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Foreign ship catches fire at Ctg port

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Dec 3: A foreign cargo ship anchored at Chittagong port jetty No 1 caught fire this evening, causing damage to 2000 tons of copra (dried coconut), port and police sources said. The Antigua flag carrier Southern Queen arrived at Chittagong port on December 1 loaded with copra imported from Australia, port sources said.

The ship caught fire in its hatch at 5.30 pm. All the 14 Sri Lankan crew left the ship unhurt, police said.

Fire fighters rushed to the spot and extinguished the blaze at 9 pm.

Port's fire fighting vehicles also joined the operation.

The dried coconuts were imported by private parties for extracting coconut oil in the factory, sources said.

Sources said the fire reportedly broke out at the time of welding inside the ship.

The port authority has formed a three-member body to probe the fire incident and ascertain the extent of damage.

Anti-peace accord activists clash with AL men at Bandarban: 35 injured

BANDARBAN, Dec 3: At least 35 people were injured, five of them seriously, in a clash between the activists of anti-peace accord and Awami League here today, reports BSS.

Police said the anti-peace accord activists of Chittagong Hill Tracts under the banner of 'four-party opposition alliance' clashed with the ruling party men after a rally in the town.

The anti-peace accord activists tried to set fire to the Modhampara residence of Juba League worker Abdul Barek and stabbed two employees of a furniture shop.

They also attacked the residence of District Chhatra League president Luomipada Pal.

The injured were admitted to Bandarban Sadar Hospital.

General Secretary of district Awami League Abdul Rahim Chowdhury told BSS that they will file a case against the attackers with Sadar Police Station. He also condemned and protested the attack.

Tussle reaches climax

Three ECs reject CEC's position

By Nazrul Islam

The tussle between the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and the three Election Commissioners reached its climax yesterday with both sides refusing to budge from their stance over the controversial appointments of a foreign consultant and some IT experts to an Election Commission (EC) project.

In their reply to CEC MA Syed's letter yesterday, the three Election Commissioners, Abdur Rahman, Mushtaq Ahmed Chowdhury and Saifur Rahman, said that their decision to reverse the CEC's 'illegal' decision on the appointments was legitimate and cannot be declared void.

MA Syed told journalists before receiving the letter that his decision was right and it is not subject to change. "I was right and I will always be right."

Hinting at the Election Commissioners, he said some people are trying to make the Commission ineffective, and that's why they are raising objection to the appointments.

Abdur Rahman, the senior most Election Commissioner who was acting as the Chief Election Commissioner during Syed's absence (he was on a trip to the US), said there was no provision for such consultant in the project. The CEC proposed to the UNDP for hiring Lionel J Wolner as a consultant. "But, we don't know why he did this."

About downsizing of the EC, which has been reportedly proposed by the CEC, he said there

should be no objection to the proposal if the Commission works properly. But, it should be kept in mind that one could become an autocrat by taking advantage of such a move.

Mushtaq Ahmed Chowdhury and Saifur Rahman, the two other commissioners, said their position was ethical. The question is whether the process through which the Election Commission will work will be transparent or not, they said.

In a four-page joint letter, the three Election Commissioners called for an immediate investigation into the appointments of the foreign consultant and others in the "Strengthening the Election Commission Project," which is funded by the UNDP.

The letter was sent to the CEC in the afternoon by a messenger, according to the EC sources.

"The authority cannot be challenged just for the sake of raising some illegal decisions and their annulment in a Commission meeting," the commissioners said.

The Commission's decision shall be confirmed by the Commission and there have been such precedence, they noted in the letter which contained 10 points explaining the Constitution, conventions and the existing laws pertaining to the Election Commission.

Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed giving his

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4 airlines want to become Biman's strategic partner

By Special Correspondent

Four airlines have sent Request for Proposal (RP) to become a Strategic Partner (SP) of Bangladesh Biman through buying 40 per cent of its shares under a restructuring programme.

The Gulf Air and the Qatar Airways have sent their RPs directly to Biman. The Singapore Airlines and the Air New Zealand have sent their RPs to the Citibank Group, Biman's consultant for the proposed restructuring, Biman sources said.

The last date of sending RP was December 2. It may be extended since some more airlines have shown interest, the sources said but declined to name those.

Advertisements inviting RP were published in The Daily Star, the Economist and the Flight International on November 17.

Tender in this regard is likely to be floated towards the end of this month.

The restructuring is being designed by the Citibank Group under a two million dollar World Bank aided project.

Under the programme, the government will retain 51 per cent shares of Biman and give nine per cent to its employees.

However, Biman will retain ground handling, cargo and catering services.

Meanwhile, Biman authorities are rethinking sale of its four DC-10-30 aircraft to lease or purchase four Airbus A 340 or Boeing 777-200 aircraft.

"We would like to complete the process but leave the choice of the aircraft to the SP", a Biman source said.

The issue of inducting new generation aircraft ahead of finalising sale of the proposed 40 per cent shares to a SP came under criticism by different quarters.

The RP for sale of the DC-10-30 aircraft and lease or purchase of Airbus A 340 or Boeing 777 was published in newspapers in October. The last date for submission of RP was November 14.



Visitors check out what's new on the racks at the seventh Dhaka Book Fair on the premises of the Physical Education College in the city's Mohammadpur area yesterday. The fair, organised by the National Book Centre, began yesterday and will run through December 17.

Ministry agrees to lift suspension on SEMP

By Special Correspondent

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has agreed to lift the suspension on the Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP).

The decision was taken at a high level meeting between the government and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) yesterday, sources said.

The SEMP was suspended on September 14 for alleged irregularities and mismanagement by the sub-implementing agencies (SIA).

The UNDP which provided 26 million dollars for the SEMP threatened last month to withdraw 22 million dollars from the programme, launched in October 1998.

It had said that the allegations against the SIAs, made by the MOEF Secretary, were unsustainable.

The SEMP was being implemented by 21 organisations including ten belonging to different government and autonomous bodies. The rest are NGOs including the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

MOEF Secretary Mamunur Rashid, External Resources Division (ERD) Secretary Dr Mashur Rahman, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division (IMED) Secretary Anisur Rahman and UNDP Resident Representative in Bangladesh Jorgen E Lissner attended the meeting, sponsored by ERD.

The MOEF Secretary, who is also National Programme Director of the SEMP, had ordered the suspension.

Earlier on Wednesday, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the MOEF recommended withdrawal of the suspension.

The SIAs had denied the allegations brought by the MOEF Secretary. The MOEF was also served with a legal notice by the ADAB challenging the suspension order.

The sources said the programme management unit of the SEMP will continue for another four months. After that there will be some changes in it. The Letter of Agreement with the SIA will continue without any change, they added.

Ershad's lawyer asked to reply whether his client talked to the judge

By Special Correspondent

A Division Bench of the High Court yesterday ordered former President HM Ershad's attorney to obtain from the attorney of the daily Manab Jamin a transcript of his client's alleged conversation with a High Court judge following his conviction in the Janata Tower case.

The Bench comprising Justice Syed Amirul Islam and Justice K.M. Shafiuddin also asked Ershad's attorney Khandaker Mahbub Hossain to give a reply on December 10 whether his client had talked with the judge and the transcript was that of his client.

But the court did not permit

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SC rejects Ershad's plea for paying fine in installments

By SC Correspondent

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday dismissed an appeal by former president HM Ershad for payment of the Tk 5.5 crore fine in installments and for his release from jail on bail bond. He was convicted in the Janata Tower case.

A Full Bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Latifur Rahman gave the verdict.

The other judges were Justice Kazi Ebadul Haq, Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury and Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury.

Ershad filed the leave petition against an earlier judgement of the Appellate Division that upheld a lower court verdict which sentenced him of five years' imprisonment and to pay a fine of Tk 5.5 crore in the case.

The Appellate Division, however, modified the High Court

judgement saying Ershad could come out from jail on payment of the penalty. It also reduced the jail term from two years to a six-month in default of payment of the fine.

Ershad has already served three years, seven months and 26 days in jail in the case until 1997. He was later freed on bail on January 9, 1997.

He was again sent to jail on November 20 this year to complete the sentence by the Appellate Division on a graft charge stemming from a high rise building called Janata Tower at Kauran Bazar, Dhaka. He allegedly built the tower beyond his legal or known source of income.

The conviction on a charge of "moral turpitude" by the highest court has disqualified the former President from remaining a Member of Parliament and from contesting in parliament election for five years from the date he would be released.

Dengue: Thirteen hospitalised

By Staff Correspondent

Thirteen people with dengue haemorrhagic fever were admitted to different hospitals in the city yesterday.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital reported admitting one patient, Dhaka Shishu Hospital three, Red Crescent Holy Family Hospital two, Mitford Hospital one, Bangladesh Medical College Hospital two and Ibne Sina clinic reported admitting four patients.

Power situation yet to return to normalcy

By Staff Correspondent

Power situation across the country markedly improved yesterday, although normalcy was yet to be restored as some 13 power generating units, including three 210-megawatt ones, remained out of order.

On Saturday, some major power plants tripped, causing severe power crisis across the country, with total load-shedding across the country reaching nearly 800MW at one stage. However, it came down to 157MW yesterday, according to PDB sources.

Tripping of Ashuganj-4, Ashuganj-3, Ghorasal-4, Ghorasal-6 and Haripur-30MW between late Friday night and Saturday afternoon resulted in a huge amount of power shortage, including nearly 350 MW in the DESA areas.

Moreover, 210MW Rajan-2 was shut down on Saturday for maintenance. Overhauling of Rajan-1, meanwhile, has

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Ghorasal-6 sets tripping record 30 times in 23 months of commercial operation

By Staff Correspondent

The sixth unit of Ghorasal power plant tripped again on December 2 for the 30th time since it started operations nearly 23 months back.

PDB officials attributed the temporary suspension of power generation to "minor technical problem." The problem, which suspended power supply for almost seven hours from 2-45 in the afternoon, wouldn't recur in the near future, they hoped.

The Tk 670 crore project took a Russian company nearly five years to complete and started power generation on a commercial basis from January 30 last year. However, the unit couldn't reach its peak generation capacity 210 megawatt in its first one year and eight months of operations.

With the local experts taking over the maintenance operations, the performance of the unit also improved. It had uninterruptedly generated power to its full capacity for nearly two and a half months until Saturday's breakdown.

Although only 23-month old, Ghorasal-6 has a long history of tripping, the first one taking place within seven days of its inauguration by the Prime Minister.

A PDB official, however, argued that it was announced beforehand. The PDB chairman said at the inaugural ceremony that power generation at the unit would remain suspended for the next few days to finish some

technical works.

Besides, he said, a power new plant needs at least six months for adjustment.

Nonetheless the PDB official admitted that such a high frequency of shutdown was "unusual" and none of the other 62 power units in the country had so many breakdowns within such a short span.

From November 12 till Decem

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WATCH OUT FOR DATE!

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 4		5.10 pm
Dec 5	6-27 am	

Prayer Timings

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-02	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-14	5-22
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

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Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Dec	Sehri	Iftar
7	4	5-02	5-14
8	5	5-03	5-14
9	6	5-03	5-14