

Delhi allows duty-free access to 40 items

Most of Dhaka's preferred items crossed off the list

SHAHRIAR KARIM

India has finally offered duty-free access to 40 Bangladesh products at the end of a three-day trade talks yesterday.

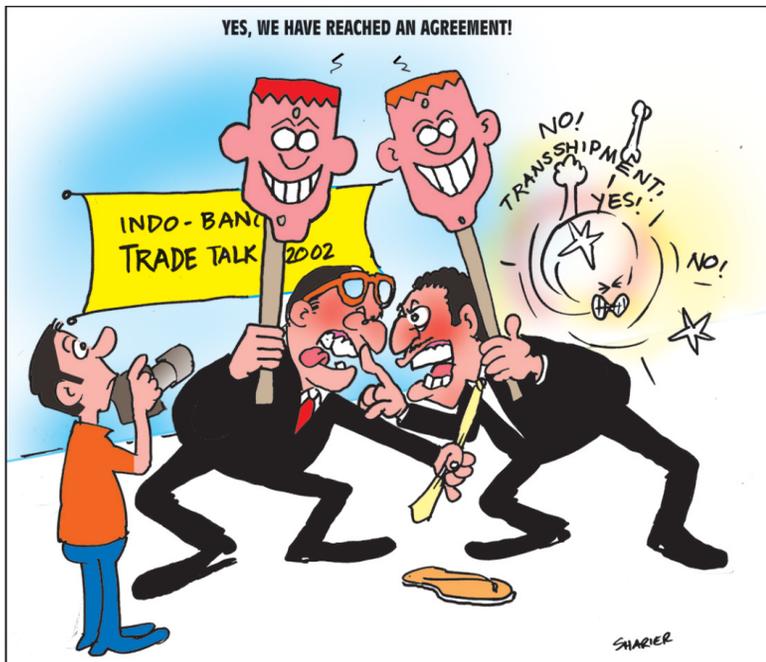
Dhaka, in return, said it will consider the Indian demand for lifting the ban on import of yarn and sugar through land ports. It will discuss the issue with the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

The much debated transit issue, which led to multiple walkouts during the mind-wrenching talks, has been passed on to the Joint Economic Commission (JEC). The JEC will meet soon on the matter, it was decided.

However, most of the 40 items that India agreed to allow free access are not produced by Bangladesh. Moreover, many of them were not on the Dhaka's list. The list of items handed over to Dhaka minutes before the signing of a joint press statement also includes products that the country produces in insufficient quantity to meet domestic demand.

The joint press statement capping the talks said, "India agreed to provide duty-free access to 40 tariff lines under 16 categories of Bangladesh products immediately. These include products in which Bangladesh has export capabilities."

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Extortionist shot dead by his rivals at Karwan Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged extortionist was shot dead by his rivals at Karwan Bazar in the city's Tejgaon area yesterday.

Witnesses said a gang of three shot Md Delwar Hossain alias Hatkata Delu point blank in front of DIT Market at about 12.15 pm. He died on way to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

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Govt, Unocal face off next week on environment damage claims

STAR REPORT

The Ministry of Environment will hold a meeting with Unocal next Tuesday over unresolved compensation issues related to environmental damages caused by the Magurchhara blowout in June 14, 1997, official sources said.

This would be the first meeting between the US oil company and the ministry after the change of government through the October 1 election.

In 1998 the environment ministry

Magurchhara blowout

had claimed from Occidental -- Unocal's predecessor -- an environment damage compensation of over Tk 600 crore.

In another development, Petrobranga is processing a compensation claim of around Tk 600 crore for damaging the gas reserve of Magurchhara through negligent operation by Occidental. Sources

said that the claim would be sent to Unocal very soon.

Occidental apparently rejected the environment ministry's 1998 claim on the ground that it was inflated to an irrational level.

However, Occidental had to soften its position soon as its production sharing contract (PSC) for block 12, where Magurchhara is located, required an extension.

The PSC was actually terminated on January 11, 1998 as the US company failed to fulfil its minimum commitments -- but the policymakers decided to renew the contract after some modifications.

Occidental was eventually suggested that the PSC would be renewed if it agreed on some modifications and payment of the compensations. Occidental accepted the conditions.

Meanwhile, Occidental collected the insurance claims against the Magurchhara blowout and the government renewed its PSC eight months later following some modifications and an assurance that the compensation would be paid after a joint study by the company and the environment ministry to determine the actual environmental damage there.

The joint study never took place and the ministry never really pursued the issue further.

In 1999 Unocal purchased Occidental's Bangladeshi stakes in

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SA Malek's son arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

The son of Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's political advisor Dr SA Malek was arrested by Sonargaon police in the early hours of yesterday.

Dr Abdullah Al Mamun, the son and a doctor at the Department of Gastrology of the PG Hospital, is facing charges of carrying banned drug phensidyl and unauthorised US dollars. Dr Mamun however denied the charges and said it is a "conspiracy to trap me".

A case was lodged with the Sonargaon Police Station under the Special Powers Act.

According to Assistant Superintendent of Police (Circle B) of Narayanganj Mosharrif Hossain, Dr Mamun and his friends -- Dr Saidul Islam, Dr Sohel Ahmed, Dr Abdur Rab and Al Amin -- came

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Ex-PSC chairman chagesheeted in graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Former chairman of the Public Service Commission (PSC) Prof Mohammad Mostafa Chowdhury and four others have been chagesheeted in a graft case.

The four others are former PSC member Mohammad Forhad Hossain Khan, former PSC controller of examinations Kabirul Alam Khan, former PSC director Sharfuddin Ahmed Khan and Executive Engineer (probationer) of Bangladesh Railway Tarun Kanti Bala.

The investigation officer (IO) of the graft case submitted charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday.

In the graft case filed with Kafrul thana, it has been alleged that four of the accused were involved in illegally allowing the other accused, Tarun Kanti Bala, to participate in the 20th BCS examinations, under the "Freedom Fighters' chil-

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BNP showcase on its 27 ward commissioner aspirants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP yesterday issued show cause notices on 27 men and women of the party who submitted nomination papers for ward commissioner for the upcoming Dhaka City Corporation election violating the party decision.

The candidates have been asked to reply in writing to the BNP Dhaka City office by April 12, according to a press release.

Following are the names of candidates and their respective ward numbers.

Belal Ahmed and Sheikh Ibrahim (ward 3), Masud Khan (ward 10), Nurul Islam Sentu (ward 80), Haji Kutubuddin and Sheikh Shahabuddin (ward 88), Haji Nasiruddin Sarker (ward 55), Shahinul Alam Marfat (ward 17), Monjur Hossain (ward 23), Dr. SA

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Khaleda attacks AL for 'planting' Review story

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday launched a scathing attack on the main opposition Awami League (AL), accusing it of sponsoring the Hong Kong-based Far Eastern Economic Review's cover story titled "Beware of Bangladesh" to make Bangladesh friendless.

Speaking in the Jatiya Sangsad, the prime minister alleged the AL had brought the Review reporter to the country to have the story published under a blueprint to tarnish Bangladesh's international image as a moderate Muslim country.

She said if they continued sponsoring 'information terrorism' the people would start saying, "Beware of Awami League". "Because, they are enemies of the country and betrayers," Khaleda told the House.

Rounding up the general discussion on the presidential address to the House, Khaleda categorically said there are no Taliban or fundamentalists in the country.

"We Bangladeshis are moderate," she said, lashing out at the Review that reported on the alleged Taliban training centre and rising fundamentalism in the country.

Khaleda, who heads the BNP, said the main opposition party lacks patriotism and democratic belief as it had continued acting against the interests of the country and its people.

Terming the AL a defunct party, she said it has become isolated from the people since its debacle in the last general election. "Its misrule in the past five years had brought the number of party's seats in the parliament down to 58 now from 146. I prefer not to say what the number will be in the next parliament."

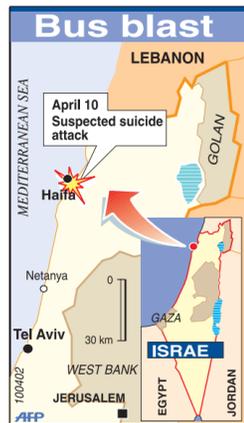
She further alleged that losing the polls the opposition party has been trying to destabilise peace and stability in the country by sponsoring terrorism. It also attempted to disturb communal harmony by claiming repression on the religious minorities, she added. "But

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Suicide bombing kills 10

Europarlament for trade ban on Israel

AP, Jerusalem



At least 10 Israelis were killed and some 15 others injured in a bus explosion at Yagur junction, near Israel's northern city of Haifa yesterday morning, Israel Radio reported.

The explosion occurred at about 7:20 a.m. local time, when the bus was driving from Haifa to Jerusalem. Some passing vehicles were reportedly also hit by the explosion.

It was the fourth suicide bombing since Israel began its massive military offensive, "Defensive Shield," on March 29 to wipe out Palestinian militants.

"There was a huge bang. I saw the man exploding near the front" of the bus, said Gal Maron, a 20-year-old soldier being treated at a Haifa hospital for cuts on his chest. "I went flying and landed on the steps of the back door. I staggered out and managed to walk a couple of steps. I even phoned my father so that he wouldn't worry -- he knew I was on the bus."

Rami Solomon, who works in an office near the scene and arrived soon after the blast, said bodies had been blown out of the bus. "There were body parts scattered on the road with legs blown off, shoes and army boots lying around, ambulances with sirens wailing," Solomon said.

The Islamic Hamas militant group claimed responsibility for the attack. "To (Israeli Prime Minister Ariel) Sharon and his ministers and generals, we have shown that there is no 'Defensive Shield'," the site announcement said.

Sources in Hamas identified the bomber as Ayman Abu Haija, 22, from the

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JS session prorogued: AL urged again to join

NAZRUL ISLAM

The second session of the eighth Jatiya Sangsad prorogued last night with a fresh call from the chair to the boycotting main opposition Awami League (AL) to join the parliament.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, before reading out the prorogation order at 9:30pm, called upon the mainstream opposition party to join the parliament to discharge the constitutional responsibilities their electorate mandated them. The speaker termed the opposition boycott unfortunate.

Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid in a press briefing immediately before the prorogation said the AL is in favour of joining the parliament. "But, the attitude of the ruling party is not conducive to do so," he noted.

Although the AL has been boycotting the parliamentary since the maiden session, the second session came into sharp public focus on many counts.

It enacted 12 laws including a controversial one -- the Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Speedy Trial) Act, 2002. It also repealed an almost similar 'black law' -- the

Public Safety Act, 2000, which was passed by the previous AL government.

The Business Advisory Committee at a meeting extended the tenure of the session by four days till April 10 to facilitate the passage of the new law, and the parliament ran its last four days skipping the question-answer session.

The session also witnessed unprecedented quorum crises throughout its 37 working days, which delayed proceedings by

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Bombs recovered at IU, one goes off

IU CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A recovered bomb weighing about one kg went off yesterday at the police station on the Islamic University (IU) campus, sending a wave of panic among the students.

Backed up by police forces, the officer-in-charge of the police station recovered two live bombs at noon from the campus -- one weighing 5.5kg and the other about one kg, police said.

A general diary was filed with the police station in connection with the recovery of the bombs.

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