



The Fifth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge over Gabkhan river in Jhalakathi was opened to traffic yesterday. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia offering *munajat* after inaugurating the bridge (inset).

Fifth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge opens

UNB, Jhalakathi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia opened the Fifth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge over Gabkhan river here yesterday, reiterating her government's pledge to build a coordinated road network.

A coordinated road communication network is a pre-requisite for economic development of the country, she said adding, "We want a problem-free road network to remove the sufferings of the people."

The 918-meter long and 30-meter wide bridge, the construction of which began in 1995, has established direct road communication between Barisal and other parts of

the country.

The Gabkhan Bridge has been built at a cost of Tk 819.58 million that includes Chinese assistance of Tk 495.32 million.

Khaleda said the government in its 100-day programme had attached priority to development of the country's road network.

She announced that work on Dapdapia Bridge over the river Kirtan Khola would begin soon.

Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda, State Minister for Communications Salaudun Ahmed, State Minister for Land Barrister Shahjahan Omar, Ishrat Jahan Ellen Bhutto MP, Communications Secretary Rezaul Hayat, Economic Counsellor of the

Chinese Embassy Zhao Jingji and Chief Engineer of R&M Fazlul Haque also spoke on the occasion.

On arrival at the venue, the Prime Minister unveiled the plaque of the Gabkhan Bridge which has a horizontal navigation clearance of 76.22 meters for passage of steamers and launches that ply to and from Barisal.

The Prime Minister's convoy later drove through the bridge marking its formal opening.

The Prime Minister recalled that Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman had emphasised the need for devel

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Inquiry into alleged irregularity in granting bails initiated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

An inquiry has been initiated into the alleged 'irregularities' in granting bail in a good number of critical cases on a single day in the district headquarters of Sunamganj district prior to the Eid vacation.

A meeting of Sunamganj District Law and Order Committee, held yesterday with the new Deputy Commissioner Md. Shafiqul Islam in the chair, was told about the move.

The meeting was, among others, addressed by the ruling party Whip Fazlul Haque Aspia, Kolimuddin Milon MP, former MP Nasiruddin Chowdhury, and President and General Secretary of District Bar Syed Abdul Quaiyum and Nesar

Alam.

Bails in more than 20 cases of serious criminal charges including murder and robbery were granted in the lower courts of Sunamganj district on December 13 alone, the last working day before the start of Eid vacation.

The matter came under serious criticism as it took place shortly before the transfer of outgoing Deputy Commissioner Habibullah Majumder. The divisional commissioner in-charge visited the courts and examined the files and documents of 86 cases concerned. He also brought some files to the divisional headquarters and talked to

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Guardians collecting admission forms for their wards from different schools in the city. The picture was taken from Motijheel Government Primary School yesterday.

'Leather' Liton arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested 'Leather Liton', an accused in 15 criminal cases including some murder cases, from the South Plaza of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban in the city's Tejgaon area on Friday night.

Liton, whose real name is Harun-or-Rashid Liton, is suspected to be involved in the murder of Doctor Milton Murder and film actor Sohel Chowdhury, and is also involved in other cases of hooliganism and bomb blast, police said.

Sources said, Liton went to the South Plaza from his residence after Esha prayers on Friday to meet some students and leaders of Hazaribagh area who were engaged by police as decoy.

As Liton was on his way back after talking to the young men, a team of DB police headed by Assistant Commissioner SM Akhtaruzzaman arrested him from

the spot after a short scuffle and recovered a revolver from his possession.

Police said Liton had identified himself as a DU student, Faruk Abbas, during his arrest. He was taken to the DB office at Minto Road.

Police said Liton, who has been absconding for a long time, used to collect toll money from every tannery in Hazaribagh and also collected a lot of money from chemical trading in the area.

Talking to journalists at the DB office, Liton said not a single GD (General Diary) was filed against him after the killing of film star Sohel Chowdhury but Jubo League Leader Liyakot Hossain through his statements in the media newspaper implicated him in the murder.

Liton said he was a student in a diploma course at the Leather Technology College, hence the

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Tariff cut won't help BTTB much against cellphone operators

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) will still face stiff competition from private sector mobile phone operators even after reducing the NWD (Nation-wide Dialling) call charges twice in five months, sources said.

The BTTB has reduced ISD (International Subscribers Dialling) and NWD call charges between 13.5 per cent and 36 per cent in June this year.

The latest reduced charges for NWD calls effective from December 8 would still remain higher than those for 'non-zonal' (nation-wide) mobile phone calls in relation to a distance from 51 to 100 miles.

Three private mobile phone operators have fixed their 'non-zonal' call rates at Tk six per minute irrespective of distances while the state-owned BTTB has fixed the call charges 51 to 100 miles to Tk 10 during peak hours and Tk 6 during off-peak hours, and 100 miles and over to Tk 15 during peak hours and Tk 10 during off peak hours. However, subscribers would enjoy a 25 per cent rebate during weekly and public

holidays.

Peak hours would be counted from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. and off-peak hours from 8:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m.

BTTB also re-fixed the NWD call rate for a distance 0 and 50 miles to Tk 3 from Tk 5. Though the rate is lower than that of a mobile phone call, yet rarely is it considered a NWD call when the distance is less than 50 miles.

The state monopoly also reduced the ISD call charges by about 65 per cent effective from December 1 following pressure from international operators, as the rates were higher than those of overseas operators.

"The rates have been lowered to bring parity with those charged by foreign telecom operators," one BTTB official said.

It was compelled to reduce the NWD call rates after facing stiff competition from private mobile operators. Use of cellular phones has seen a phenomenal increase in the country after the failure of BTTB to provide new phone connections.

The Ministry of Post and Telecommunications

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Naziur resents 'political sermons' by Imams

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Jatiya Party Chairman Naziur Rahman Manjur yesterday expressed his resentment over the "political speeches" made by Islamic clerics during prayers in different mosques.

When asked about recent remarks by Baitul Mukarram national mosque's Khatib Moulana Obaidul Huq on Eid Day at the main congregation, the BJP chairman said, "They are religious priests, they should not come up with any political speech or sermons."

Commenting on similar political remarks by the Imam of Gulshan Mosque, Naziur said a time would come when people will protest it. "And if necessary, we shall refrain from saying our prayers standing behind them," he added.

"We go to mosque not to hear the political sermons of the Imams rather to hear about holy Quran and Hadith," he said adding "Giving political sermon is beyond their jurisdiction."



The hoodlum caught for obstructing dropping of bidding papers at Bangladesh Madrassah Education Board in the city yesterday seeks mercy of minister AN H Ehsanul Haq Milon.

A commendable action

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an adventurous move, a state minister yesterday caught a hoodlum red-handed, who along with his four accomplices were obstructing bidders from dropping bid documents at the Bangladesh Madrassah Education Board at Bakshibazar yesterday.

State Minister for Education ANH Ehsanul Haq Milon came to know that a group of criminals were obstructing bidders from dropping tender documents for printing and binding of question papers of the Madrassah Board.

The Board floated the tender for printing and binding of examination papers worth about Tk 72 lakh. The deadline for submission of tender documents was fixed at 2pm yesterday. The bidders were supposed to submit their proposals through courier services.

The state minister, who was in his office, decided to visit the Madrassah Board to see for himself the incident of 'tender paper snatching'. He along with some reporters and officials went to the Board office and parked his car outside the premises.

He even kept his security guard inside his jeep and did not inform the police about his visit.

Milon reached the second floor of the Board office at Bakshibazar at around 1:05pm and found a group of five youths engaged in obstructing

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'Re-export' indeed transit facility to India: Tofail

UNB, Dhaka

The arrangement for carrying Indian goods through Bangladesh territory, which the government preferred to call 're-export,' is indeed transit facility to India, says the former commerce and industries minister Tofail Ahmed.

"It is absolutely transit or transshipment, which BNP opposed vehemently during our time," Tofail Ahmed said, giving his reaction to UNB yesterday to the government decision of providing facility to reach goods from West Bengal to the eastern states of India through Bangladesh territory.

"Anyway, we aren't against transshipment. But why such hide and seek about it?" the senior Awami League leader asked, giving the background of detailed trade negotiations initiated between Bangladesh and India when his

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Indo-Pak tension will be defused thru' dialogue, hopes FM

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan hopes current tensions along the Indo-Pak border would be defused through dialogue between the two close neighbours.

"We hope the tension will be defused through dialogue between India and Pakistan, two member-countries of SAARC," he said talking to UNB at his office yesterday.

The two countries are reportedly on warlike posture after the terrorist attacks on Indian parliament in New Delhi on December 13, for which India blamed Pakistan-backed militant groups Lashkar-e-Tayeba and Josh-e-Muhammad.

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'US wants control over Central Asia's oil, gas reserves'

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a dialogue in Dhaka yesterday felt that the US involvement in Afghanistan has been motivated to get a 'toe-hold' in Central Asia with an eye on control of energy supply.

Although the reason was to fight terrorism, the underlying and core-intention of the United States was to have a control over Central Asia's vast gas and oil reserves, they said.

The discussants were giving their views at a dialogue on "The Middle East: Perspectives for a new century" held at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS).

Dr Selim El Sayegh, Director du DESS de Diplomatie, University of Paris delivered the key speech on the occasion.

Speaking about international geo-politics, Dr Selim said the United States, in the face of aggression of

September 11, has reacted in a modern way to face and police the global networks. It destroyed the Afghan bases, tied the other powers—India, China and Russia to its system, and decided to share with them, the control of regional conflicts.

"The alarming situation in Kashmir will be a test to the new emerging order," he added.

Those who participated in the discussion included Prof Moniruzzaman Miah, former vice chancellor, Prof Anwar Hossain, M Shafiqullah, Dr Abdur Rab of BISS and Dr Sabur. It was rounded off by Mufleh R Osmany, chairman, board of governors of BISS.

Osmany said the US has changed its global strategy and tactics as the sole super power. Energy is now its core interest. After September 11, its strategic methods have been changed while interests remain the same.

A former foreign secretary Osmany said the oil and gas interests of the United States will continue to domi

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 23		5-17 pm
Dec 24	6-38 am	

Prayer Timings		
Dec 23		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-25	5-30
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation