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Lara Dutta is Miss Universe

NICOSIA, Cyprus, May 13: A 21-year-old model from India who said beauty pageants give women a platform to 'voice our choices and opinions' was named Miss Universe 2000, reports AP.

Lara Dutta succeeded Mpule Kwekgobane of Botswana to become the 49th winner of the pageant Saturday.

Claudia Morena, 22, of Venezuela was second and Helen Lindes, 18, of Spain was third.

Dutta, who holds a master's degree in Communications, topped 78 other contestants who had competed during the last three weeks on this Mediterranean island, which promoted itself as the island of love. According to Greek mythology, the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite, was born here.

Dutta won the crown after impressing the judges with her answer to the final question of the contest: What would you say to those who condemn the contest as an affront to women? "Pageants like Miss Universe give us young women a platform to foray in the fields that we want to and forge ahead be it entrepreneurship, be it the armed forces, be it politics," Dutta responded. "It gives us a platform to voice our choices and opinions and it makes us strong and independent that we are today."

Moreno and Lindes were also asked the same question.

As her name was announced Dutta, wearing a single strap, glittering red gown, raised her hand to her mouth. She then hugged Moreno, who was standing next to her.

Dutta consistently impressed the judges with her beauty and poise. She won the swimsuit contest with 9.44 points out of a maximum 10 while Moreno was second with 9.37. She came fourth in the evening gown competition with 9.40 points behind Moreno (9.55) and Columbia's Catalina Acosta, 22, (9.52) and Lindes of Spain (9.51).

The Cypriot Church condemned the pageant as unchristian and an affront to feminism.

After sunset Friday, about 100 people, mostly women in their 50s and 60s, held an all-night protest vigil at a hilltop church overlooking the Eleftheria stadium where the pageant is being held.

Earlier, the parishioners distributed leaflets on the street that said: "Shame to the beauty contest which plunges women down to the bottomless pit of hell."

About 50 demonstrators also gathered outside the pageant venue late Friday while a dress rehearsal was going on.



Tears roll down the cheeks of Lara Dutta after her coronation as the Miss Universe 2000 yesterday in Nicosia.

—AFP photo

Quake hits Central Asia

MOSCOW, May 13: A strong earthquake hit Central Asia early today, with the epicentre in Afghanistan and the effects felt in neighbouring Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Russian ITAR-TASS news agency reported, says AFP.

The Uzbek seismological centre said the earthquake, whose epicentre was located in a mountainous border region of Afghanistan, registered six to seven on the Richter scale, according to the report.

There was no immediate information on any casualties or structural damage.

The earthquake was felt in Uzbekistan's capital Tashkent for 10-15 seconds, causing panic among locals and in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe for a couple of seconds early Saturday, ITAR-TASS reported.

A quake measuring over six on the open-ended Richter scale can be destructive in areas up to about 100 kilometers (60 miles) across in inhabited areas.

Reuters adds, an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale shook northern Chile and Argentina on Friday, killing at least one person and briefly cutting power and telephone lines, authorities said.

The region's large copper mines, which provide the lifeblood of Chile's economy, were not reported to be damaged.

"We have been informed that one person died in the region, a miner," Alberto Maturana, a

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Hopes still high for bumper Boro

Storms, flash floods damaged only five per cent of cropland

By Reaz Ahmad

About five per cent of Boro paddy was damaged due to storms and localised flash floods during the current Boro season, sources in the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE).

They, however, said that prospect of a bumper Boro production was still there.

Quoting preliminary estimates, the DAE sources said five per cent loss meant damage of Boro crop on about two lakh hectares of land out of the 37 lakh hectares brought under Boro cultivation this season.

"The target acreage for Boro was 35 lakh hectares but farmers grew the crop on larger area. So the crop loss due to inclement weather would not affect total Boro output so much", a senior official noted.

Initial government target for Boro production was 92 lakh Metric Tons (MT) but in view of field reports of increased acreage, the target was refixed at 97 lakh MT.

Chief of the field service wing of DAE Muslehuddin Ahmed, when asked about the crop damage, said, "I can't divulge this to the media but can assure you that Boro output

would well cross one crore MT."

Other DAE sources, however, said they received reports of damage of the crop from greater Mymensingh, greater Comilla and low-lying areas of Sylhet Division over the last two weeks.

More than 50,000 hectares of Boro land in the haor areas of Sylhet were submerged due to flash floods. Some 14,000 hectares were damaged in Mymensingh, 5,000 hectares in Kishoreganj. Besides, Boro crop in some areas of Rajshahi suffered damage due to tornadoes late last month.

Reports of damage were still coming in from some other areas of the country, they said.

Meanwhile, Boro harvesting is going on in full swing and will continue till the end of this month.

Production of Aus totalled about 17 lakh MT in the current financial year as against 16 MT last year while that of Aman stood at over 95 lakh MT this year compared to 77 lakh MT last year.

Boro hit an all time record production of one crore five lakh MT last year as against a target of 78 lakh MT.

Bhutanese FM in city

Bhutanese Foreign Minister, Lyonpo Jigme Y. Thinley arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a three-day official visit, reports UNB.

"I hope the existing excellent bilateral relations will be strengthened further, specially in the field of trade and commerce," he said at the Zia International Airport. It is his third visit to Bangladesh.

He was received at the airport by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad. Azad said Bhutan was one of the first few countries to recognise Bangladesh.

Bhutanese Ambassador in Dhaka Lhatu Wangchuk, acting Foreign Secretary Dr Towfique Ali and senior officials of the Foreign Ministry were present.

The Bhutanese Foreign Minister will call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleida Zia. He will hold official talks with his Bangladesh counterpart Abdus Samad Azad.

Thinley yesterday visited the Bangladesh Museum at Dhanmondi 32.

He placed wreaths on the portrait of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and later went round different sections of the museum.

Later, the minister signed the visitor's book recalling Bangabandhu's glorious role for the independence of Bangladesh and peace for the world.

Tug of war over Tanguar Haor

Land Ministry refuses to let go of the Ramsar site

By Shehab Ahmed

Although the Prime Minister declared Tanguar Haor as the only Ramsar site in the country, the Land Ministry is yet to return it to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF), terminating the lease for harvesting its fish resources estimated to be worth around Tk 10 crore a year.

The MOEF wrote to the Land Ministry on April 19 urging it to return the nearly 10,000 hectare wetland immediately without leasing it further for developing it as Ramsar site as per the international protocol for preserving the world's wetlands.

The PM gave the declaration on January 6 this year.

Tanguar Haor in Sunamganj district is the only 'near-fresh water lake' in the country. It is rich in bio-diversity and home to 140 species of fish and birds and the country's only surviving swamp forest of Hilsa-Koroch and a rare Bengal Rose.

Pallas's Eagle, a majestic bird found its last retreat in the lake which also hosts some 80,000 guest birds including the world's few hundred surviving Black Net Stork.

The Haor was declared an Ecologically Critical Area last year following demands from environmentalists. They called for an integrated management plan involving the local community for better harnessing of its resources without endangering its flora and fauna.

Ignoring the public pleas, Bus rams fountain at Gulistan

Parts of grill-wall of the newly constructed fountain at Bangabandhu Square in Gulistan were damaged and the pump operator was injured as a bus rams it yesterday morning, reports UNB.

Anisur Rahman, pump operator of the fountain, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police and witnesses said driver of a bus of the Rider Paribahan lost control over the steering and rams the fountain at about 8 am.

Driver M Zahangir Alam was arrested and later produced before the court.

press reports, particularly by The Daily Star and the MOEF requests, the Land Ministry leased out the Haor for Tk 76 lakh to a lone bidder for three years. But the ministry reserved the right to cancel the lease.

State Minister for Land Rashed Mosharraf had told The Daily Star before it was leased last year that the lease would not be renewed after expiry of one year on April 13 this year.

Meanwhile, officials and wildlife experts visiting the wetland recently said that there had been indiscriminate fishing by the lessee, apprehending that the lease might not be renewed.

The state minister told this correspondent on Friday that the matter would be placed before the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Land Ministry on May 27. He confirmed that the terms of the lease were violated as regards fishing in the first year. "But the swamp forest had not been touched. There might have been problems for the birds to find food due to fishing", he said.

He said that an inter-ministerial committee is yet to make a plan for proper management of the Haor under the Ramsar guideline.

Necessary steps would be taken after the parliamentary body's decision in this regard, he added.

Wrist of BCL activist severed at Mymensingh

From Our Correspondent

MYMENSINGH, May 13: A group of terrorists severed wrist of an activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at College Road adjacent to Ananda Mohan College at about 10 am today.

The victim was identified as Russel, 28.

Police said, Russel came under attack while he was going to Ananda Mohan College.

He was first admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) and later shifted to Dhaka as his condition deteriorated.

Efforts to nominate CEC on consensus to continue: PM

FFs' allowance from next fiscal year

CHITTAGONG, May 13: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday she would continue her efforts to nominate a person as new Chief Election Commissioner on the basis of national consensus, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister said this while addressing a grand rally of freedom fighters organised by the Combined Freedom Fighters Front of Chittagong at MA Aziz stadium.

Hasina said since assuming power, she had tried to rule the country on consensus so that democracy gets stronger. She referred to her letter to Khaleida for discussion on a new CEC after resignation of Abu Hena. But Khaleida outright rejected it, she said.

The Prime Minister said despite the authority vested in her by the Constitution, she had been continuing discussion

with different political parties on the question of nominating a person for CEC.

She referred to her discussion with the 11-party combine and said more discussion would take place on the matter.

"Then I will take decision and sent a proposal to the President for approval," she told the rally.

Hasina called upon the freedom fighters and democratic forces to frustrate the "opposition's blueprint" to disrupt democratic rule.

"We've earned democracy and voting rights, we'll not allow it to be foisted. Get united and be alert against conspirators," she said.

Hasina said all the four were against the country's liberation war, and were the beneficiaries of Bangabandhu's killing and post-75 military dictatorships that trampled constitution and

people's voting right.

She said these four "conspirators" joined hands to overthrow the present democratic government since the beginning as it is engaged in restoring the spirit of great liberation war and institutionalising democracy to improve the economic condition of the people.

But the opposition's so-called movement has failed, the Prime Minister said, adding that despite continuous threat, "we are running the government to establish a poverty and illiteracy-free Bangladesh."

She urged the people and freedom fighters to remain alert so that the "conspirators" could not snatch away the people's voting rights.

The Prime Minister said her government has provided financial benefits to families of

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Saarc judges for strengthening judiciary to protect HR

The two-day preliminary meeting for the proposed South Asia Judicial Colloquia Series began in the capital yesterday, reports BSS.

Special emphasis has been given on strengthening the judiciary in the SAARC countries for effective protection of human rights in this region.

Held at a city hotel, the meeting being attended by Chief Justices of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, put forward several suggestions for effective guarantee of human rights in the SAARC countries as enshrined in their respective constitutions.

In his inaugural remarks, the Chief Justice of Bangladesh Justice Latifur Rahman said the colloquia is to afford the judges of SAARC region an opportunity of meeting and discussing the ever widening human rights jurisprudence as developed by international institutions and as embodied in international instruments.

He also said the meeting will also make it possible for the judges to have closer look at the question of human rights norms against the social, political and cultural experiences in the region's municipal jurisdictions.

Sri Lanka's Chief Justice Mark Fernando said the purpose of this meeting is to plan a regional Judicial Colloquia Series "which would truly reflect the needs and concerns of the South Asian Judiciary," and which "would focus on the areas of access to justice and judicial remedies for the vindication of human rights."

Justice Fernando said the judiciary in South Asia has "a heavy responsibility" in response to the needs and expectations of the public, to ensure good governance to facilitate access to justice, to strengthen rule of law and to safeguard

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One stabbed to death in city

A middle-aged man was stabbed to death in the city's RK Mission Road on Friday night apparently following dispute over boundary of his house, reports UNB.

Family members said armed terrorists attacked Bidhu Saha, 50, while he was walking in front of his 7/1 RK Mission Road residence at about 11 pm.

"He was out of the house as load-shedding was going on in the area at that time," said victim's brother-in-law Shipon Saha.

His relations found him lying in a pool of blood on the street and immediately rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctor declared him dead.

"We are not sure, but the killing of Bidhu, father of a son and a daughter, might be a sequel to dispute over boundary of his house," Shipon Saha said.

A case was filed with Suprapur thana in connection with the killing.

India extends ban on LTTE

NEW DELHI, May 13: As Sri Lanka's civil war rages, neighbouring India has extended a ban on Tamil Tiger rebels blamed for the assassination of former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi nine years ago, reports AP.

Under the ban, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, which are fighting for an independent homeland in Sri Lanka, are forbidden to operate in India. In the 1980s, the LTTE ran training camps in southern India, where ethnic Tamils live in large numbers.

Tamil political parties that are part of India's ruling coalition still support the cause of the Tamil Tigers, and have requested a lifting of the ban, which was imposed in 1992 and renewed in 1996. It was due to end Sunday.

The federal government, however, has decided to extend the ban, the Press Trust of India

reported late Friday.

India has refused to intervene in the fighting with troops or arms, but says it is ready to mediate or offer medicine or food if asked. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said the stance would not change even if the northern city of Jaffna, the former LTTE stronghold, was recaptured by the rebels.

India's refusal to step into the battle has earned it bitter criticism in Sri Lanka.

"We asked India first for assistance to help end the conflict but their response has so far been negative," Lakshman Kiriella, deputy foreign minister, was quoted as saying in an interview with the independent Weekend Express newspaper Saturday.

India sent a peacekeeping force to Sri Lanka in 1987 to fight the rebels, but it was ordered back in 1990 after 1,200

Indian soldiers were killed and thousands others wounded or maimed. The maximum strength of the peacekeeping force was 50,000 in late 1988.

In 1991, a Tamil rebel suicide bomber assassinated Rajiv Gandhi during a political rally.

"India cannot be unmindful of the dangers inherent in a separate state of Tamil Eelam," the state-run Daily News said.

The 17-year war in Sri Lanka has killed more than 62,000 people.

Verdict in Ansar Revolt Case today

The Fourth Additional Session Judge's Court, Dhaka, will pronounce today the verdict in 'Ansar Revolt Case' of Khilgaon Ansar Headquarters in 1994, reports UNB.

Thousands of Ansars, an auxiliary force, staged violent demonstration at Shafipur Ansar Academy and Khilgaon Ansar Headquarters on December 1, 1994 demanding pay hike and regularisation of their services.

Soon after the revolt, Army along with Air Force, BDR and police conducted a joint operation and brought down the revolt.

Later, the Ansar authorities filed a case with Sabujbagh thana accusing 65 ansars, including general secretary of the BCS Ansar Association AKM Khaledul Islam, who was then posted in Meherpur.

Criminal Investigation Department submitted a charge sheet against 54 of them after a seven-month inquiry.

The proceedings of the case continued for more than five years and finally completed on May 3.

Judgement in Fatik Murder Case today

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, May 13: The judgement in Jahangir Kabir Fatik Murder Case will be delivered by the Special Court here tomorrow.

This will be the third judgement in less than three months in murder cases so far recorded against Ershad Shikder and his armed cadres.

All the murder cases are being tried by Additional District and Sessions Judge Hasan Imam, now in charge of the Special Court.

Fatik, a young member of Khulna Bar Association, was killed by Shikder at Skid Ghat here on the night of April 6, 1998. He was killed allegedly for illicit relation with Khodeja Begum, first wife of Shikder.

Six of the eight accused in the case are in jail custody and two — Khodeja and Ayub Munshi — are absconding.

Ershad Shikder and two others, Jamal Faruque and Li-aquat Lashkar, have already been sentenced to death in two cases for murdering Zainal and Khalid.



Rotting rubbish stacked up in front of the Janata Bhaban at Karwanbazar testifies to DCC's performance in waste management.

—Star photo

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