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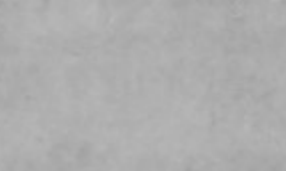
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Surplus production needed to increase tea export

By Reaz Ahmad, back from Srimangal

If the country is to increase its earning from tea export, it has to produce adequate exportable surplus after meeting the domestic requirement, sources in tea industry said.

Bangladesh Tea Board (BTB) officials and representatives of tea garden owners said the domestic demand for tea is rising at a rate almost double the growth in production.

They were talking to a team of newsmen at Bangladesh Tea Research Institute (BTRI), Srimangal, on Monday.

The country's export earning from tea dipped to 19.93 million US dollars in 1999 from 36.18 million dollars in 1998 and 40 million dollars the year before, BTB Chairman Danial Islam said.

The annual growth rate of tea production is 1.7 per cent and that of domestic consumption is 3.2 per cent, he mentioned.

Dried up foreign assistance for tea sector, non-replacement of less productive old tea plants and deterioration of law and order in tea estates were identified as the main reasons behind the country's weakening position in international tea market.

According to BTB statistics, 25 million kg of tea were exported in 1997 after meeting the domestic requirement of 25 million kg. In 1998, export fell to 22 million kg as domestic demand rose to 29 million kg.

In 1999, tea export plunged to a record low of 15 million kg while domestic consumption rose further to 32 million kg. Tea production was however badly affected by a severe drought in the year, sources concerned pointed out.

"This trend would bring a setback for our tea industry", the BTB Chairman feared.

There are 158 tea gardens in the country, 134 of those in

greater Sylhet. Tea is planted in 48,571 hectares of land. BTB sources said 20 per cent of the total area now has tea plants as old as 60 years and another 16 per cent has 40 to 60 years old plants.

"These are less productive and need re-plantation," Danial Islam said.

Besides, due to financial constraints, tea growers could not bring some 8,900 hectares of land under tea plantation, earmarked for this.

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A woman plucking leaves at a tea garden in Sylhet.
— Star photo

Experts yet to determine nature of bombs found in Gopalganj

By Special Correspondent

Ammunition testing experts, ordinance officers and engineers of Bangladesh Army are yet to determine the nature of the explosive devices recovered in Gopalganj.

A group of officers from the Jessore Cantonment led by the CO of an engineer battalion are working round the clock to retrieve the second device and bring it to the Jessore Cantonment for further examination.

An ISPR press release said last night that "considering the risk, the army personnel have taken necessary measures" regarding the second bomb at Kotlpara.

However, sources concerned failed to say how the experts transported the first bomb detected at Kotlpara to Jessore and decided to keep the second device on the spot even three days after it was discovered, knowing well that the bomb may jeopardise lives of the people there.

The sources said the first explosive device "has been kept under observation" in Jessore Cantonment. It could not be known where the device has been kept given the "destructive potential" of the device. The authorities concerned also declined to give the details of the casing of the device which reportedly contained a cast iron casing of "an unconventional nature."

However, an official confirmed that the first device has neither been exploded nor defused. It has only been kept under observation. No official could say how long it would be kept under observation to assess its type and composition.

"Even Bangabandhu had asked army chief to send troops saving his (Shafiqullah) soldiers attacked his house. But no troops came to rescue him or bar the attackers," he said putting a question "why".

Referring to a statement of

AL trying to cover up its failures, says Ershad

By Staff Correspondent

Jatiya Party chief H M Ershad yesterday asked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina not to blame the opposition alliance for the "attempts on her life" through planting bombs.

"But, we are yet to be sure that the bombs planted in Kotlpara were genuine... We never want to kill you, honourable prime minister. Rather, we want to defeat you in the election with a big margin and come back to power," the deposed president told a rally at Kalabagan in the city.

"Don't blame others to cover up your failures," he said.

The JP rally was organised simultaneously with three other opposition parties as part of their countrywide demonstration against the government.

Addressing the rally as the chief guest, Ershad said the law and order was at its worst saying "none, not even the prime minister is now safe."

If returns to power, he told the rally, his party will free the country from terrorism in three months, stop extortionism in one month and remove traffic jam in a week.

"The police force will be equipped with sophisticated

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Bangabandhu murder trial

Real culprits have not been exposed: Defence

The defence in Bangabandhu Murder Case yesterday told the High Court that a truncated version of the killing, not the real one and entire picture, had come up in the case, reports UNB.

The real culprits and those behind the killing have not been unmasked, said advocate Abdur Razzak Khan concluding his argument immediately before the court was adjourned for lunch.

The defence counsel for condemned accused Lt Col (Retd) Sultan Shahriar Rashid Khan said justice was not ensured in the case as only a partial picture of the incident was given and the real one was concealed.

In support of his contention, Razzak Khan referred to various prosecution witness accounts, including of General Shafiqullah, Col Hamid and Col Shafaat Jamil, and said none came forward to save Bangabandhu although he sought help.

"Why had all been silent when help was sought by Bangabandhu? The silence indicates the real culprits were behind the scene, he told the court of Justice Mohammad Rujul Amin and Justice ABM Khairul Haque.

Quoting witness accounts, the defence lawyer mentioned that Bangabandhu had rang up police control room, Ganabhaban and Razbargh. "But none received the phone and Bangabandhu couldn't talk to," he said.

"Even Bangabandhu had asked army chief to send troops saving his (Shafiqullah) soldiers attacked his house. But no troops came to rescue him or bar the attackers," he said putting a question "why".

Referring to a statement of

director (military intelligence) Brigadier Salahuddin made before a court of enquiry, Razzak Khan said he had informed Shafiqullah that armour and artillery troops are going out of the cantonment.

But no troops came out to resist them," the defence lawyer said. He, however, said that Brigadier Jamil had asked the force at Ganabhaban to march, but they too remained inactive.

The lawyer said: If the house of an ordinary man is attacked and he seeks help, certainly people will come forward. It was the residence of the President. He sought help. But none came. Why?

Razzak Khan quoted army chief General Shafiqullah as saying to newspapers that he (Shafiqullah) witnessed festivity in the 46 Brigade on August 15 morning that hurt him seriously.

"During the cross-examinations in trial court, Shafiqullah said he didn't mention the matter in that way, but admitted that the substance of the statement was right," he said reading out from the paper book.

He also quoted PW-8 Major Shahadat Hossain as saying following hue and cry he woke up at about 6:15 am on August 15 and found the soldiers shouting "we finished all and you are still asleep? Put on uniform and report to the units".

Khan also quoted PW-9 Col Hamid and PW-42 Ziauddin as saying the DGFI team was the first to reach Bangabandhu's residence to record the place of occurrence by a video camera.

Terminating the verdict of Dhaka District and Sessions Judge Court as a one-sided judgement, he said, "Cross-examination of none of the 61

prosecution witnesses was considered in it."

He referred to an observation of the Federal Court put in 7 DLR (Dhaka Law Report) and said paralytic affect takes place if a judgement is one-sided. "Justice was not ensured in this case," he said.

Responding to the defence lawyer, the court hearing death reference and convicts' appeals in Bangabandhu murder case, said appeal courts can determine whether justice was ensured or not.

As Judge Kazi Golam Rasul gave the judgement of executing the death penalty through firing squad in public, which is not permitted by existing laws of the country, Razzak Khan said the learned judge was "mentally influenced."

He said it was not true that all the people were forcibly taken to radio station on August 15 and referred to PW-42 Major Ziauddin's statement that he found acting chief of Rakhi Bahini, Hasan, ready to go to the radio station to make announcement of allegiance.

After the argument of Razzak Khan, Advocate Mahbubur Rahman MP, defence counsel for accused Maj (Retd) Bazul Huda began his argument.

Beginning his argument Mahbubur Rahman described the case as a "double tragedy." "The killing was extra judicial one and depriving Huda of just and fair trial is the second tragedy. He was not given scope for self-defence. But he has been awarded capital punishment," said the defence counsel.

He said the case has two FIRs and the first one didn't name Huda. "In the second one, he was indicted as he was one of the founders of Freedom Party.

Accord signed to lay gas pipeline from Habiganj to Ashuganj

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh company Summit and Chinese company Daging jointly signed an agreement yesterday with Gas Transmission Company Ltd (GTCL), a subsidiary of Petrobangla, for laying a 55km 30-inch diameter gas pipeline from Habiganj to Ashuganj.

The agreement marked entry of a Bangladeshi investor in the gas pipeline sector for the first time, said Aziz Khan, Chairman of Summit after the simple signing ceremony held at the Uttara office of GTCL.

Eight companies including some foreign and joint venture ones participated in the inter-

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Journalists condemn attempt on PM's life

Journalist community yesterday condemned the attempt on the life of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits behind the heinous conspiracy, reports BSS.

In a joint statement, 128 journalists said any of the two bombs planted near the meeting venue and the help could have claimed hundreds of lives of the common people besides the Prime Minister.

"We have no language to condemn such types of heinous activities," the journalists said, adding the clue of the conspiracy is yet to be unmasked.

But such incident cannot be considered isolated from murders, terrorist activities and the use of bombs and explosion as let loose by a section of fanatic forces in the recent past, they

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Humayun Zahir murder: Hearing of arguments begins

By Court Correspondent

The hearing of arguments in the Humayun Zahir Murder Case began in the 8th Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday.

Judge Mir Mohammad Awlad Hossain adjourned the proceedings of the case till 11 am today after hearing of statements from the prosecution side.

Humayun Zahir, a leading businessman was shot dead by a group of assailants on the premises of his Dhanmondi residence on April 8, 1993.

Zahirul Haq Khan, Father-in-law of Zahir, filed a murder

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AL-BNP clash Opposition calls hartal in Mymensingh today

MYMENSINGH, July 25: At least 28 BNP activists and two policemen were injured in a clash with AL activists in the town this evening, reports UNB.

The four-party alliance blamed Awami League for the attack and called for half-day hartal tomorrow in Mymensingh town to protest terrorism and police excess.

Witnesses said police stopped an opposition procession in front of Collegiate School brought out at 5 pm from Natunbazar.

Attempt on Hasina's life ALCWC announces resistance programme

Awami League Central Working Committee yesterday condemned attempts on the life of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and called upon the people to foil all evil designs against her, reports UNB.

The call came from a meeting of the ALCWC held at Ganobhaban yesterday evening with Awami League president and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

"People would not tolerate any attempt on the life of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," the meeting said in a special resolution with reference to the Kotlpara bomb incident.

It said anti-liberation and anti-democratic forces are trying to kill the daughter of Bangabandhu.

Condemning the planting of a 76-kg bomb with destructive power covering 2 sq km, the meeting said it exposed a heinous and dangerous conspiracy to kill Prime Minister Hasina.

It said although this deep-rooted conspiracy was foiled with the blessings of Almighty

Allah and the people, the entire nation was stunned by the barbaric and terrific design of the evil forces.

"Having failed to oust an elected government by means of chaos and anarchy, the opposition has chosen the dangerous path of killing," said the meeting.

A special prayer, led by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, was offered expressing gratitude to Almighty Allah for saving Sheikh Hasina's life.

The party announced a week-long "Resistance Programme" from July 28-August 3 to protest the plot to assassinate Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

During the period, Awami League will stage meetings and demonstrations at village, union, thana and district levels.

Besides, special prayers would be offered in all mosques, temples, churches and pagodas giving thanks to Almighty Allah for saving Sheikh Hasina's life.

On August 3, the ruling party will hold a public meeting at Paltan Maidan.

Bachchan top tax defaulter from cine world

NEW DELHI, July 25: Indian film icon Amitabh Bachchan, who hosts a wildly popular TV game show that offers millions of rupees to viewers, is the country's biggest tax defaulter from the world of cinema, a minister said today, reports AFP.

Junior Minister for Finance Dhananjaya Kumar told the Upper House of parliament that Bachchan's tax arrears totalled 132 million rupees (three million dollars).

Bachchan, once described as a "one-man industry" by French director Francois Truffaut, is currently topping TV ratings as host of a version of the popular British TV show "Who wants to be a millionaire?"

Director Mukesh Bhatt was the second biggest tax defaulter, followed by Bachchan's actress wife Jaya and film actor Shah Rukh Khan, he said.

Other tax violators read like a Who's Who of the Bombay film industry, including action heroes Ajay Devgun and Sunil Shetty, top actresses Sridevi, Karishma Kapoor and Pooja Bhatt and directors Subhash Ghai, David Dhawan, Mahesh Bhatt and Ram Gopal Verma.

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One more held Hunt for killers in Chittagong

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, July 25: Police raided different areas of the city to nab six other gunmen involved in Bahadurhat incident that left eight people including six BCL activists killed on July 12, police said.

Earlier, police disclosed that a gang of seven Shibir-backed gunmen was involved in Bahadurhat incident.

Of them, one Solaiman was arrested by police on Saturday night. He was placed on a seven-day remand for interrogation.

Solaiman was identified by the driver of the microbus as a member of the gang, police said.

Another FIR named accused Md Elias was arrested yesterday. CID took him on a seven-day remand.

CID police picked up Mohammed Khokon, helper of the microbus from Chandgaon area last night.

Khokon gave his statement before a magistrate under section 164, CID source said.

Police charge baton on Jamaat activists

By Staff Correspondent

Police fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the Jamaat activists as they were demonstrating on the road in front of the northern gate of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque yesterday evening.

Police also charged baton on them following exchange of hot words with Jamaat leaders. After the incident, three persons were arrested from the lane adjacent to the Housing Building Finance Corporation (HBFC). However, none reportedly was hurt in the incident.

Later, leaders and activists of Jamaat brought out a procession in the city.

Earlier, Jamaat held a rally in the northern gate of Baitul Mukarram as part of the four-party alliance's simultaneous mass procession programme. The rally was addressed among others by Jamaat Secretary General Motiur Rahman Nizami, Delwar Hossain Saidee and Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid. ATM Azharul Islam presided.

Vajpayee to visit US from Sept 15

NEW DELHI, July 25: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will make a three-day state visit to the United States from September 15, the foreign ministry said today, reports Reuters.

Vajpayee will hold talks with US President Bill Clinton who was in India in March. Clinton's visit was the first by a US president in over two decades.

Privatisation Biman seeks help of Citibank consultants

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman asked the Citibank consultants yesterday to provide it with the best options for offloading its 49 per cent shares for a tie up with a Strategic Partner (SP) without any confrontation with the employees, Biman sources said.

In a message sent to the Citibank consultants, who designed a blueprint for privatisation of Biman, the national airlines sought their views on the alternatives to conversion of it into a Public Limited Company (PLC). Biman employees have vowed to resist the move for conversion.

The Citibank consultants had earlier said the best option was to convert Biman into a PLC and find out an SP-- a bigger and reputed airlines-- to make it profitable.

Biman has 13 aircraft with two of those grounded and has 5550 employees and officials. It suffered a loss of Tk 56 crore last year.

The airlines decided to go for privatisation, offloading 49 per cent shares. Nine per cent of the shares would go to the employees and 40 per cent to the strategic partner.

The Citibank consultants also recommended that there could be a tie up with an SP retaining the status of Biman as a Corporation. Another option was to amend the Biman corporation ordinance for a tie up

with an SP and conversion into a PLC after the tie up.

In the face of opposition from Biman employees, fearing job losses due to privatisation, Minister for Civil Aviation Mosharraf Hossain had a meeting with them on Sunday to explain the situation. But it failed to resolve the problem.

The employees held a rally before the meeting with the minister. They also held a rally yesterday in front of the Engineering hangar of Biman at Zia

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14th PW in Rubel Murder Case cross-examined

By Court Correspondent

Mahmudullah Gazi, the 14th prosecution witness in the Shamim Reza Rubel Murder Case, was cross-examined yesterday in the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court Dhaka.

The proceedings of the case will resume at 2-30 pm today and the defence lawyers will cross-examine the rest prosecution witnesses in the case.

Gazi in his statement said that he came to know about the arrest of Rubel by DB police from Rubel's elder brother at

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