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Buddha Purnima today

UNB, *Dhaka*

Buddha Purnima, the biggest religious festival of the Buddhist community, will be observed today.

The Buddhists observe the day commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of Gautam Buddha.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina have congratulated the Buddhist community on the occasion.

In separate messages, they called for following the unique teachings and non-violence principles of Buddha and establish peace in all spheres of national life.

Bangladesh Buddhist Federation has drawn up programmes to observe the day which is also a public holiday.

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Work unitedly for peace, prosperity

PM tells Buddhists

UNB, *Dhaka*

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon the people of all faiths to work unitedly for peace, prosperity and welfare of the country.

"We'll have to maintain religious harmony through concerted efforts and protect the culture and traditions of different religions," she told a gathering of Buddhists at her office yesterday.

A large number of members from the Buddhist community joined the gathering on the eve of Buddha Purnima, their biggest religious festival, to be observed today.

The Prime Minister said the country has many small religious groups having their own rich cultural traditions and history and the

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Plot to kill PM

Dutch intelligence service probing report

REUTERS, *Amsterdam*

The Dutch intelligence service is investigating reports of a plot hatched on the Dutch soil to murder Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the foreign ministry said yesterday.

"Some reports of a plot appeared in the Indian and Bangladeshi press. Our embassy in Dhaka sent clippings to us and such a thing, of course, has to be taken seriously," a ministry spokeswoman said.

"We passed this onto the BVD (the Dutch intelligence service) and they are investigating it."

The Dutch news agency, ANP, quoted the reports as saying former soldiers of the Bangladesh army and the Pakistani secret service devised the plan at a restaurant in the southern Dutch town of Breda.

The spokeswoman said she also heard that story, but could confirm nothing right now.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
May 6		6.30 pm
May 7	5-20 am	

Prayer Timings

May 6

	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	4-30	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-30	6-35
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Second round bidding for Block 11

Tullow tilt may rob BAPEX of 10pc equity share

SHARIER KHAN

Bangladesh has lost 10 per cent equity share in the production sharing contract for Block 9 and is likely to lose another 10 per cent in the PSC for Block 11 as the authorities are clearly prioritising share for the Irish oil company, Tullow.

Petronas, the Malaysian national oil company, last week proposed to Petrobangla that it should be given 60 per cent equity in Block 11 with 20 per cent carried-over interest for BAPEX, the Bangladeshi exploration company.

In response to Petrobangla's final attempt to close negotiations for oil and gas exploration in Block 11 under the Second Round Block Bidding, the Malaysian company also suggested that Irish company Tullow get 20 per cent share.

In a recent letter Petronas further said it should be made the operator in the block, arguing that that Tullow is already the lone operator in Blocks 17 and 18 and partial operator in Block 9. If Petronas is made operator in block 11, the government will have more operators and thus ensure that no single company controls most of the blocks. Sources said that Petrobangla primarily agreed to the Petronas proposals.

However, the government's top notches are still planning to make Tullow the block's operator as well as to give it at least 45 per cent of equity. The top notches also recommend only 10 per cent carried-over interest to BAPEX, 10 per cent less than what Petronas has proposed.

"Tullow is being backed by a political lobby that has personal interest in the company's new operations in the country," said a source who has been involved with the Second Round Block bidding from early 1997 when the process began.

A Petrobangla high official, who retired recently, has also been personally pushing the issues in favour of Tullow, sources said, adding that the political lobby earlier promised him a high-profile job in the Irish company.

Tullow became the operator in blocks 17 and 18, which it had acquired

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Villagers still fleeing Baraibari, don't dare to harvest paddy

NAIMUL HAQ *from Roumari*

Matured IRRI-Boro crops on hundreds of acres of land near the border in Baraibari are untouched as local farmers do not go to harvest those fearing fresh attack by BSF troops.

Villagers are still leaving their homes for safer places although BDR personnel are trying to convince them of a normal situation and to stay back.

On Friday, at least fifty families left their homes at Barbandha, Datbhanga and neighbouring villages. During a visit to the area this correspondent saw panicked people moving to safer places with their belongings.

The exodus started after the border skirmishes on April 18 that left 17 BSF and three BDR personnel dead.

At least 83 houses were burnt by BSF during their attack. Most of the victims are passing their days under the open sky in other areas of Roumari, far from the border.

Insaf Ali who planted IRRI paddy on two acres of land close to the barbed wire fence on the border said, "It is time to harvest the paddy. But we did not go to see the crops since the skirmishes out of fear." He was talking to this correspondent at a place about five kilimetres from the border.

Kauser Mia said, "My father and I went to see our crop fields on Wednesday. We went half the way and returned noticing BSF troops patrolling near the fence." Many others also said they are passing days amid hardship but can not harvest their crops near the border.

BDR personnel are trying to convince the villagers to return to their homes. "We have instructed our men to go house to house to convince them to come back to their homes," said a BDR offer at Roumari.

"Many people are still in panic. We assured them that we would protect them from any attack," said the officer seeking anonymity.

Most of the thatched houses in Baraibari were seen empty. Only male persons come during daytime to take their belongings and leave the areas before sunset, some people said.

"We have moved to a safe place in Roumari. They say fighting may start any day again," said 35-year-old Md Nazrul, whose house is close to the BDR camp in Baraibari.

Boatman Md Moinul Huq said, "In last few days, many people from near the border moved to Roumari, fearing fresh attack."

Jamal Hossain who was caught in the skirmishes in Baraibari said, "The exodus will continue till tension subsides, no matter now hard BDR officials try to convince them to

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Traffic police withdrawn from ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The dispute between the Home Ministry and the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) has further intensified following withdrawal of traffic police from the Zia International Airport (ZIA) yesterday.

The Home Ministry on Thursday withdrew its airport police camp when CAAB cut-off gas, water and electricity to the camp, airport sources said. CAAB went into action as the police camp was not removed despite repeated warning by the airport authorities.

CAAB after the police withdrawal deployed some 30 Ansar personnel to maintain law and order in the canopy and car parking area, a top CAAB official said.

He said CAAB officials arrested seven persons from the canopy area yesterday for their alleged involvement in passengers' harassment.

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Mamun wants to surrender, his two brothers held

NURUL ALAM, *Chittagong*

Alleged terrorist Mamunur Rashid Mamun contacted police officials over phone yesterday from his hideout in the city and told them that he would surrender on Thursday.

But the officials asked him to surrender by today, a senior official of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) told this correspondent yesterday.

A local political leader is acting as a mediator, the official said but declined to name him.

Police yesterday arrested two younger brothers of Mamun during a raid of his house near MES College and recovered two deer from there at 3 pm.

Police filed a case against his arrested brothers Khorshed Alam and Morshed Alam under the Wildlife Preservation Act for keeping the two deer.

Police also seized Mamun's luxury car worth Tk 14 lakh.

Ward Commissioner Mamun was sued under the Public Safety Act (PSA) for assaulting two senior journalists of daily Purbakone on April 18. There are eight other criminal cases against him.

Mamunur Rashid

Khorshed Alam and Morshed Alam, brothers of Mamunur Rashid, in custody at Khulshi police station in Chittagong. The two were arrested for illegal possession of two deer. Mamun is wanted for barging into the daily Purbakone office and roughing up its two journalists.

Police announced a reward of Tk one lakh for any information leading to his arrest.

During telephonic talk yesterday afternoon, the police officials asked Mamun to surrender by todayoday or to face "dire consequences" including filing of more cases and arrest of his father, CMP sources said.

Police also confirmed that he is staying in a hideout in the city after returning from Fatikchhari where he had taken shelter under another terrorist gang.

The sources said Mamun proposed to surrender as his godfathers in the ruling party are reportedly keeping themselves aloof from him now. The godfathers included a minister and a ruling party stalwart, both from Chittagong.

Even most of his armed cadres also reportedly deserted him and went into hiding.

Mamun emerged as a notorious terrorists under the shelter of an influential ruling party leader who had a long drawn rivalry with another ruling party leader-Aktaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu-over domination in city politics here, sources said.

Coveted and controversial... a view of the low-lying, marshy patch the Rajuk plans to develop into plots and distribute among the 2,687 'fortunate' allottees, whose name it finally announced on Thursday last.

Ministry proposes cut in BTTB connection fee

Revised rate would still be highest in world

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications (MOPT) has proposed that the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) lower subscription charges for new connections from Tk 18,300 at present to Tk 13,000.

In a bid to discourage new applications, the BTTB, which has some 165,000 applications for new connections pending, has so far kept the rate very high.

However, the fee, if revised, would still be the highest in the world. According to the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) Asia Pacific Telecom Indicator 2000, telephone connection fee is Tk 810 (US$15) in Bhutan is, Tk 1,026 (US$19) in India, Tk 1,566 (US$29) in Nepal, Tk 4,806 (US$89) in Pakistan, Tk 7, 884 (US$146) in Maldives and Tk 9,990 (US$185) in Sri Lanka.

The installation charge was Tk 10,000 in the country up to 1989 when analogue telephone service was provided. After digital telephone was introduced in the same year, the fee nearly doubled.

If the new proposal is accepted, the government stands to lose in revenues. However, a long-standing public demand for low connection rate would be met.

The Ministry of Finance has seriously reviewed the matter and the new rate could be declared in the budget for the 2001-02 fiscal, a source in the MOPT.

Bus service in11 dists resumes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Sirajganj*

Bus service in 11 districts resumed as Bogra Bus Owners' Association called off its strike yesterday.

The decision to call off the strike came at a meeting held at Bogra yesterday morning.

Hartal victim schoolboy Ripon dies at DMCH

BSS, *Dhaka*

Ripon Sikder,16, who received bomb injuries during hartal, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on Friday night after fighting for life for 11 days.

Police and hospital sources said Ripon, a student of UPCEP Polytechnic College at Mirpur, suffered critical splinter injuries in front of Hotel Illisium in Tikatuli area during opposition-called hartal on April 24. The pickets threw homemade bombs on Ripon while he was returning home by a rickshaw.

He was rushed to Sumona Clinic and later shifted to DMCH as his condition deteriorated. He breathed his last at about 10 PM.

Ripon was the youngest son of Mohammad Shajahan Sikder, a rickshawpuller of Golapbagh area.

A case was registered with Sutrapur thana in this connection.

BSF kills another Bangladeshi

UNB, *Sylhet*

Anther Bangladeshi was shot dead by the BSF near Jakiganj boarder in Sylhet yesterday.

Local people said Amin Ali, 35, son of Hajee Rafi Mia of village Dighali, died when BSF opened fire on him. BSF took away Ali's body.

On Friday, Selim Ahmed, 35, a resident of Islampur village, was shot dead by BSF. The body was also taken away.

Defaulters use lengthy judicial process as a blanket cover

Prothom Alo roundtable on 'Banking Sector Reform' told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable yesterday have identified lengthy judicial process as the shield defaulters use to block any move against them.

Vested interest groups, trade unions and political patronages also hinder development of a sound banking system in the country, they said.

These factors are delaying banking sector reforms and bad loan recovery causing genuine entrepreneurs to pay higher interest rates, the speakers at a roundtable on "Banking Sector Reform," organised by the Bengali daily Prothom Alo at a city hotel.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Mohammad Farashuddin said that as many as 43,000 cases were pending with the Money Loan Court which, in fact, was formed to expedite proceedings. There are stay orders on 75 per cent of these cases, he informed.

When a lower court stays the higher court order in favour of a bank, it is difficult to make any progress, he observed.

The governor also talked of reforms already taken place in the banking circle and called for more reforms. Political consensus and commitments were required in this regard, especially with the election ahead, he said.

Chairman of Banking Reform Committee Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud said that the banks should not be allowed to fund political parties.

He said that NCBs had failed to take legal steps against big defaulters and that the NCBs should be given autonomy with supportive regulations.

He said that different governments had allowed new banks in private sector on political considerations and if sponsors had ill intention then fate of these banks were determined even before their birth.

He said that despite reforms in banking laws and formulation of bankruptcy act there was very little progress.

He said that the BB should make banks' performance report public along with camel rating reports. "Such publications would help depositors to choose banks."

Bangladesh Economic Association President Moinul Islam called for a special tribunal to deal with defaulters.

He sought provision for an ombudsman for the banking sector saying that a new type of default cancer was spreading in the name of

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Nor'wester hits Rajshahi: 500 houses damaged

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

At least 500 houses were damaged and 1000 mango trees uprooted when a nor'wester hit nine thanas here and the Rajshahi city yesterday.

The nor'wester along with massive hailstorm and gusty wind started at 12:45 pm in the district damaging IRRI-boro cultivation on about 700 acres of land.

No casualty was reported from any parts of the district till writing of this report at 7:00 pm.

BSS adds: A strong storm lashed Chuadanga district town yesterday evening leaving five people injured and causing huge damages to the kutcha houses, trees and plants.

Police and hospital sources said the injuries were due to collapse of kutcha houses and fall of trees in different parts of the town. Many electric poles were also uprooted plunging the town into completez darkness.

The storm accompanied by heavy rainfall lasted half an hour, sources said.

42 murdered in 10 southwestern dists last month

QUAZI AMANULLAH, *Khulna*

Law and order in the south-western zone of the country has deteriorated alarmingly. There is hardly any day passes without dacoities, muggings, robberies, rapes and murders.

Police have so far failed either to contain these crimes or make any headway in the investigation of 42 murder cases recorded with different thanas of the south-western zone only last month.

According to reliable sources, real purpose for setting up 105 police camps in ten districts has not been served as most of hardened criminals and terrorists are yet to be nabbed due to lack of sincerity of a section of police officials who are not only corrupt but politically biased. As a result, crimes including murders are being committed unabated.

According to a source in DIG Range Office, 42 persons were killed in the south-western zone last month. Jhenidah district tops the list with 12 murders followed by eight in Khulna district during the same period.

Narail district secures the lowest position with only one murder.

In Kushtia and Jessore districts, the total number of murders committed last month stood at six and five respectively.

Of the rest murdered during the same period, three each were in Bagerhat and Magura districts and two each in Satkhira and Chuadanga districts, sources said quoting official records.

It is alleged that police superintendents of the ten districts of the south-western zone do not take view of the deteriorating law and order due to political reasons.

Meat trader murder

Killers threatening family members to withdraw case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Killers of meat trader Sirajul Islam of Vogda, Bashon in Joydevpur are threatening the family members to withdraw the murder case filed with Joydevpur thana in February this year, victim's wife alleged.

Khodeza Akhter, wife of Sirajul Islam was speaking at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity (DRU) office yesterday. Tofazzel Hossain Manik and Shamima Siraj Shimu, brother and daughter respectively of the victim were present at the press conference.

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