

Visa for D-8 businessmen eased

UNB, Dhaka

The Foreign Ministers of D-8 countries have signed a pact to facilitate entry visas for businesspeople of the member-states in their bid to boost trade.

"This agreement enables businessmen to overcome some bureaucratic hurdles and procedural obstacles that harm investment opportunities in these countries," Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad represented Bangladesh at the meeting of the Council of Ministers that concluded here Saturday. The closed-door meeting discussed trade activities among D-8 member-states and highlighted the importance of increasing the volume of trade exchange.

The D-8 officials who also met here prior to the 3rd summit that began here yesterday agreed on a number of measures to facilitate trade and harmonise laws and regulations in this respect.

In the meeting they pointed out the necessity of clearing obstacles from different sectors, such as inter-D-8 transport, to encourage private sector to play a more active role in boosting trade.

Shazneen Case adjourned again

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka yesterday adjourned the proceedings of the Shazneen rape case till March 14 following a time prayer by the prosecution lawyers.

Judge M Shah Alam Miah adjourned the proceedings as the accused in the case were not produced in the court and complainant Mojibur Rahman also did not turn up due to hartal.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom Group, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.

Latifur Rahman filed a murder case with Gulshan thana on April 24, 1998, accusing Shahidul Islam alias Shahid, a domestic help at his house.

Mojibur Rahman had filed a rape case with Gulshan thana after six months' investigation into the murder case.

Shahidul Islam is the principal accused in the case while contractor Hasan is the alleged mastermind.

Special PP A B M Sharfuddin Khan Mukul and Mahub Ahmed appeared for the state while advocates Mosarraf Hossain Kajol, Munzoor Alam, Saigra Ferdous and M A Kamrul Hasan Khan Aslam for the accused.

The murder case, pending with the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court Dhaka, was stayed following an order by the Supreme Court. The order will remain valid till disposal of the rape case.



For some pro-hartal pickets it was a festival of fire of sort, as they set ablaze an autorickshaw in front of Rajarbagh Police Lines in the city during hartal hours yesterday.

First day's hartal passes off peacefully

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The first 12-hour of the 19-hour hartal passed off almost peacefully across the country yesterday saving some incidents of bomb explosion that left a dozen people including three children injured.

The originally planned two-day dawn-to-dusk shutdown, enforced at the call of the BNP-led opposition alliance, was curtailed to a 19-hour one with a 12-hour pause from 6

p.m. yesterday evening to 6 a.m. this morning.

The general strike that ends at 1 p.m. today is in demand for resignation of the government.

Yesterday's hartal was observed with chiefs of the two leading political parties Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia staying abroad.

Hasina is now in Cairo to attend

the third D-8 Summit while Khaleda is in Singapore for treatment.

At least seven persons, including three children were injured when several crackers were blasted in Keraniganj on the outskirts of the capital and Badda in the city in the early hours of the hartal.

Four persons were injured when pickets blasted crackers near the BNP club at Jinjira bus stand under Keraniganj thana at about 11:30 a.m. The crackers exploded when an

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Food procurement target 7.5 lakh tonnes this yr

UNB, Dhaka

Government has set the target of this year's food procurement at 3 lakh metric tons of wheat, 1.5 lakh mts of paddy and 3 lakh mts of rice.

The target was fixed at a meeting of the Food Planning and Monitoring Committee, presided over by Food Minister Amir Hossain Amu at the ministry yesterday, said an official hand-out.

The meeting also fixed the procurement rates at Tk 8.90 per kg for wheat, Tk 8.25 for boro paddy and Tk 13 for boro rice. However, the rates will have to be approved by the Cabinet.

The meeting reviewed the overall food situation in the country.

Rupsha AL leader murder KMP suspects involvement of PBCP activists, some brickfield owners

QUAZI AMANULLAH, from Khulna

None has yet claimed responsibility for killing Rupsha AL leader Haroon Sardar. But KMP officials suspect involvement of the activists of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) and few brickfield owners in the conspiracy.

According to sources, the slain AL leader had strained relations with some brickfield owners over leadership of Brickfield Owners' Association. He was not also on good terms with armed cadres of the Rupsha unit of PBCP.

AUP chairman of Rupsha upazila has blamed neither Awami League nor BNP for the murder of Haroon Sardar. Preferring anonymity the UP

chairman appealed to the police to unearth the real motive behind the murder taking in serious view the strained relations between the slain AL leader and brickfield owners.

Haroon Sardar was threatened several times by rivals in his party not to become a candidate either in the upazila or parliamentary elections, alleged some insiders.

Insiders further said that Haroon Sardar had a quarrel with an influential brickfield owner in Rupsha upazila over payment of toll to armed cadres of PBCP and capturing of local leadership.

The slain AL leader had a group of armed cadres of PBCP to face challenge of his rivals in the party.

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Shikha Chirantan to be inaugurated on March 31

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to inaugurate the "Shikha Chirantan (Eternal Flame)" of the Independence Memorial Plaque being erected at the Suhrawardy Udyan on March 31.

Sheikh Hasina will address a grand rally of the freedom fighters and people on the udyan premises.

It was decided at a meeting of the officials concerned with Adviser to the Prime Minister on Establishment Ministry and War of Liberation Affairs Khondoker Asaduzzaman in the chair at his office, an official handout said last night.

The meeting directed the authorities concerned to complete the construction work of the Independence Memorial Plaque Complex on time.

Indian garments, saris worth Tk 36 lakh seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate on Saturday evening seized huge quantities of Indian saris, fabrics and readymade garments worth about Tk 36 lakh from Dhaka-Mawa Highway, customs sources said.

Acting on a tip-off, the team led by Joint Director Khandokar Aminur Rahman conducted a raid at Nimtoli on Dhaka-Mawa Highway and recovered 1350 pieces of saris, 7650 metres of different fabrics, 215 sets of Shalwar Kameez, readymade garments and 20 front-rear casings for TV worth Tk 35.88 lakh.

The consignment was being loaded on a truck at an isolated place at Nimtoli when the customs team burst into the scene. The truck sped away from the spot leaving behind the goods.

Customs sources said that the goods were smuggled into the country from India in 16 large sacks and two wooden boxes. The goods were brought to the customs office at Bailey Road.

9 BCL activists of CU unit sued under PSA

CU CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Nine activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) Chittagong University (CU) unit have been sued under the Public Safety Act (PSA) on charge of attacking an Islamic Chhatra Shibir (ICS) leader on Shaheed Minar premises on the campus on February 20.

The accused BCL activists are Nizamuddin Shimul, Asraf Shadat Chowdhury Tanvir, Awranghazeb Sumon, Rabiul Hasan Bhuiyan, Shahnoor, Polin, Arju, Tareq and Baijib Sohel.

Kazi Nurul Mostafa, a leader of the ICS, filed the case with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Chittagong on February 23.

Violence must stop for lifting blockade, peace talks: Sharon

AP, Jerusalem

Prime Minister-elect Ariel Sharon yesterday told visiting US Secretary of State Colin Powell that the Palestinians must stop acts of violence before a blockade is lifted and peace negotiations resume.

In turn, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat called for the Americans to help restart talks where they broke off last month in negotiations under outgoing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak.

Arafat, who also met with Powell, encouraged an intensive American role in bringing the sides back to the negotiating table despite five months of fighting that has left more than 400 people dead.

"I look forward to resuming negotiations from the point they left off," Arafat said at a joint news conference with Powell.

Peace talks are presently on hold, and Powell's brief visit did not produce any breakthroughs.

As Powell met with leaders from both sides, an Israeli was shot in the head and neck in a drive-by shooting near the West Bank town of Bir Zeit, military sources said.

Meanwhile, Palestinians held anti-American protests to denounce the recent US air strikes against Iraq. Just a few blocks away from Arafat's offices in the West Bank town of Ramallah, where he met with Powell, some 250 Palestinians, some wearing black masks, demonstrated against the visit.

The crowd burned pictures of Sharon and US

President George W Bush, with a sign attached reading, "Down USA."

In Gaza City, some 2,500 Palestinian marchers, some toting automatic rifles, burned US flags and chanted "Go home Powell," and other anti-American slogans aimed at Powell and Bush.

In a joint press conference with Powell in Jerusalem, Sharon reiterated his position that peace talks would only follow a cessation of violence.

"One thing should be clear. Israel will not negotiate under pressure of terror and violence," Sharon said.

Sharon did leave open the possibility of a meeting with Arafat before that point, however. He said talks with the Palestinian leader could take place if Arafat took steps to contain the violence.

"The beginning of such steps must be visible to us," Sharon said. He also acknowledged that there were channels of contact between him and the Palestinian Authority.

Powell met Barak on Saturday night, and the outgoing Israeli leader said the negotiations conducted under his watch would be "null and void," and would not bind Sharon.

Powell said the United States would remain active in Mideast peacemaking, but he did not offer specifics on any possible US mediation efforts.

Frequent power disruption in city

RAZIUR RAHMAN

While the peak season for power consumption is yet to start, frequent power disruption coupled with low voltage is already causing misery to the city dwellers.

Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office had asked the authorities concerned to take immediate steps to keep loadshedding in the capital as low as possible during the lean season beginning in March-April.

But the capital and its adjacent areas have been experiencing power shortage even up to 67 MW a day in the last few days.

DESA officials had earlier said the city dwellers could expect improved power supply this year as some projects under a crash programme were likely to be completed by mid-March.

But some sources in DESA said the capital is going to face more than 100 MW loadshedding from March-April even if the projects are completed. They also expressed

doubts about completion of the projects by mid-March.

Installation of 2000 'capacitor banks' is needed to solve the problem of low voltage in the city. DESA is scheduled to install 1888 'capacitor banks' by March 15. So far it has installed 538, the sources said.

When asked, a senior official of DESA said all efforts are being made to complete installation of those within the scheduled time but he could not confirm it.

Besides, installation of 538 capacitor banks is yet to make any improvement in the situation as those are still at the 'monitoring stage.'

"Low voltage also causes power disruption as the supply lines trip due to this. As soon voltage rises to an acceptable level, power supply resumes. Some areas in the city suffer frequent power disruption only due to voltage problem", said an official.

When contacted, DESA Member K Z Azam attributed

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Combing operation at Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Sundarban Forest Division (SFD) has launched combing operation against pirates on February 21.

The coast guards and forest guards jointly launched the combing operation at Chandpai Range.

Forty coast guards tipped from the Army and 50 forest guards were given 12 watercrafts to carry out the special operation, a SFD handout said.

A monitoring cell has been opened in this regard to ascertain success and failure, the DFO said.

Sixty guards of the SFD continued the combing operation with the help of 15 watercrafts in Khulna and Sathkhira Ranges. The operation in Swarankhola Range is being carried out with the help of 12 policemen and 30 forest guards. Seven watercrafts have been engaged for this purpose.

According to SFD handout, 30,000 cubic feet of Sundari and Passur wood and 10,000 cft of other fuel wood worth over Tk 80 lakh were seized from 20 trawlers and boats during the last three months.

Forty-five pirates were arrested and 172 cases filed under Forest Act, the handout said.

One SBL gun, a bullet-proof jacket and a helmet were recovered during the operation.

The DFO Tapan Kumar DC alleged non-co-operation of police in recovering arms from custody of political godfathers of the pirates of the Sundarbans.