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Lankan army battles to keep supply routes open

LONDON, May 20: Sri Lankan rebels said today they were threatening key supply routes serving some 30,000 beleaguered troops on the Jaffna peninsula, but the government said its air base and sea port were still operating, reports Reuters.

The government's Special Media Information Centre said in a statement released in Colombo that the air force and navy were maintaining a regular supply of all essential Jaffna, and were repulsing Tamil Tiger attacks elsewhere on the peninsula.

Earlier, the rebels said the military had suspended operations at Jaffna's only sea port, Kankesanthurai, and had cancelled flights from its single airstrip at Palaly after both came under direct artillery fire.

Palaly is home to the military's main ammunition and fuel dump on the peninsula. Along with Kankesanthurai, it is the only supply point available to the military as there is no land access to Jaffna, some

400 km north of Colombo. Military sources who asked not to be identified told Reuters by phone that all ships had been pulled out of Kankesanthurai. They said two flights made it to Palaly on Friday, but continued shelling may have made the air base inaccessible since then.

On Friday a pro-rebel website (www.Tamilnet.com) monitored in London posted an LTTE statement urging troops to surrender "to avoid the continuing bloodbath".

It said it troops laid down their arms they "will be treated with dignity and honour" and handed over to the custody of the International Committee of the Red Cross within 24 hours.

"The call for surrender is being announced by loudspeakers at different battlefronts in the Jaffna theatre of war and also by Voice of Tigers radio," the statement said.

"Explaining the precarious

nature of their predicament, the LTTE has been impressing upon the government soldiers that their vital supply lines are cut and their lives are in grave danger."

Today, Tamilnet quoted the clandestine Voice of Tigers radio as saying that guerrillas had captured army positions defending approaches to Chavakacheheri, the war-scarred peninsula's second-largest town.

"The latest advance... threatens to cut off all supply lines to the Sri Lanka army troops in Jaffna's southern sector," it said, adding that the remaining viable supply route for soldiers in the area was in "imminent danger" of being cut off.

However, the government said troops had thwarted rebel attempts to penetrate their defence at Thananklappu village, which lies east of Jaffna city, the cultural capital of the homeland for which the LTTE has been fighting since 1983.



PCJSS chief Shantu Larma speaking at a rally at the Dhaka University yesterday and (right) Parbattya Bangali Chhatra Parishad protesting Larma's presence on the campus.



Parbattya Bangali Chhatra Parishad protesting Larma's presence on the campus.

Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation due tomorrow

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Swedish Minister for Development Cooperation Maj-Inger Klingvali arrives in the city tomorrow on a five-day visit to Bangladesh.

During the trip, the minister will meet political leaders and visit Swedish companies and some Swedish aided projects.

The minister's visit is a sign of the growing importance of Bangladesh as a partner in development and trade, says Anders Johnson, Sweden's ambassador to Bangladesh.

Sweden has supported Bangladesh since independence.

Misappropriation of wheat - Khetmojur Samity to lay siege to LGED office

By Reaz Ahmad

Bangladesh Khetmojur Samity, a farm labourers' organisation, will lay a siege to the LGED office in the city today protesting what its leaders say massive misappropriation of wheat meant for infrastructure development.

Newspaper reports earlier said that some ministers and ruling party leaders had got allotments of wheat 'in papers' while consignments were yet to reach the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).

A meeting at the LGED and Cooperatives Ministry on April 17 also expressed surprise at such allotment of wheat 'in papers' before development projects were approved.

When contacted, LGED Chief Engineer Monowar Hossain Chowdhury said no wheat was allotted against the name of any minister. "The system does not permit such practices as we allot wheat against schemes." He however admitted, "Sometimes ministers recommend allotment for development work."

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, an official of a food

Blair blessed with a son

LONDON, May 20: The wife of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Cherie, gave birth early today to a boy, the couple's fourth child and the first baby born to a serving British premier in 152 years, reports AFP.

Mrs. Blair gave birth to a baby boy earlier this morning. The prime minister and Mrs. Blair are delighted and all three have now returned home to Downing Street, a statement from the prime minister's office said.

The Blairs and their new baby left the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital at 2:50 a.m. (7:50 BST), in a car whose windows were covered to stop photographers getting the first picture of the infant.

A few minutes later a light went on in a room on the first floor as baby Blair made his first post-natal visit to his first home - 10, Downing Street.

Journalists who had waited long hours at the hospital for the first slivers of information had little to report - the boy's name has not been announced and no update on the health of the mother and child given.

"It's almost a royal birth," one of them told the BBC.

Some observers noted that 45-year-old Cherie Blair's swift return to Downing Street suggested that she had given birth naturally and not by Caesarian section as some unconfirmed reports had predicted.

The Blairs have expressed

'Tk 1000cr can be earned by exporting fruits, vegetables'

Proper incentives & policy support needed

By Staff Correspondent

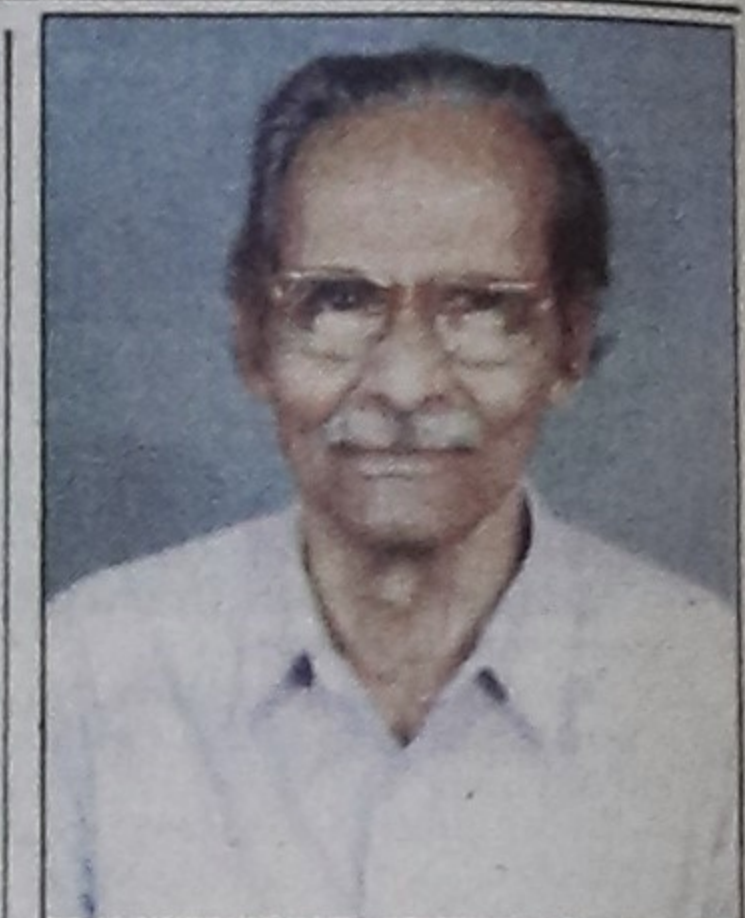
The country can earn more than Tk 1,000 crore annually by exporting fruits and vegetables if proper incentives and policy support are given by the government, Fakhruddin Islam Munshi President of Agribusiness Development Organization of Bangladesh (ADOB) has said.

"It is not very hard for us to increase annual export earnings to Tk 1,000 crore from about 2,000 crore now from this sector," he told a press conference in the city yesterday.

The only thing needed is to expand the market and develop processing systems for agri-products, which need government support, he said.

Besides increasing earnings, this will add value to agri-products and ensure better prices to farmers, he said noting that fruits and vegetables worth over Tk 200 crore get rotten every year due to lack of processing facilities.

Munshi said the main problems in the sector are lack of



Prof Quamruddin Hossain passes away

Language Movement veteran Prof Syed Quamruddin Hossain died late Friday night at his Fuller Road residence on the Dhaka University campus, family sources said. He was 75, reports BSS.

Hossain, former Chairman of DU Philosophy Department, was suffering from bronchopneumonia.

He is survived by his wife Dr Sultana Begum, a professor of Psychology Department of the DU, two sons and a host of relatives and well-wishers to mourn his death.

After namaz-e-janaza at DU Central Mosque after Zohr prayers, he was buried at the Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard at Mirpur.

A large number of teachers and students of the DU, including Vice-Chancellor Prof A K Azad Chowdhury, joined the janaza.

Earlier, President Shahabuddin Ahmed visited the residence of Prof Hossain to pay respect to the deceased.

After his retirement from the department, he used to take classes for at least seven years without any remuneration.

SAARC Secy-Gen due tomorrow

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Nihal Rodrigo, the Secretary General of SAARC is due to arrive in Dhaka tomorrow on a three-day visit to Bangladesh.

The current Secretary General of the seven-member regional organisation is expected to pay courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad.

The SAARC Secretary General is likely to discuss with Bangladesh leaders the prospects for holding the 11th Summit which was due to be held in Nepal. The Summit was postponed because of the reported "unwillingness" of India to sit on the same table with Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf.



Rajuk demolished some illegal shops in the city's Dhanmondi area yesterday.

BCL supporters assault 2 DU correspondents

By DU Correspondent

Ruffians backed by a leader of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) assaulted two Dhaka University correspondents of two national dailies while they were performing professional duties on the campus yesterday.

The victims are Mahbub Zaman Nahid of The Daily Star and Tanveer Mahmud of The Bangladesh Observer. Both are students of Mass Communication and Journalism Department of the university.

Witnesses said the ruffians, led by Mazharul Islam Kajal, General Secretary of Jahurul Haq Hall BCL unit, beat the journalists as they allegedly did not make way for them amid a huge crowd at the entrance of Arts Faculty building where PCJSS leader Santu Larma was watching a procession of Pahari Chhatra Parishad.

Kajal was accompanied by, among others, Zahid of Mohsin Hall and Miron of Zahurul Haq Hall.

The journalists were beaten even after they disclosed their identities. They also hurled abuses at them and the journalist community. Kajal said, "Do not know, who am I on the campus?"

Kajal and his accomplices first beat them up at the corridor of Arts Building. They again swooped on them and tried to drag Nahid to Zahurul Haq Hall and threatened to kill him. Reporters of other dailies and some students rescued him near Bat-Tala in front of the Arts Building.

The victims filed a written complaint with Vice Chancellor Prof AK Azad Chowdhury. The university authorities formed a one-member probe body comprising Proctor AKM Nurun Nabi to investigate the incident, said a DU press release.

The committee yesterday served a show cause notice on Kajal asking him to explain.

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9 killed, 29 injured in road accidents

At least nine people were killed and 29 injured in separate road accidents in four districts yesterday, report agencies.

Three people were killed and 27 injured in a road accident yesterday morning on Bangabandhu Jamuna Bridge Eastern Side Approach Road near Gobindashahi, ten miles from Tangail town.

Of the dead Gour, 32, and Chand, 30, were identified as rice dealers of Tangail town.

All the injured were taken to the Tangail hospital in critical conditions.

The accident occurred when a passenger bus skidded off the road.

Three people were killed and one was injured in two road accidents on Kishoreganj-Bhairab road in Kishoreganj yesterday.

Police said two unidentified passengers of a Kishoreganj-bound bus coming from Dhaka were crushed under wheels as they fell from rooftop of the bus at Vitadia in Katiadi upazila at noon.

Jahangir, helper of the vehicle, was injured and admitted to Sadar hospital in critical condition.

The driver of the bus, which was carrying excess passengers, managed to flee with his vehicle after the incident.

Ctg businessmen form MCCI to get rid of deadlock in CCCI

CHITTAGONG, May 20: In an alternate move, the leading businessmen and industrialists of the port city, at a meeting held today, decided to form another trade body, styled as "Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries" to get rid of the deadlock in CCCI, reports UNB.

M A Tareq, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, Ameer Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury and M Mirza Babar among others were present at the meeting.

The newly-appointed administrator of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industries (CCCI), Firoz Kibria, will take office tomorrow for an interim period.

The Commerce Ministry appointed the Director of Trade Organisation (DTO) as its administrator dissolving the board of directors of CCCI on Thursday.

The administrator will complete formalities of holding the due annual general meeting of 1998-99 period and formulating a legal voters' list.

A director of CCCI, on condition of anonymity, told UNB that the committee, headed by Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed, would file a writ petition with the High Court challenging the order of the Commerce Ministry.

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Extortion: Three policemen suspended in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 20: The three policemen caught red handed at the time of collecting toll in Jamal Khan area last night, were put under suspension, police sources said.

The policemen - Altaf, Lebu Miah and Jahangir - belonged to Kotwali thana in the city.

Kotwali thana sources said that departmental investigation was on against the three. But no case under PSA was started against them as no complainant came forward for the same, Kotwali thana sources said.

Local people caught the three policemen while they (policemen) were collecting toll from the vendors in Jamal Khan area at 8 pm yesterday.

News Analysis

Jyoti thought it 4 yrs ago

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, May 20: What Jyoti Basu had thought four years ago, his party CPI (M) appears to be thinking now.

The party, which refused to join a coalition to rule India in 1995, thereby scuttling chances of Basu becoming the Prime Minister, has started talking about participating in a similar dispensation if it helps strengthen the CPI (M).

This is the only perceptible change that emerged from the remarks of CPI (M) General Secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet when he released the "updated" version of the party's programme, adopted at the time of its birth in 1964 at a news conference here yesterday.

What is noteworthy is that

in sharp contrast to its earlier stand of not entertaining the idea of power-sharing at the centre, the CPI (M) is now keeping open the option of participating in a non-left government.

The draft of the "updated" version of the party's programme "has been prepared in such a manner that it allows both the options," said Surjeet adding when the programme was first adopted 36 years ago it did not think of joining a coalition at the centre.

The situation has, of course, changed over the past few years, he pointed out.

In 1996, when a proposal was put forward to CPI (M) for joining the United Front Coalition after the general elections, the party rejected in outright, brushing aside the views of Jyoti Basu who at that time had been widely tipped to head the coalition.

The views of the Marxist hardliners had prevailed then, CPI (M) sources said.

It was nearly two years later that Basu, in a newspaper in-

Cong needs to woo Hindus: Gadgil

NEW DELHI, May 20: A senior leader of the main opposition Congress party has said the political fortunes of the party cannot be revived if it ignores India's majority Hindu community, domestic news agencies reported yesterday, says AP.

The Hindus do feel that the Congress is not protecting their interests. The Congress needs the substantial 82 per cent of the Hindu votes. You cannot ignore the interests of the Hindus in this Hindu majority country," VN Gadgil told the private TV channel, which faxed transcripts of the interview to Indian news agencies.

Gadgil's comments were a clear departure from the century-old ideology of the Congress party of representing the interests of Indians irrespective of their religion.

In the past, the party had the backing of religious and social minorities and governed India for nearly 40 years after independence from British rule in

Biman's F-28 returns

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman's F-28 aircraft which was stuck up at Calcutta airport due to fault in its hydraulic system since May 16 returned to Dhaka yesterday.

It was sent to Engineering hangar immediately for repair.

The aircraft, one of the two F-28 of 1978 and 1979 vintage had often developed trouble since they were added to Biman fleet after purchase from an Indonesian operator.

England all out for 415

LONDON, May 20: England were bowled out for 415 in their first innings of the first Test of two against Zimbabwe here at Lord's on Saturday, reports AFP.

This gave Nasser Hussain's side a first-innings lead of 332. Fast bowler Heath Streak's figures of 6 for 87 were the best by a Zimbabwean in Test cricket.

Alec Stewart was 124 not out, his third and highest Test century at Lord's.