



Chopper crash kills India's Lok Sabha speaker

AP, Hyderabad

GMC Balayogi, the speaker of the Indian Parliament's lower house, was killed yesterday in a helicopter crash in southern India where he had attended a peace rally along with the governor of US state Arkansas. Balayogi was 50.

The Pilot and Balayogi's personal assistant, D. Raju were also killed in the crash in the state of Andhra Pradesh, the state chief minister's office said.

It said the helimptor belonging to a private aviation company was flying low through fog when it hit a tree soon after taking off from the town of Bhimavaram for the state capital, Hyderabad.

Balayogi had attended a Global Peace Initiative rally on Saturday in Bhimavaram, which is about 350 kilometers east of Hyderabad. One of the invitees at the rally was Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee.

SEE PAGE 11 COOL 4

20pc regulatory duty on import of cement clinker

RAFIQ HASAN

The government yesterday imposed a 20 per cent regulatory duty on commercial import of cement clinker.

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) through a statutory regulatory order (SRO) made the new duty effective from yesterday.

However, this would not be applicable for local cement factories, which import clinker as raw material.

The new move was taken as it became difficult to assess VAT refund to some small cement factories, which do not directly import clinker, but buy it from commercial importers.

According to sources, there are at least 40 small cement factories in the bordering areas.

Currently, a total of 43 per cent duty, including VAT, is applicable on import of cement clinker.

The Bangladesh Cement Manufacturers Association has long been demanding ban on commercial import of cement clinker.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

JCD leader shot dead at Pallabi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A leader of Jatiyatabdai Chhatra Dal (JCD) was shot dead and a constable of city SB was injured when unidentified miscreants fired on them in front of the local BNP office at Pallabi in the city last night.

Asaduzzaman alias Zaman, general secretary of Pallabi thana unit of JCD and constable Anisul Haq of Special Branch were talking at about 8:45 pm. The miscreants came in an autorickshaw, fired shots indiscriminately and escaped.

They were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where doctors declared Zaman dead, hospital sources said. Anisul Haq was admitted to the hospital.

Pallabi police said last night that they sent a team to investigate the incident and were awaiting its return.

WB consultant irks dialogue participants, comes under fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Local economists as well as entrepreneurs yesterday blasted a World Bank (WB) consultant for terming Bangladesh as 'the second most protective market next to India in the South Asian region'.

The consultant, Gary Pursell, made the remark while making a presentation at a dialogue on "Will Bangladesh benefit from SAFTA?" at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) in the city yesterday.

His remark triggered strong protests from the local participants that included chamber leaders, businessmen and renowned economists.

When economists and entrepreneurs asked the WB consultant to explain what he meant by 'most protective' market, Pursell, a specialist in trade related issues, referred to the 'import licensing system'.

But the local experts pointed out that the provision of import licensing has been practically abolished long ago

except for some negative listed items like sugar or acid which constitute less than two per cent of total imports.

In the face of scathing criticism from the business people, Pursell said he got the information from the Trade Policy Review of WTO.

CPD chairman Rehman Sobhan, who chaired the dialogue, observed that the WB consultant should have verified the information before making the presentation.

Among others, International Chamber of Commerce, Bangladesh president Mahbubur Rahman, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) executive member Rauf Chowdhury, former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Latifur Rahman, commerce secretary Suhel Ahmed Chowdhury, WB country director Frederick T Temple, CPD executive director Debapriya Bhattacharia and acting chairman of Tariff Commission

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia relaxes during the leaders' retreat at the Commonwealth Heads Of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Coolum, Australia yesterday.

PM exchanges views with C'wealth leaders on regional, int'l issues

UNB, Coolum

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday joined other Commonwealth leaders in a retreat at the Coolum Hyatt Regency and exchanged views with them on domestic, regional and international issues.

She also joined a dinner hosted by Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

John Howard and Mrs Howard hosted the dinner at the pool of Hyatt Regency hotel in honour of heads of government and spouses attending the Commonwealth summit, which began here Saturday.

Meanwhile, Foreign Minister Morshed Khan met his counterparts from different Commonwealth countries on the sidelines of the summit and discussed bilateral matters of common concern, including cooperation, in trade and commerce.

Ramna Batamul carnage File sent back to bench that granted bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An HC bench scheduled to hear the petition for extension of bail period for the three accused in the Ramna Batamul carnage case yesterday sent a file related to the original bail order back to the bench that issued it.

A bench comprising Justice MA Aziz and Justice Nazrul Islam Chowdhury was set to hear the petition for extension of the bail period yesterday when Attorney General AF Hasan brought to the court's notice a Prothom Alo news report about "a mysterious medical report."

The court then gave instructions to make arrangements for the case to be sent to the bench that granted bail on the basis of the medical report, sending it the related file via the chief justice for scrutiny as to how those reports appeared in the first place.

Meanwhile, Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed in a news briefing at his office yesterday said he would sue Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman for tarnishing his image by making "false allegations."

"Rahman will have to prove his allegations against me in the court," said Moudud, one of the defense lawyers in the Ramna carnage case in which 10 persons were killed.

Moudud came down heavily on Zillur who accused him of "supplying a false medical report to the High Court", and said he would personally move a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Hasina yet to receive official order cancelling her arms licence: AL

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina and her sister Sheikh Rehana have not yet received any official order cancelling their arms licences.

This was stated in a letter to the home secretary sent by the AL chief's political secretary, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, following press reports that their arms licences were cancelled.

It said Hasina's firearms had been kept in the SSF custody till the passage of a bill repealing the Father of the Nation Family Members Security Act on December 2, 2001.

So, the government order for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Tremor jolts Afghanistan, part of India and Pakistan

Five killed, houses collapse in Kabul

REUTERS, Kabul

A powerful earthquake shook Pakistan, Afghanistan and north-western India yesterday, killing at least five people in Kabul and caus-

ing buildings to sway from Kabul to New Delhi.

The quake, which struck Afghanistan around 4:40 pm local time, also jolted the Pakistani capital of Islamabad, the eastern city of Lahore and the northern Afghan city of Mazar-i-Sharif, residents said.

At least five people were killed and 20 injured in and 30 houses collapsed or were badly damaged.

Scientists from the Seismic Centre in the northern Pakistani city of Peshawar said the quake measured 6.7 on the Richter scale and the epicentre was 250 km north of Peshawar in the Hindu Kush mountain range on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

An earthquake of Magnitude six is powerful enough to cause widespread damage.

An official in the northern Pakistani province of Chitral border-

ing Afghanistan said he had received no reports of damage or casualties more than an hour after the quake struck, but was still gathering information from remote areas in the sparsely populated mountainous region.

Further south, Pakistan's main cities appeared to have escaped without any significant damage.

"It was a very severe earthquake but we have received no reports yet of any casualties or other damage," a spokesman at the Edhi ambulance service in Rawalpindi said.

Many Kabul residents rushed from their homes, which were already in a bad state of repair from years of war.

In Pakistan, residents of Rawalpindi fled into the streets

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

Slum dwellers set several hundred shanties afire protesting an eviction drive at Bangla Bazar in Shershah Colony area of Chittagong city yesterday.

Banking sector plagued by poor loan recovery

BSS, Dhaka

The classified loans considered as the cancer of the banking system still remained at its alarming level of 31.49 per cent amounting to Taka 23,599 crore as on December 31, 2001, according to the latest central bank data collected from the concerned commercial banks.

The amount of total loans and advances with the banking sector stood at Taka 74,948.56 crore in December last while the recovery performances during the last five years showed a gloomy picture.

The vast majority of the loan portfolios centred on loans to influential businessman and politicians, insiders, stake holders who have defaulted on their obligation and are either unable or unwilling to repay their debts.

The classified loans with the banking system was 33.49 per cent in 1997, 40.65 per cent in 1998, 41.11 per cent in 1999 and 34.92 per cent in 2000.

The accumulation of the huge bad asset with poor recovery has precluded profitable operation of most banks, extinguished their reserves and created enormous capital deficiencies.

A total of Taka 1892.17 crore is now outstanding only with 15 influential directors of some private commercial banks, one central bank official told the BSS.

Meanwhile, 50.49 per cent of these classified loans amounting to Taka 5,445.06 crore has been identified as 'bad or loss loans' -- as the money is beyond recovery.

The amount of total doubtful classified loans stood at Taka 297.92 crore as on December 31, 2001 while Taka 921.74 crore has been identified as sub-standard loans.

Under the banking rules, banks have to build reserves equivalent to 25 per cent of the sub-standard loans, 50 per cent of the doubtful loans and 100 per cent of the bad and loss loans curtailing funds from

profits. The credit growth to public sector was at 19.5 per cent in 2001 compared to merely 13.4 per cent in the private sector.

Presently banks are giving credits at different rates between 10 per cent and 16 per cent which is higher compared to other regional countries discouraging entrepreneurs to go for investment.

Meanwhile, the net worth of commercial banks and specialised banks has been eroded to a large extent with their provision short-fall of Taka 4,622.12 crore as on December 31, 2001.

Besides, the amount of suspended interests from these classified loans has increased to Taka 7,270.04 crore reducing the profitability of these banks.

All nationalised commercial banks and some private commercial banks have long been facing enormous capital deficiencies driven by this mounting classified loans

Slum dwellers set shanties afire to protest eviction drive

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Several hundred thatched houses at a slum at Bangla Bazar of Shershah Colony in the city were gutted as agitated slum dwellers set them on fire during an eviction drive yesterday.

The agitated mob also put up barricades on the Bayezid Bostami road and fought pitch-battle with the eviction workers and police, leaving some 15 persons injured.

The slum was illegally established by local miscreants on about eight acres of land belonging to a BNP leader, Anwarul Azim, and some other local businessmen. The fire rendered several thousand of dwellers homeless.

The owners of the land took up an eviction drive of the dwellers of the slum known as 'Bustuhara

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Murder scares Christians in Chatmahar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Panic gripped the Christian community in Chatmahar upazila yesterday following killing of a person early in the morning by unidentified assailants.

Mohammad Foni, 35, was shot dead at a village in Debottor union near a village inhabited by Christians.

According to police, a gang called Foni out of his house and shot him. He died on way to hospital.

Police arrested three persons in connection with the killing. They are Baset Rahman, Tofiz Hossain and Sanwar Hossain.

Members of the Christian community said there is no connection between the killing of Foni and the attack on their village earlier. But they are panicked fearing reprisal.

Police are yet to arrest any one even six days after the attack on the Christian para (an area inhabited by Christians) by terrorists.

Victims of the attack alleged that police did not register the case filed by Subol Mondol in which 33 cul

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Law & order now far better, claims Altaf

UNB, Dhaka

Top officials of the home ministry yesterday conceded that law and order could not be improved up to people's expectations but said the situation turned for the better than the previous government's.

"The people are not in panic, but they feel a bit uneasy over the law-and-order situation," said Home Secretary Dr Sada't Hossain exchanging views with journalists at the home ministry.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and State Minister Lutfuzzaman Babor were also present.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Taraj murder Hearing on naraji petition Mar 14

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday fixed March 14 for hearing on naraji petition in the Taraj Uddin Murder case.

Judge Mohammad Rezaul Islam adjourned the hearing following a time petition by the defence lawyers.

Taraj Uddin, president of a Co-operative Society, at Narda in the city's Uttara area was gunned down by a group of armed men on February 8 last year.

Victim's brother Nurul Islam, filed a murder case with Uttara thana accusing 23 people, including Sajedul Islam alias Dipu Chowdhury, son of former state minister for shipping, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

But the investigation officers of the case submitted a charge sheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka, on July 9 last year against 22 people dropping the names of Dipu Chowdhury and three others from the Charge sheet as the allegation brought against them were not proved.

Later, a naraji petition against the charge sheet was filed with the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

Left unused...forgetful of the nearby footbridge, pedestrians cross the Shahbagh Road in front of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital as a shortcut to the other side.