

Textile park to be set up in AJM areas

UNB, Dhaka

The vast area of the closed Adamjee Jute Mills will be turned into a 'textile park' to accommodate garment and backward linkage industries.

Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has been asked to prepare a project concept paper (PCP) within 15 days

Once the PCP is prepared, the government will take next steps for developing the 294-acre land into a well-equipped industrial park for housing garments, dyeing, finishing and weaving industries, an inter-ministerial meeting decided yesterday.

The park, to be developed with government funds, will have a container terminal, a central affluent treatment plant and all utility services, including gas, electricity, water and telecommunications.

A steering committee, headed by a secretary will be formed to develop the industrial park in the shape of export processing zone, the meeting decided with Industries Minister MK Anwar in the chair.

Apart from relocating old units, the new park will welcome new enterprises and give priority to foreign investment.

It will have two categories of plots - one-acre plots for backward linkage industries and one-higha plots for garment units - and those will be allotted to the entrepreneurs suiting their requirements.

Jute Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, Textiles Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, Disaster and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, State Minister for Industries Rezaul Karim and leaders of associations of the textiles sector, including BGMEA, BTMA, BKMEA and BSTMA, attended the meeting.

Evacuation of some 1500 families with over 6000 non-Bengali settlers on the Adamjee complex was also discussed. Relief Ministry is looking for an alternative venue for rehabilitating them, but evacuation might not be possible by July 31, a deadline as set earlier, the sources said.

Owned by Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation, the Adamjee complex still houses many abandoned buildings and huge machinery.

Jute trader beaten, shot dead in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A jute trader was beaten and shot dead by miscreants in the city's Sabujbagh area Tuesday, police and hospital sources said.

The victim, Amanullah, 36, son of Mojibur Rahman, was a resident of South Mugdapara. His whole body was badly bruised and three bullets were found in his leg, hospital sources said.

Victim's wife Taslima Begum said local gangsters had sent a boy to call her husband from their 95/1, South Mugdapara residence at 2:00pm.

At around 4:30pm, Amanullah was found lying on the road near his house and badly bleeding.

He was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital at 5:30pm where he died an hour later.

Taslima Begum filed a case with Sabujbagh police station without naming anyone as accused.

Police failed to arrest anyone till filing of this report last night.

Armed gang kills fellow member in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

Armed men of a criminal gang killed a fellow member at Ranigram village under Atikula thana in the district Tuesday night, police said.

Police recovered the body of the victim, Abu Bakkar, 40, from the village yesterday and sent it to the Pabna General Hospital for autopsy.

A group of 10 men attacked Bakkar as he was on his way home from Ranigram bazaar and hacked him to death, police said. The assassins are suspected members of an outlawed party.

A murder case was filed with Atikula thana. None was arrested till filing of this report yesterday.

Mobile phone shop robbed in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Armed robbers looted cash and goods worth around Tk 2.5 lakh from a cellular phone shop in the city's Mehediabagh area in broad daylight yesterday.

Sources said an armed gang of five robbers disguised as customers went to Naurin Media Centre at Mehedi Super Market in the Mehediabagh area under Kotwali thana at around 3:00pm yesterday.

They then robbed the store at gunpoint, taking away Tk 2 lakh and some 50 SIM cards and 15 mobile phones. The miscreants also beat up the employees of the store.

Owner of the shop Abdal Malik, who was preparing to file a case, said a similar robbery had been committed in his shop last year.

Tragic

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A retired railway employee died of heart attack as robbers allegedly forcefully entered his residence and looted valuables yesterday. They also looted goods and money from a school office and a nearby house. The looted goods reportedly are worth Tk 13 lakh.

The victim identified as Jan-e-Alam, 60, went into Leave Preparatory for Retirement around a year back and resided at Ambagan Railway Colony in the city. "He panicked and fainted when the armed robbers started looting," a witness said. He died on the way to hospital.

The gang reportedly looted cash Tk. 40 thousand and other valuables including ornaments and electronic goods worth Tk. 2 lakh.

The same gang then looted goods reportedly worth around Tk. 50 thousand from one Amir Ali's house at the neighbouring Tigerpass Railway colony. They later broke into the office room of Polo-ground school and reportedly looted Tk. 15 thousand. The incidents occurred within two hours, sources said.

A case was filed with the Khulshi Police Station.

Shazneen case

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the place of occurrence (Latifur Rahman's Gulshan residence) at about 3:00 am on April 24, 1998 and made an inquest report in presence of the victim's brother Arshad Waliur Rahman alias Reaz and other witnesses," Shamsul Haque told the court.

All the six accused -- Shahid, Hasan, Badal, Shaniram, Minu and Parvin -- were produced in the court yesterday.

Special Public Prosecutor Arfan Uddin Khan appeared for the state while advocates Mosharraf Hossain Kajol, Mizanur Rahman and MAKamrul Hasan Khan Aslam defended the accused.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, the youngest daughter of Latifur Rahman, Chairman of Transcom Ltd, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23, 1998.



PHOTO: STAR

Children at Mukhtangan yesterday protest the sudden rise in robbery and mugging.

US raises terror alert, FBI warns of attack

REUTERS, Washington

The US government on Tuesday raised its terror alert status to the second-highest level, citing the renewed risk of attacks on American soil in light of suicide bombings in Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

The decision to raise the alert level to "high" or "orange" from "elevated" or "yellow" on the color-coded scale was made by top national security officials after a review of recent intelligence.

"This change is based upon the recent terrorist bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, also in conjunction with intelligence reports concerning anti-US terrorist groups' intentions," said Department of Homeland Security Undersecretary Asa Hutchinson.

"The United States' intelligence community believes that terrorists continue to plan attacks against targets in the United States, and for this reason the alert level has been raised," he told reporters.

The FBI said earlier that the suicide bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco last week in which a total of 75 people were killed could herald attempts to carry out an attack on the United States, though it said it had no specific threat information.

"Recent intelligence suggests (these) attacks may be a prelude to an attack on the United States," the FBI said in a message to law enforcement agencies across the country.

The last time the government raised the terror alert to orange was on March 17, the eve of the war with Iraq when officials feared potential retaliation on the United States. It was lowered to yellow one month later.

Homeland Security chief Tom Ridge, who met with President George W Bush as the latest FBI warning was released, said in a statement that al Qaeda and its sympathizers were still the main danger but threats could also come from anti-US terror groups, regional extremists or "disrupted individuals."

Market access

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links between the two countries.

Saifur Rahman said a non-discriminatory trade liberation by Bangladesh in the early nineties led to boosting Indian exports to Bangladesh.

But he pointed out that Bangladesh does not get an equitable opportunity as India was yet to reciprocate the gesture by providing greater market access to Bangladeshi products.

Saifur Rahman stressed the need for customs infrastructure on both sides to facilitate smooth and hassle-free bilateral trade.

While the Bangladesh side already had some infrastructure, the Indian side had none which sometimes causes goods imported from India to perish spelling losses to Bangladeshi traders, the officials said.

They said Bangladesh allowed Indian trucks to enter its territory carrying imported goods from India while India did not allow Bangladeshi trucks to enter its territory.

According to an Indian government press release, Indian Finance Minister Jashwant Singh yesterday conveyed his government's decision to build the structural facilities to land customs stations bordering Bangladesh under a crash programme in the first phase before the onset of rains.

These structures are intended to provide storage facilities for perishable goods exported by India to Bangladesh.

The two ministers exchanged notes on various economic reforms being carried out in their countries.

The two sides noted with satisfaction that a draft bilateral investment promotion and protection had been finalised for signing at a mutually suitable time, the officials said.

The Bangladesh delegation included High Commissioner Tufail

K Haider, Foreign Affairs Ministry Director Mushfi Bin Shams, the Finance Minister's Private Secretary Qayyum Chowdhury and Commercial Counsellor in Bangladesh Mission Wasi Ahmed.

The press release said that India extended the validity period of a Rupee 200 crore line of credit to enable Bangladesh to avail of the balance credit of Rupee 26 crore.

The ambit of commodities for which the credit could be utilised has also been widened by rescheduling the amortisation plan.

Senior Indian officials took part in the formal talks between the two finance ministers.

Later, Saifur Rahman called on Indian Minister for Commerce Arun Jaitley and had an extensive discussion on bilateral trade, investment and economic cooperation.

The two ministers discussed possible ways of reducing the staggering trade imbalance that favours India and exchanged notes on recent trends in their global exports.

They also discussed the issue of a free trade agreement that India had proposed to sign with Bangladesh in line with the Indo-Sri Lanka free trade agreement, now poised to move into its second phase.

Saifur Rahman pointed out that without a quantum jump in Bangladesh's exports to India, it would be difficult for Bangladesh to sustain its imports from India which is already at a very high level.

Both discussions, officials said, took place in a highly constructive and cordial atmosphere.

Saifur Rahman will meet Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today.

He is also scheduled to call on the leader of the opposition Sonia Gandhi.

Saifur will leave Delhi for Dhaka this afternoon.

Launch capsizes in Patuakhali

UNB, Patuakhali

A launch capsized in the river Paira at Fultola in Mirzaganj upazila during a storm yesterday.

Witnesses said most of the passengers swam ashore while local people and fishermen rescued others. It could not be known how many passengers the launch was carrying.

Sources concerned said the launch, ML Takdir, left Subedkhali in Mirzaganj upazila for Patuakhali at 10 am and sank in the river an hour later.

The storm damaged over 300 thatched houses and uprooted many trees.

Graft cartel

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fabricated figures of import duty with the help of customs officials and got undue refunds. They also filed fake export documents, sources said.

The companies involved in the scam include a leading pharmaceutical company and a leather processing company.

The BAC will interrogate the customs inspector and take action, said the BAC inspector.

The chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) and the NBR member, (VAT) helped the BAC inspector reveal the misdeeds.

Sultana Panni

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talked with the members of the family and those who used to work for them.

The investigators have started questioning the arrested people.

Sultana Khan Panni, wife of the former deputy speaker Humayun Khan Panni, was strangled at her Dhammondi residence in the early hours of Monday.

The killers ransacked the residence to make it look like a case of robbery. But Dhammondi police confirmed that it was not a robbery. They believe family members might have been involved in the crime.

Dhammondi police had arrested four people-- Alauddin Munshi, the cook, Mohammad Mizan, Mohammad Rony and his wife Ruby in this connection. They are being interrogated on their five-day remand.

The namaj-e-janaza of Sultana will be held on Gulshan Azad Mosque premises after the Juma prayers on Friday. She will be laid to rest at the family graveyard in Tangail.

The qulkhwani of Sultana Khan Panni will be held at house-31, Road-15 in Dhammondi R/A after Asr prayers on Saturday, said a press release.

Abducted journo

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Khosru said, "At around 9:30 pm on April 30, I was on way to Nalapara in a hired scooter. When I was near the GEC intersection, I received a call from Nurul Islam on my cellular phone...He requested me to come to a local restaurant for some important talks with him... Nurul Islam along with one Lokman was waiting there... The BNP leader then asked me to cancel club membership of Mahmudul Haq, former president of Sitakunda Press Club... He also wanted me to help him in a case he had filed against Mahmudul Haq."

He added, "On refusal, Nurul Islam admonished me that I had made a blunder."

While coming out of the restaurant, Khosru said, he saw Lokman's car there and a group of Nurul Islam's men' in and around the car. They

included Forkan, Abu, Sekander, Quaiyum, Salim, husband of Nurul Islam's sister, Kader Master and Kazi Amanat Ullah.

Khosru said he then started again and his scooter was intercepted by four armed miscreants boarding a taxi-cab near Dewanhat mosque. Then they picked him up at gunpoint.

He was then blindfolded and taken to a place probably at Kumira under Sitakunda and confined in a building, he said.

During the confinement, Khosru said, he was forced to sign two statements and four blank sheets. But he did not know the contents of the statements.

None was arrested in connection with the abduction.

When contacted, the ASP of Sitakunda circle, Mofazzal Hossain, declined to say anything about the incident.

Tough shot for ailing NCBs

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maturity period of more than seven years and will bear market rate of interest.

The NCBs will not provide any new loans to defaulters, the draft MoU says.

They will however be allowed to continue modest agricultural loans and microcredit depending on the quality of the portfolios.

Focus on reducing expenses will be a key priority for the NCBs and they will have to reduce their operating expenses by 10 per cent compared with those of 2002.

The Bangladesh Bank has said the banks will have to rationalise

their staff and branches as against the IMF demand for retrenchment and closure.

The MoUs will remain as interim till March 2004 and by this time, the central bank will come up with a long-term reform proposal.

But in case any NCB fails to meet the agreed conditions, the central bank will remove the board members and change management.

As of December 2002, the NCBs have Tk 36,111 crore in outstanding loans of which Tk 12,179 crore is classified.

Moreover, Tk 3,296 crore is in

interest suspense against the classified amount and the provision shortfall of the banks amount to Tk 4,257 crore.

The central bank's CAMEL (Capital, asset, management, earning, liquidity) rating qualifies the NCBs as No. 4 or marginal, showing their precarious health condition.

In 1995, the central bank identified seven private banks with severe problems and forced them to sign similar MoUs. Later, two of them - National Bank Ltd and National Credit and Commerce Bank Ltd -- came out of their 'problem bank' status.

Saifur for fresh initiatives to revive SAARC

BSS, New Delhi

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday called for fresh initiatives to revive SAARC in order to improve the economic prospects of future generations of the impoverished South Asian region.

Speaking to members of the Foreign Correspondents Club of South Asia, he said India ought to take the initiative to make the regional forum more active.

SAARC countries need to cooperate rather than quarrel among themselves, he said, and praised Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for normalising ties with Pakistan saying that it would have a positive impact on the region.

He said historical and negative mindset is keeping the region backward and India should take a positive and forward looking attitude to foster a better atmosphere in the region just as France and Germany had done in Europe. India would only gain and have nothing to lose by doing that, he added.

A generous trade regime of India, he said, would encourage business in smaller neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, and thereby contribute to strengthening economic and political cooperation.

He called on the Indian government to have no reservations in dealing with the BNP government in Bangladesh as India had benefited immensely from the non-discriminatory trade liberalisation done by the previous BNP government in 1991.

He called upon India to reciprocate the gesture by facilitating

exports from Bangladesh which now has only a small export basket.

Saifur pleaded for simplification of visa procedures to facilitate more people-to-people contact and easier travel.

He also called for promotion of joint ventures and investments to make the region economically more prosperous.

He reiterated Bangladesh's total opposition to all forms of terrorism anywhere in the world.

Bangladesh remains an example of communal harmony with a flourishing democracy where no form of extremism would ever gain strength, he asserted.

He said more areas of economic cooperation could develop and grow between the two neighbouring countries.

On gas export, he said conceptually he was not against the idea provided the reserve allowed it after meeting Bangladesh's domestic needs.

But he said evaluation of the reserve was yet to be completed and that the idea of gas export also faces stiff resistance from the opposition.

About the issue of letting India use Chittagong Port, Saifur said it would depend on improvement of the port's capacity, which he said is currently inadequate even to handle the growing domestic need.

"I don't say the use of Chittagong Port is ruled out," he said. But it is related to a host of practical issues including its cargo-handling capacity.

He said a port at Moheshkhali is under active consideration to cater to the growing domestic needs.

Foreigners in Malaysia must not rob rare resources, says Mahathir

BERNAMA, Putrajaya

Dr Mahathir Mohamad said Tuesday that foreign companies or scientists coming to Malaysia to undertake research on the country's resources will be asked to sign an agreement or undertaking to ensure that they do not rob the country of its rare natural resources.

"Anybody coming here must enter into some kind of agreement or undertaking that they will share the resources and not take everything out of the country," said the Prime Minister.

He said that it was easy to take the resources out of the country like the flowers which were taken out of Madagascar and later studied elsewhere.

"Foreign scientists came in and took the flowers out and did research on it (the species) and the product is now their exclusive property," he told reporters after the ground-breaking ceremony of the BioValley Malaysia project at the project site in Dengkil near here.

Hospital workers protest sacking of Baath man

AFP, Baghdad

Dozens of employees demonstrated yesterday outside a leading hospital in the Iraqi capital against the dismissal of a deputy director for his links to the former ruling Baath Party.

Dr Sale Osama, head of the medical department at Al-Kindi hospital, was appointed to his post by staff after Saddam Hussein's regime collapsed.

But a decree issued by the new US chief administrator for Iraq, Paul Bremer, says no former Baath officials can hold senior jobs.

"We want him to stay. He's a gentleman, a good doctor and he stayed with us throughout the war," said Dr Mundhir Al Dujaly.

"All members of the Baath Party are not criminal. The American decision to exclude them systematically is not realistic," said hospital director Dr Hamid Hussein Al Araji.

He said the personnel had sent a letter to Bremer in protest.

"I will never leave the hospital or my patients," Osama told AFP, refusing to be treated as a "criminal" and branding the blanket ban an "injustice and an inhuman decision".

"I am here because of my diplomas, my ability, not because I belonged to the Baath. I worked night and day here during the war."

Hospital employees, supervised by coalition officers, are due to elect new senior staff across the capital.

Osama said he would reapply for his job when the vote takes place at al-Kindi later Wednesday.

Hasina arrives in Florida

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, now on a tour of Europe and USA, reached Florida from London yesterday.

Leaders of US chapter of Awami League, including Abdus Salam, Dr Hassan Mahmud and Nizamuddin Ahmed, decided her at the airport.

Her press secretary Abdul Kalam Azad said Hasina would be staying with her children in Miami for a week.

On May 28, she will come to Washington to see the progress of a book on Bangabandhu.

US soldiers kill four Afghans 'mistakenly'

REUTERS, Kabul

US troops shot dead four Afghan soldiers and wounded four others outside the US embassy in Kabul yesterday when they mistakenly thought they were about to come under attack, Afghan officials said.

The incident came just after Washington raised its terror alert status to high after recent bombings in Saudi Arabia and Morocco, and could prove an embarrassment for the main backer of the fragile government of President Hamid Karzai.

Bailey bridge on Dhaka-Mawa road collapses

UNB, Bagerhat

A bailey bridge at Kathaltala near Fakirhat on the Khulna-Mawa Highway collapsed yesterday when a sand loaded truck was crossing it.

Truck driver, Idris, was taken to the Khulna Medical College Hospital in a serious condition.

The accident occurred at 10am, disrupted communication on the busy highway. Scores of vehicles on both sides of the bridge remained stranded.

Officials said repair of the bridge would take at least 72 hours.

New tender

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of food grains at subsidised price) and released as much as four lakh tonnes of rice from its stock to avert a sharp rise of rice price.

The government's food grain procurement drive in the last autumn season did not make much headway due to poor harvest and delayed start of the drive. The subsequent wheat season also saw a poor harvest and the procurement drive did not succeed.

In such a situation, the private sector imported about 24 lakh tonnes of rice and wheat in the first 10 months of the current fiscal.