheba Telecom stopped allocating new connections last year.

Printers' pain

Dishonest traders make most of taxation loopholes

Star Report

Huge quantities of books including text books and those distributed under government's non-formal education programme are printed in India and brought to the country, taking advantage of loopholes in taxation rules.

There is only 5 per cent import duty on 'unfolded printed sheets' like brochure and leaflets.

Taking advantage of this, some unscrupulous businessmen do the printing work in India, declare the imports as printed materials and complete the binding work in the country to make extra profit, leaders of Bangladesh Mudran Shilpa

Samity (BMSS) said. This is destroying the budding printing industry and depriving the government of huge revenue, they said. Local publishers are losing printing jobs worth crores of taka every year due to this although modern technology has been introduced in the printing industry, they said.

Sometimes those printed materials are brought into the country 'almost duty-free' by showing that the publisher and sender is a foreign national.

All these are done in connivance with officials concerned and law enforcers, they alleged. See page 11 col 8

Where's your mother's name?

By Shaikh Nazrul Islam

Bangladeshi students studying abroad face problems since their personal records do not include their mothers' name, say sources.

Immigration and naturalisation services in Europe and North America demand parents' names on birth, medical and school certificates. Immigration authorities in Arab countries also demand both, although there are no hard and fast rules.

The government directed officials to deal with the problem in 1998. Officials with the passport office and educational boards said they were dealing with the matter and would implement the government's decision as soon as possible.

"The highest office in the country is taking a keen interest in the issue," said an official in the home ministry.



Clinton's security staff unloading sensitive equipment fresh from the airport at one of Sonargaon Hotel's loading bays yesterday. - Star photo

Albright expected on Clinton's entourage

Secretaries of Commerce, Energy may also come

By Diplomatic Correspondent

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Commerce Secretary William Daley and Energy Secretary Bill Richardson are expected to be in Dhaka during President Bill Clinton's visit, it was learnt yesterday.

All the three would be having separate itineraries although their 'main Dhaka schedule' will be integrated with the Clinton's visit. Other details are still being worked out.

President Clinton will see operation of rural micro-credit programmes in two NGO pro-

jects during his March 20 visit, official sources said.

The projects, styled Arayan, are located at Joypara under Dhamrai thana, some 50 kilometres from Dhaka. These are run by BRAC and Grameen Bank.

An advance team from the US, now in the city, will visit Dhamrai and take a look at the projects as part of a site inspection survey.

The four-member team led by Terry Bish had an hour-long meeting yesterday with foreign ministry officials led by Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami and

discussed the itinerary of the US President. US Ambassador John C Holman was also present.

Despite a 'basket of proposals', the itinerary will be confirmed with consent from the White House, the sources said. All the details being proposed and studied are immediately conveyed to the White House, which is controlling the tour programme as a 'matter of procedure'.

Meanwhile a 51-member security team led by Marine Captain Eric Shambora arrived in See Page 12 Col 1

Opposition plans prove 'ambitious, unrealistic'

Pace of activist mobilisation disappoints many

By Rezaul Karim

Despite all efforts, the BNP-led opposition alliance is yet to reach the target of its massive plan to build a nearly seven lakh-member alliance work force to intensify the street agitation and quicken fall of the Awami League government.

The alliance formally started on January 18 formation of All Party Action Council (APAC) units across the country.

But the process did not make desired progress because of intra-party conflicts in the BNP, misunderstanding and dispute over representation of the four component parties in APAC and different of opinion on some other issues, sources concerned said.

Besides, a section of alliance leaders lacks interest in forming APAC units. A number of senior BNP leaders are still op-

posing this 'unrealistic' move.

"The plan is highly ambitious and unrealistic because it is not possible to form such APAC units down to grassroots level in a year or two. This peculiar idea was conceived by some of our leaders who have no links with activists," said a top BNP leader on condition of anonymity.

The current movement is being affected because the Central Liaison Committee has imposed extra burden on local leaders by asking them to give priority to formation of APAC units immediately, he added.

Chiefs of the alliance components- BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote -- at their summit on November 30 last year instructed the CLC to ensure formation of APAC at all levels in

the country.

The CLC asked APAC units to conduct massive anti-government campaign, implement all programmes announced by it and solve local level internal problems.

According to the plan, the alliance is to form a three-tier (ward, thana and city) APAC units in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna metropolitan cities, and a five-tier (union, thana, ward, municipality and district) units in all the 64 districts.

Though the CLC instructed formation of APAC units with not more than 101 members each, headed by a convenor, in many places the units comprised 151 members and joint convenors and member-secretary.

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Bangladesh Bidyut Samik Karmachari Union took out a procession from PDB office at Motijheel yesterday protesting privatisation. - Star photo

Rajuk must draw lines

Demarcation of parks, lakes, open spaces, low-lying areas urged

By Staff Correspondent

Rajuk should demarcate all city parks, low lying areas, lakes and open spaces and notify the public through the press, say professionals.

The call comes as Rajuk begins demarcating Gulshan Lake for the first time.

The professionals said demarcation and notification would help save open spaces, a vital component of any urban environment. Several organised groups, with the connivance of government officials, are grabbing public land, parks, open spaces, lakes, and canals are their prime targets.

In the last ten years dozens of playgrounds and parks have been replaced by strange looking markets, community centres and other commercial structures," said a town planner. "Rajuk must take responsibility and demarcate those

areas and publish caution notice."

A government architect said all of the city's open spaces would disappear unless immediate action was taken to protect them. This would cause an environmental disaster.

"A healthy city needs to be about 25 per cent open space," said the architect. "Dhaka is roughly 8 per cent."

Another architect said Rajuk should immediately complete the Detailed Area Planning under the Dhaka Master Plan. Unfortunately, work on the DAP is years behind schedule.

"As soon as the DAP is published every nook and corner of the city will be easily identified," said the architect. "There won't be any way for anyone to temper with the restricted areas." Rajuk sources said the de-

marcation would be time consuming, since at least five different organisations, including Rajuk, DCC, PWD and the railway, are involved.

If Rajuk is going to do this, these organisations must sit down and chalk out a plan. The government should tell the organisations to demarcate their own spaces and notify the public, said the sources.

M. Azizul Haque, the chairman of Rajuk, said Rajuk has already started to demarcate its parks, lakes, water retention points and publish notifications.

"We are already planning to notify the public about other open spaces in the same way we did for Gulshan Lake," Haque said. "Every fifteen days we will pick one spot and publish a notification."

Dockers' strike stalls Ctg port operations

Row over installation of container terminal

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 9: Dockers shut the country's main port here by enforcing a 24-hour strike from 8 am today to protest the move for installation of proposed container terminals by an American company, Stevedoring Services of America (SSA).

Officials said loading and unloading of 26 ships anchored at the jetties and outer anchorage of Chittagong port, were hampered due to the strike.

"Even ship movement at the channel of Chittagong port was halted by the striking dockers, forcing suspension of the schedules for four incoming and four outgoing vessels," said the harbour master Quamrul Hossain.

It's a new thing today as during other strikes ship movement was OK, Quamrul said, adding that ships called at this port will be forced to incur demurrage of about 5,000 dollars for one day overstay.

Dockers locked all jetty gates, halting delivery of goods to and from Chittagong port.

Dockers backed by 22 trade union bodies also threatened to shut the port for an indefinite period if any agreement is signed by the government with the American company for installation of container terminals — one at Patenga near Chittagong Port and the other at Pangao in Dhaka.

The dock workers numbering over 10,000 at Chittagong port staged agitation, after the government gave a go-ahead to the biggest US container port operator, Stevedoring Services

of America for its 500 million dollars container project.

The SSA project, if implemented, will have the capacity to handle 600,000 containers a year while Chittagong port now handles 300,000 containers, official sources said.

However, the Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation Mohiuddin Chowdhury also opposed the move for installation of the proposed container terminals, saying that it might hamper the interests of the Chittagong port.

Dock workers staged demonstration and held rallies on Chittagong port premises urging the government to cancel the permission given to SSA.

Security was tightened in and around Chittagong port to avert violence during today's strike.

150 megawatt loadshedding in city

By Staff Correspondent

Power failed across the country yesterday due to acute shortage in generation.

According to Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), there was 150 megawatt power shortage in the city yesterday. As a result, many areas remained in the dark for several hours.

The Power Development Board (PDB) allocated 850 MW power for the city and its suburbs yesterday against a demand of more than 1000 MW. The worst affected areas in the city were Bongshal, Armanitola, Babubazar, Nawabpur, Gandaria, Azimpur, Dhanmondi, Karwanbazar, Farm gate and Telgaon.

Power supply in Karwanbazar was disrupted several times during the day. Power supply to the Daily Star office in Karwanbazar went off several times in the evening.

PDB control room sources said the total power demand in the country was estimated to be 2650 MW, but the power plants could produce only 2465 MW.

The generation target was not fulfilled as 12 units did not function yesterday for maintenance purposes, said a PDB source. The units are Ashuganj Gas Turbine-2, Shiddhirganj-4, Sylhet Gas Turbine, Fenchuganj Gas Turbine-1, 2, Shahaji Bazar-3, Syedpur Gas Turbine, Khulna Barge-mounted Power Plant, Baghabari Gas Turbine, Khulna 110 MW and Ghurashal-4.

Attack on opposition's procession in city: 15 hurt

By Staff Correspondent

At least 15 people were injured when an opposition alliance procession was attacked, allegedly by Haji Selim, MP yesterday afternoon.

Haji Selim denied any involvement in the attack on the procession of Lalbagh unit members. He said he was shot in the thigh yesterday afternoon near the Central Shaheed Minar at around 5-30 p.m.

"A bullet from my revolver pierced my right thigh when I was returning home from the office," said Selim.

The city unit secretary general of the opposition BNP Abdus Salam contradicted Selim's version of event.

"The MP's goons attacked a peaceful opposition party procession near Azimpur Crossing," said Salam.

Golaran Morshed, commissioner of Ward No. 63, was leading the procession. He said at least 15 people were injured during the attack, which was led by MP Selim.

"The goons, led by Haji Selim and accompanied by some Ansars, came in a jeep," said Morshed. "They fired blanks and dispersed the procession."

Lalbagh police said they weren't aware that any incident had occurred in the area.

Manju's writ on election symbol rejected

The High Court yesterday rejected the writ petition of Anwar Hossain Manju, Minister for Communications and Secretary General of Jatiya Party (Mizan-Manju) challenging the decision of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) for allocation of symbol 'Langal (Plough)' to Jatiya Party headed by Hussain Mohammad Ershad, reports BSS.

The bench comprising Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim and Justice Mohammad Abdul Wahab Miah summarily rejected the petition on hearing the petitioner's counsel Barrister Amir-ul Islam.

One shot in Shantinagar

By Staff Correspondent

The manager of a sweetmeat in Shantinagar was shot yesterday afternoon for refusal to pay toll to extortionists.

Kalir Hussain Lion, 27, Manager of Modhumita Mish-tanno Bhandar was shot by the armed gang after he refused to pay toll to them. The gang then fled with money from the cash box of the shop.

Liton was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Motijheel police when contacted last night said that they had sent a team to the spot. A case was also in the process of being filed.

None however was arrested till writing of this report.