

Padma Bridge Tokyo to sign accord on 'scope of work' this month

BSS, Dhaka

A Japanese delegation will visit Bangladesh this month to sign an agreement on "scope of work" and subsequently carry out a feasibility study for the construction of Padma Bridge.

Japanese Ambassador to Bangladesh Jiro Kobayashi said this here on Thursday in response to a request made by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to his government to carry out a feasibility study to quickly begin construction of the bridge over the river Padma.

The ambassador, who called on the prime minister at her office, also said work on the Rupsa Bridge



Japanese envoy to Bangladesh Jiro Kobayashi met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday. A Japanese team will visit Bangladesh this month to sign an agreement on 'scope of work' on the proposed Padma Bridge.

Bangladesh, Pakistan to expand ties

BSS, DHAKA

Bangladesh and Pakistan have agreed to expand bilateral relations in all fields including trade.

This was resolved during the official talks between Foreign Minister AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and the visiting special envoy of Pakistan Shaheda Jamil at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Thursday.

Shaheda Jamil was on a three-day visit to Bangladesh as the special envoy of Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf.

The envoy told newsmen that the main purpose of her visit was to strengthen bilateral relations with the new government in Bangladesh.

Replying to a question, the special envoy said she discussed all matters of mutual and bilateral interests with the Bangladesh foreign minister. She said both Afghanistan and Kashmir issues were discussed at the meeting. She said Pakistan, being a frontline state, could not remain uncon-

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Property worth Tk 30 lakh gutted as boiler oven of oil mill explodes

UNB, Savar

Property worth about Tk 30 lakh was gutted in a devastating fire in an oil mill at Hrishipara village in the upazila yesterday.

Witnesses said the fire broke out in the Oil Mills Ltd. a Mobil company, after a boiler oven exploded at about 12:45 pm.

"The fire engulfed the mill soon after it was connected with a gas oven, creating panic among the workers, who ran here and there to save their lives," said a spot report.

The fire might have originated from explosion of a boiler oven as unskilled workers were on duty due to weekly holiday, witnesses said. Fire service in Dhaka told UNB that the cause of the blaze could not be known immediately.

Over a hundred drums of the total 3,000 kept in the mill exploded one after another as the depot went

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Tk 20 lakh jute gutted in N'ganj

UNB, N'ganj

Raw jute worth about Tk 20 lakh were gutted in a devastating fire at two godowns at Nabiganj in Bandar thana last night.

Exact cause behind the fire could not be known but one source said that electric short circuit or blasting of crackers might have caused the fire at the godowns of Jamal and Company.

Firefighters from Bandar, Hajiganj and Demra fire stations along with the local people put out the flame after one and half hours of frantic efforts. Ten people were slightly injured while trying to bring the fire under control.

Ahaj Kashem Jamal, owner of the company, alleged that firefighters of Mondalpara fire station did not come to the spot despite frequent requests. However, Mondalpara fire station sources denied receiving any message about the fire.

Four AL activists, Jubo Dal worker killed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Awami League activists and one Jubo Dal worker were killed in separate incidents in Feni, Gazipur, Narail and Kushtia districts on Thursday and Friday.

Our Feni Correspondent reports: Two people, including an elderly Awami League activist and a Jubo Dal activist were killed in the district yesterday.

The victims were identified as Abdur Rashid Sarker, 60, an AL activist of Char Sonapur village under Sonagazi thana and Nazrul Islam Liton, 20, a Jubo Dal activist of Ramchandrapur village of Dagonbhuyan thana.

A group of terrorists abducted Rashid from Sonapur Bazar at about 8 pm Thursday. He was found dead near Mohuri Regulator yesterday morning. His body bore marks of injuries.

AL blamed 'BNP terrorists' for the killing.

Meanwhile, Jubo Dal activists Nazrul and Alauddin sustained critical bomb injuries when they were making bombs at Mithapukur area at about 2 pm, villagers said.

They were rushed to Feni Sadar Hospital where Nazrul succumbed to his injuries as early yesterday.

Local BNP, however, claimed that Nazrul and Alauddin were injured when AL terrorists hurled bombs at them.

Our Kushtia correspondent said, a college teacher as well a Jubo League leader was shot dead by a terror-

ist group at Goneshpur village under Khoksa upazila in the district on Thursday.

The victim was identified as Mahbubur Rahman Ripon, 30, a computer trainer of Khoksa Saidur Rahman Montu Girls College and Khoksa Union Jubo League president. He was also joint secretary of local Bangabandhu Parishad.

Police said, a gang of terrorists led by Akdil, regional leader of Biplabi Communist Party (BCP) shot Ripon dead while he was having both at the river Gorai. Police recovered the body and sent it to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy. A case was filed and four people were arrested in this connection. They are Dulal, Saidul, Shuza and Belal.

UNB adds, unidentified assailants shot dead an Awami League activist in Tongi Bazar Thursday night.

Police said armed goons shot cloth-trader Elias, 25, son of Daliluddin of Arichpur at about 10 pm.

He died on way to hospital.

In another incident, an Awami League activist was killed and his father injured by rivals at Noagram village in Kalia upazila on Thursday.

Police and witnesses said a gang of assailants equipped with lethal weapons waylaid Azmur Islam, 25, and his father Afsaruddin near Baroipara ferry ghat on Noagram road at about 4:30 pm.

They slaughtered Azmur and critically injured his father.

Awami League leaders blamed BNP for the killing.

ASM NURUNNABI

To every watchful observer, city's roads, drains and sewerage present a melancholy picture depicting a state of neglect and decay. Instead of concerted efforts, there have been only sporadic and isolated efforts for improvement, which has been largely ineffective.

Observers are of the opinion that most roads except a small number of VIP roads do not undergo proper maintenance and repair. Following every rainy season, the city roads in many areas become water-logged.

The incessant rain coupled with heavy pressure of the mounting volume of vehicular traffic damage the road surface in many areas, most of which develop large pot-holes and large areas of broken surface. Repairs are never promptly taken up.

The continuing failure of agencies concerned in the matter of repair and reconstruction leads to a process of unabated decay presenting a sorry picture of the city's road network for the most part.

DOWN TO EARTH

City's essential services at risk

Literally crores of taka are wasted every year on poor road repair work. It is felt that if roads are to be repaired with quality materials and in a way that will ensure durability, then the whole process of selecting contractors, purchasing materials and supervising the work done will have to be thoroughly reviewed.

Next to the roads are drains equally afflicted by lack of proper maintenance. The overall situation has turned so wretched that it is the biggest cause of pollution of environment and a direct threat to health and sanitation of the city's population.

The sanitation is made further pitiable by the city's time-worn sewer system. Some of the underground sewers date back to the

1920s. According to the sufferers in the affected areas, they need replacement on an urgent basis. From the sanitation point of view, an efficient sewerage is regarded to be more important than even good roads.

As it is, the state of city's sewerage, particularly in old Dhaka, is as horrifying as the drainage and road system. The general public, the tax payers in particular, have come to react with a growing sense of frustration over the inaction and inertia of the public utility agencies such as the Dhaka City Corporation and the WASA.

The other aspect connected with the city's sanitation is the present state of negligence in regular removal of garbage from the city's garbage dumps. The big

garbage containers that are at present placed mostly on the main roads of the city, always overflow with their putrid contents vitiating the environment.

Finally, with the level of groundwater dropping at an annual rate of nearly 15 feet, engineers of the Dhaka WASA fear that supply of water would be extremely scarce and more expensive than petrol within a few years.

In view of the above scenario, observers feel that here is a city in decay and delaying immediate measures would be only at the great peril to the health and well-being of the entire populace of the city.

Khaleda asks BTV, Betar to maintain objectivity

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday asked the authorities of Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television to maintain objectivity and accuracy in broadcasting news and programmes.

The prime minister gave the directive during a meeting with Information Minister Dr Moyeen Khan and officials of the two state-owned media at her office.

Khaleda also instructed the BTV authority to restart its 'Natun Kuri' programme.

She advised the authorities of both the electronic media to come out of the traditional concept of programmes and introduce new programmes aimed at educating the people and raising mass awareness.

She stressed the need for producing programmes that would educate the people about their civic duties.

No more fund for Novo Theatre project

BSS, Dhaka

State Minister for Science and Technology Lutfur Rahman Khan Azad Thursday said it would not be possible to fund the remaining work of the Bangabandhu Novo Theatre project in view of the global recession, an official release said.

Visiting the project site on Bijoy Sarani in the city, he said the government has fund constraints due to its priority to financing projects involving public interest.

The state minister said the government would carry out probe into the public confusion regarding huge expenditure involved in the project.

Azad expressed dissatisfaction with the tendency to complete the work quickly without caring for quality.

He said implementation of such costly projects in a poor country like ours was a luxury.

The state minister was informed that the project was being implemented on 4.46 acres at an estimated cost of Taka 134 crore.

AL to resist gas sale to India: Nasim

UNB, Strajganj

Terming the present government as the "stooge of India," Awami League leader Mohammad Nasim yesterday said his party would build up resistance against the move to sell gas to India.

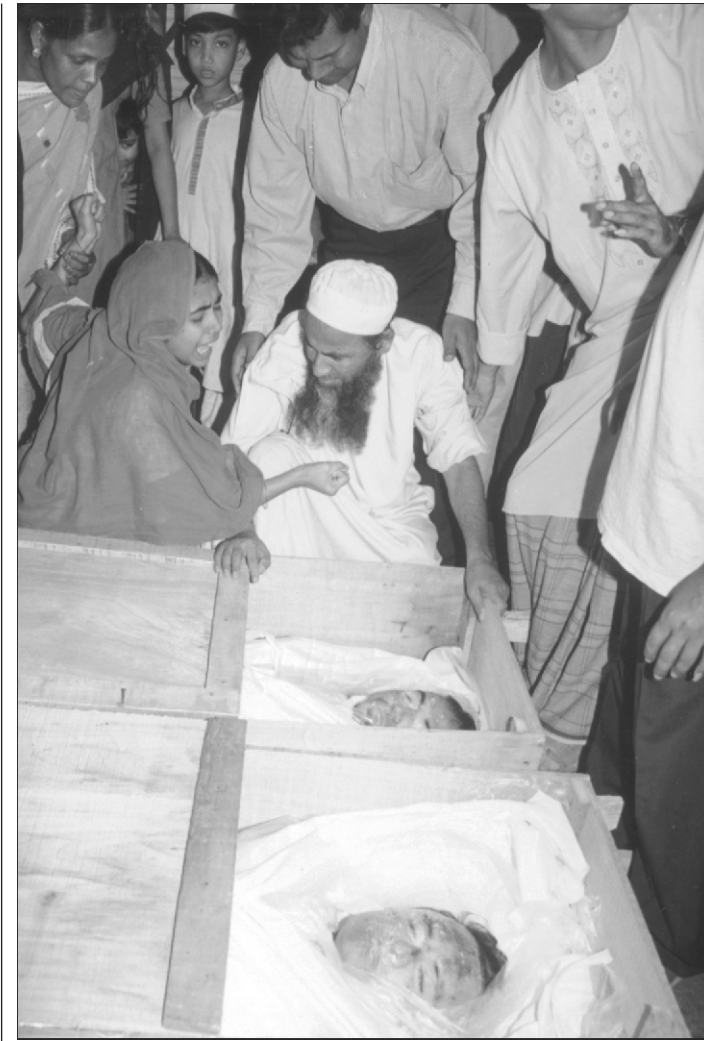
"This government is becoming a slave of India with the intention to sell gas," he said affirming that Awami League would resist the move and, if necessary, enforce hartals month after month.

Addressing a meeting at Kazipur upazila ground organised to protest the killing of Jubo League leader Kanak, he said the role of the present government is confusing as it talks about religion but keeps mum over the killings in Afghanistan.

The former minister said the BNP government is following the politics of vengeance and autocracy through continuing torture, killing and rape of the minority people.

He claimed that during its five-

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Relatives of two brothers--Mizanur and Ziaul--break down when the bodies were brought to their Mirpur residence yesterday (Story on Page-1).

3 killed, 19 hurt as 'outlaws' attack villages in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Three persons were killed, at least 19 injured and one was abducted in separate incidents of attack by 'outlawed' gangs and two rival groups at two villages in the district yesterday and the day before.

The dead were identified as Moktar Hossain, 18, Malek, 30, and Moksed, 35, all from Shakhanpara village in Atakula Upazila. Of the injured, two with critical wounds -- Rafiqul Islam, 25, and Akkas Ali, 40-- were rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Besides, one person Shabal-- was abducted from the same village.

Police said, 29 people were arrested in this connection. Both the attackers and the victims are 'rival outlawed' elements.

Moktar and Malek were killed when some 15 to 20 armed men attacked them with firearms and sharp weapons on Thursday. A rival gang attacked and abducted Moksed yesterday and later his body was found near the village.

Police raided the village and arrested 29 suspects but villagers deserted their houses, apprehending further violence.

In another incident, 17 people were injured at Kazipur village in the same upazila when two rival groups clashed over fishing on Thursday. Of the injured, seven were admitted to Pabna Hospital.

Former foreign secy Fakhruddin passes away

UNB, Dhaka

Former foreign secretary Fakhruddin Ahmed died in the United States yesterday. He was around 70.

His family sources said Fakhruddin Ahmed died at his daughter's house at around 6:30 pm (BST).

A freedom fighter and career diplomat, Fakhruddin served as Bangladesh envoy to London and Belgrade.

He was the advisor for foreign affairs in the first caretaker government of acting President Shahabuddin Ahmed. He was also the chairman of FEMA.

Fakhruddin left behind his wife, one son and one daughter and a host of friends and relatives to mourn his death.

No power shortage during peak hours today

UNB, Dhaka

The country will not experience any shortfall in power generation during the evening peak hours today.

Maximum power generation in the peak hour will be 2900 MW against the same demand, said a PDB press release.

India, Pakistan must exercise restraint, hold dialogue

Visiting French FM says in Delhi

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

France has urged India and Pakistan not to escalate tension in the region even as New Delhi said Islamabad had mounted additional military build-up facing Indian border in Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan states.

The visiting French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine told a joint press conference with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh here yesterday that "we know Kashmir is a problem but these issues should be dealt by the two countries with responsibility and in a cool-headed fashion."

Echoing what German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder had said a few days ago, Vedrine said India and Pakistan must exercise restraint and enter into dialogue to

solve bilateral differences and offered France's help in this regard if such a request was forthcoming from the two countries.

India has consistently rejected third party mediation in Indo-Pak differences.

Jaswant Singh quickly emphasised this point in the presence of Vedrine when he said he would not use the French Foreign Minister to send a message across to his Pakistan counterpart. "We are in touch with Islamabad. We can pick up the telephone and talk ourselves," Singh said.

"France would like to see India and Pakistan resume their dialogue. We can't see how anyone can avoid dialogue," the French Foreign Minister said before leaving for Islamabad. Interestingly, Vedrine articulated what a galaxy of foreign leaders British Prime

Minister Tony Blair, US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Schroeder had been speaking out during their recent trips to India and Pakistan in quick succession.

Jaswant Singh said although "there is a problem of cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir but this will not hamper the resolution of the Afghanistan issue."

Singh's remark assumed significance as the US as well as the European countries have let it be known that India and Pakistan should not set off tension in their bilateral ties at a time when the international community was fighting terrorism emanating from Afghanistan.

In what must have been music to India, Vedrine said France did not

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