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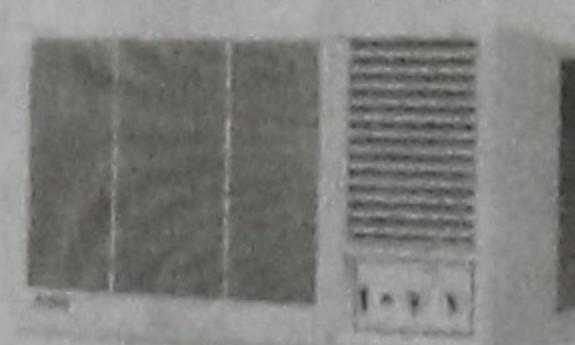
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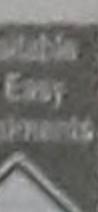
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Loads of rubbish in front of the red-bricked NICRH complex at Mohakhali (left) and the burgeoning slum that has gobbed up a considerable portion of the hospital compound (right).
- Star photo by A KM Mohsin

Expanding 'empire' of local toughs at NICRH

By Shehab Ahmed

A burgeoning slum with 'clubs' and bazaar has gobbed up the compound of the National Institute of Cancer Research and Hospital (NICRH) at Mohakhali in the city. Heaps of rubbish are dumped by the slum dwellers and the shopkeepers just in front of the NICRH, posing a serious health hazard to the patients.

The local toughs have expanded their empire over the years, making a hefty profit out of the slum and bazaar that has warehouses.

Three 'clubs' under different banners 'guard' the properties where different elements have their presence much to the discomfort of the general NICRH staff, patients and the local residents.

Two groups, including a section of NICRH staff and employees, control the slums

with the blessings of political high-ups, residents of the adjacent area complained. "They are so powerful that we cannot protest," one resident said, preferring anonymity. Even reports appearing in newspapers several years ago about the unlawful acts did not have any impact.

The NICRH officials said they could not do anything about it. "We have written several times to the authorities and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), who for reasons best known to them have kept their eyes close to the situation," a NICRH official said.

The three-storey institute with a 50-bed hospital was set up in 1982 with the help of Rotary Club.

President visits eye hospital in Daudkandi

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday visited Batakandi Eye Hospital and Keshabpur Girls' High School in the remote areas of Daudkandi upazila of Comilla district, reports UNB.

The 17-bed Batakandi Eye Hospital, established in 1973 by Eye Specialist Dr Muhammad Humayun Kabir, is rendering commendable service to the patients in the surrounding villages.

The hospital has two full time doctors with necessary staff and operation theatre. Dr Kabir conducts eye operation once in a month free of cost.

About one hundred eye patients receive outdoor treat

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'USGS lacks transparency, Dhaka should look for a third party'

By Staff Correspondent

The 'initiative' of United States Geological Survey (USGS) which is now engaged in assessing gas reserve in Bangladesh lacks 'transparency' and the country should immediately opt for a third party for this, participants at a roundtable in the city suggested yesterday.

A team comprising representatives from USGS and Petrobangla is now assessing gas reserve and there is no expert from Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology or Dhaka University in it. People would not accept such 'non-transparent assessment', they said.

The roundtable on 'Use of

Bangladesh's Gas Resource and National Interest' was organised by Jatiya Peshajibi Shamannay Parishad and held at Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Chaired by Justice TH Khan, the roundtable was participated by, among others, Prof Moniruzzaman Mia, former vice chancellor of Dhaka University; Prof Anwar Hassan, Chairman of Applied Physics department at DU; Prof Ferdous Hossein, General Secretary of DU Teachers Association; Prof Syed Md Shafiqullah, Chairman of Environmental Science department at Jahangirnagar University; Prof Abu Ahmed of Economics department at DU and journalist Amanullah Kabir.

Prof Anwar Hassan said BAPEX has a very good track record of drilling as it has drilled 19 gas wells with success in. "So steps should be taken first to strengthen BAPEX."

Prof Shafiqullah suggested export of gas in value added form. "We can export fertiliser and electricity which would bring more foreign currency for the country," he said.

Prof Abu Ahmed said, "We welcome foreign investment in fertiliser and electricity projects. But gas export to India through pipeline is not acceptable."

One poisoned to death in city

By Staff Correspondent

A young man was poisoned to death allegedly by the family members of his father-in-law at Mirpur in the city on Friday.

Rezaul Karim Reza, 25, of Chuadanga was found in an unconscious state in front of a cinema hall at Mirpur in the city at about 2:30 pm on Friday.

Oli, a car driver, took him to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died an hour after admission, hospital sources said.

Reza married a girl of Mirpur named Shumi. She was taken to Reza's family at Chuadanga but his parents did not accept Shumi.

Shumi returned to her family at Mirpur in the city. Shumi's husband Reza came to Dhaka to take her back.

Doctors at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital quoting the autopsy report said that the young man died from poisoning.

Reza's father said his son was poisoned to death by Shumi's family. Mirpur police filed an unnatural death case in this regard.

Ex-Pak minister jailed for corruption

ISLAMABAD, Oct 7: A Pakistani court today sentenced former communications minister Azam Khan Hoti to 14 years imprisonment for corruption, an official report said, reports AFP.

The court also fined him 20 million rupees (around \$30,000 dollars) and ordered an additional three years in jail if the fine is not paid.

Shahmir Khan, a local engineer, was sentenced to 14 years and fined 50 million rupees, the state-run Associated Press of Pakistan said.

According to the prosecution, the engineer made 20 million rupees for the installation of a motorway emergency telephone system without providing specifications, with Hoti's consent, the agency said.

Hoti, a member of the Awami National Party, served as communications minister under prime minister Nawaz Sharif, who was ousted in a military coup in October last year.

Several politicians and former officials have been convicted for corruption under an accountability drive launched by the military regime headed by General Pervaiz Musharraf.

Strike cripples Kashmir: 8 killed

SRINAGAR, India, Oct 7: Six people including three suspected Muslim militants were killed today in Kashmir as a general strike crippled life in the northern Indian state, police here said, reports AFP.

Two Islamic guerrillas and an Indian soldier were killed in an encounter in the district of Patti, some 35 km north of Srinagar city, a police spokesman said.

In a separate clash, a militant was gunned down at a border village, some 100 km north of Srinagar, he said, adding that another Indian soldier and a civilian were killed elsewhere in the Himalayan region.

The Kashmir valley, meanwhile, was crippled Saturday by a total shutdown called by an umbrella forum of Islamic guerrillas and Kashmiri political groupings.

A spokesman of the forum said the general strike was called to protest alleged excesses by Indian troops deployed in the

Vested property

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"We believe in equal rights of all citizens irrespective of caste, creed and religion," the Prime Minister said, adding that the government at all levels of administration would maintain total impartiality and neutrality.

Members of the Hindu community are living in this country with full rights and privileges," she said and expressed her happiness that this year over 15,000 puja mandaps were erected across the country and Durga Puja is being celebrated with enthusiasm and gaiety.

Earlier, Hindu leaders felicitated the Prime Minister and expressed their deep gratitude for creating atmosphere for performing puja at the place of historic Ramma Kali Bari for the first time after 30 years.

ISLAMABAD, Oct 7: Military

ruler General Pervaiz Musharraf today asked India to agree to talks with Pakistan to find a solution to the thorny Kashmir dispute between the two countries, reports AFP.

India should refrain from 'provocative' actions and accept Pakistan's offer for dialogue, an official report quoted him as saying.

Musharraf, addressing an official meeting here, accused India of trying to impose a military solution on Kashmir, the crisis-ridden Himalayan state divided between the two countries and claimed by both.

A Muslim separatist campaign in the Indian zone, which erupted in 1989, has claimed more than 34,000 lives.

Pakistan denies India's charge of fuelling the unrest, but vows normal and diplomatic support for the campaign, calling it a legitimate struggle.

India wants to impose a military solution in Kashmir on the basis of the status quo consolidating its occupation in defiance of the charter, principles and resolutions of the UN Security Council, "Musharraf said.

Reaffirming support to the

Kashmiri people, Musharraf said India was trying to create differences between Pakistan and Kashmiri leadership.

"India would not succeed in its nefarious designs to drive a wedge between Pakistan and the Kashmiri leadership," he said.

Pakistan is party to the Kashmir dispute and a durable solution to the festering dispute could only be achieved with full participation of Pakistan in any dialogue in future," "Musharraf said.

He said Kashmiris were forced to resort to an armed struggle because India used "brute force" against them.

The objective of the Indian repression is to pressurise the Kashmiri people into submission and to make them abandon their demand for the realization of their inalienable right to self-determination."

Musharraf said both India and Pakistan had committed themselves to the implementation of the 1948-49 UN Security Council resolutions envisaging a referendum in Kashmir.

"Their (Kashmiri) right to decide their own future has not lapsed with the passage of time," he said.

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President, PM greet Hindus

President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday greeted the Hindus on the occasion of their greatest religious festival Durga Puja, report agencies.

The President in his message said the people of Bangladesh have been practising their respective religion in the most cordial and peaceful atmosphere.

He called upon all to strengthen the bond of friendship among all irrespective of religion and status for the sake of peace, progress and welfare of the people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her message said all citizens in Bangladesh enjoy full independence in practising their respective religion.

She also called for greater unity of all irrespective of caste and creed to lead the country toward further progress.

News Analysis**Old warmth in a new milieu**

From Pallab Bhattacharya

Indian new middle-order batsman Yuvraj Singh, who made a decisive 84 and was later adjudged man-of-the-match, prepares to have a go at a Brett Lee delivery during yesterday's ICC Knockout match against Australia in Nairobi.

-- AFP photo

NEW DELHI, Oct 7: The visit to India by Russian president Vladimir Putin has revived the traditional warmth in relations between the two countries in a changed international order, the flames of the past were fed by a convergence of geo-political interests, the cold war and ideological wrap, but gone are those days and those issues.

The warmth, however, continues, perhaps with greater intensity, as new geo-political concerns and commonality of interests have emerged.

Since the demise of Soviet Union a decade ago, the thrust of Russia's foreign policy has been towards Europe both Western and Eastern and the United States. Russia has been keen to strengthen its ties with east European countries in the light of growing coming together between the latter and the West and the United States. That is not surprising given the fact that East Europe has been such a close ally of Moscow during the Cold War days.

As Russia looked towards Europe and U.S. and India decided to reach out to the U.S., Western Europe and South East Asia, a certain warmth crept into ties between New Delhi and Moscow in the nineties. Even visits to India by Boris Yeltsin, the then Russian President in 1993, and Russian Foreign Minister Primakov four years later could not alto-

gether erase that impression.

With the ideological leanings of the past missing in the posturings of both New Delhi and Moscow, the two countries seem well prepared to evaluate their relations in a new context, as evident most tellingly in the signing of the Strategic Partnership.

The Strategic Partnership document says India and Russia will not participate in any military-political or other alliances or associations or armed conflicts directed against the other side or in any treaties, agreements or understandings infringing upon the sovereignty or national security interests of the other side. Although some analysts are prone to view this as a throw-back to the past, such a formulation carries very little weight in a unipolar world of today.

At the core of the new upswing in Indo-Russian relations are strengthening and reaching of military ties reflected in the setting up of joint military commission and reaching of multi-billion dollar deal to supply Russian tanks, fighter jets and a huge aircraft carrier to India, Joint Working Group on Afghanistan and international terrorism and cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Russia's defence cooperation with India is as much a reflection of its

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Kostunica's priority is to build a new democracy

BELGRADE, Oct 7: With the army behind him and Slobodan Milosevic wishing him well, President-elect Vojislav Kostunica appears free to take his oath of office and begin leading Yugoslavia out of a decade of war and turmoil and into a welcoming Europe, reports AP.

Kostunica focused on efforts today to build a new democracy in this beleaguered Balkan country, sidestepping questions about the outgoing president's future plans.

"For now, it is more than enough that Milosevic congratulated me," Kostunica said. "Difficult times are behind us, but the days ahead also hold many trials."

Kostunica made the comments after talks with Greek Foreign Minister George

Papandreou, the first Western official who arrived here to congratulate and offer the new Yugoslav president support.

Papandreou expressed his admiration for the peaceful transition that the Yugoslavs accomplished and said that it was now time for Europe to respond by lifting economic sanctions. The European Union may lift sanctions as early as Monday.

"The priority today is to the democratic transition in Yugoslavia, to help this country consolidate its democracy," Papandreou told reporters.

Kostunica's official inauguration was scheduled to follow a session of the newly elected Yugoslav parliament today in Belgrade's modernistic Sava Center, after the parliament building was gutted and ransacked in riots

Thursday that toppled Milosevic. The Yugoslav strongman addressed the Yugoslav people in a televised speech late Friday, conceding he had lost the Sept. 24 presidential elections.</p