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TIFA talks

US tepid about RMG free access demand

Wills hopes to cut deal in two months

STAR REPORT

Washington responded lukewarm about a host of Dhaka's demands including duty- and quota-free access of readymade garment (RMG) and temporary movement of natural persons at the talks on the proposed Trade and Investment

Framework Agreement (TIFA) yesterday.

However, Assistant United States Trade Representative Ashley Wills said the two countries are likely to sign TIFA within two months.

The US did not react positively to the demands that also include technical cooperation in light engi-

neering, agro-based industry and information and communication technology, meeting sources said.

"I have to discuss with my colleagues in Washington about the demands of Bangladesh," Wills said when asked about his opinion.

A number of issues has to be settled before signing the agreement, said

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury on the outcome of the meeting at the ministry.

The meeting thoroughly discussed the drafts on TIFA prepared by both sides.

"We are close to signing the agreement within two months,"

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BCL calls off strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday called off an indefinite strike at Dhaka University after a 'successful' dialogue with the university authorities yesterday, ending a six-day deadlock.

However, the university authorities postponed all examinations scheduled for Saturday considering the convenience of the students, who left residential halls. But classes will resume tomorrow.

"Examinations will be held as per schedule from Sunday," a university press release said.

"We have called off the strike as the authorities paid moral support to our demands and assured that steps would be taken to implement

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Blast kills 11 at Jordan embassy in Iraq

2 Marines die in gunbattle; US troops nab 4 militia leaders

REUTERS, Baghdad

A truck bomb exploded outside the Jordanian embassy compound in Baghdad yesterday, killing at least 11 people, wounding 65 and strewn gutted cars, body parts and a severed head across the street outside.

Elsewhere in the capital, US troops exchanged fire with gunmen in nearby buildings after a blast set a Humvee vehicle ablaze. At least one

Iraqi bystander was killed as US soldiers sprayed the area with gunfire. His body lay spread-eagled on the road, blood oozing from his head onto the baking-hot tarmac.

A US army spokesman said there had been an improvised bomb attack in the area but had no information on casualties.

The army said that in an earlier gunbattle in central Baghdad on Wednesday night, guerrillas killed

two American soldiers and wounded another, along with an Iraqi interpreter.

The deaths brought to 55 the number of US troops killed in hostile action since May 1.

Yesterday's embassy blast came a week after Jordan granted asylum to Saddam Hussein's elder daughters Raghd and Rana, angering some Iraqis. Iraqis who support Saddam

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City still suffers on power cuts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Power cuts continued to make life miserable in parts of Dhaka city yesterday as the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) failed to fix the distribution line at Ulan Sub-Station.

DESA engineers worked flat out to locate the glitch in its underground cable network fanning out towards Dhanmondi as the searing heat parched people in their houses.

"We reckon we'll not be able to find the fault in daytime. The cables run beneath the roads which we'll have to dig at night," said a DESA engineer.

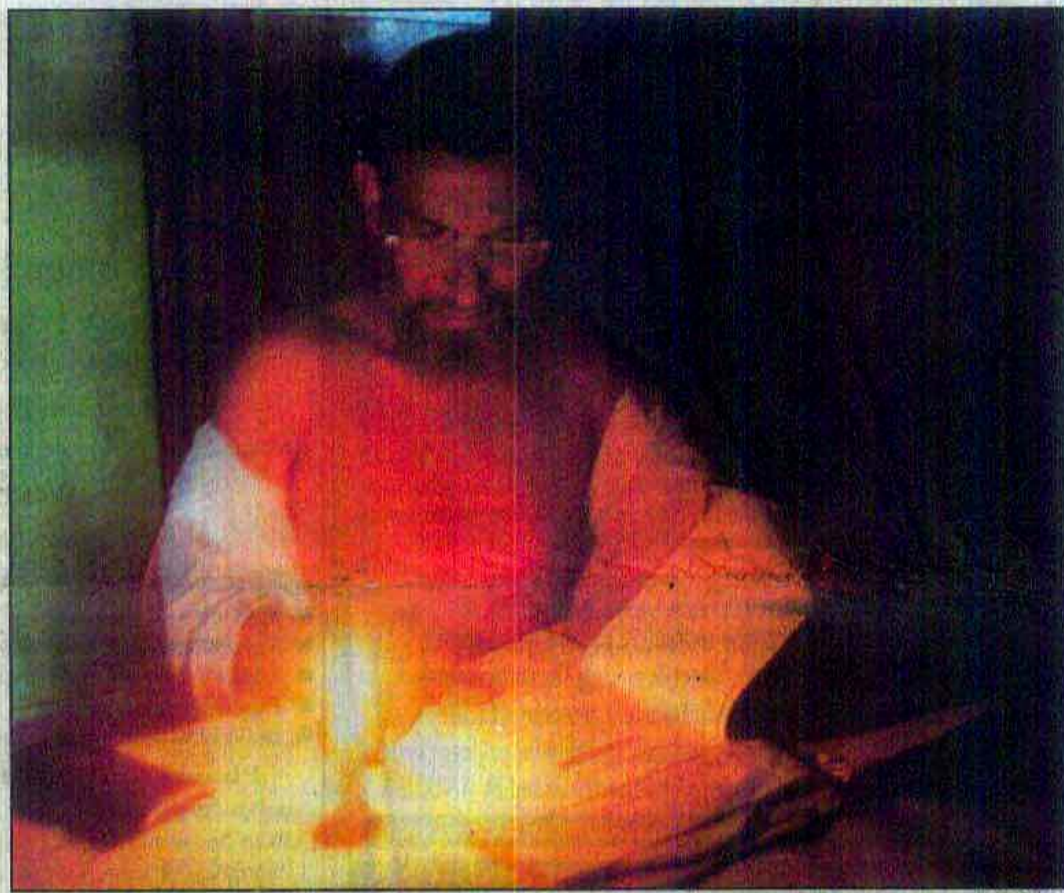
"The faultfinding and repairing jobs will be done on Thursday night and it will take a day or two to restore normalcy."

Sources hinted that full power supply was not possible today.

Meanwhile, mercury remained as high as 34.6 degrees Celsius yesterday coupled with humidity that stood at 63 per cent in the city.

The sultry weather proved unbearable in mostly power outage-

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A staff of a government office at Motijheel yesterday takes off his shirt and checks files in candle light as load shedding gripped the capital for the second consecutive day.

JS body clobbers PDB as loss runs into Tk 1,600cr in six years

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Power Development Board (PDB) counted over Tk 1,600 crore in losses in the last six years and a Jatiya Sangsad body attributed this to corruption, systems loss and mismanagement.

Scrutinising a PDB report, the Undertaking Committee of the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday expressed its dissatisfaction over the performance of the organisation, asking it to take steps to become profitable.

Termining the PDB affair a vast complicated maze, Abdul Alim, chairman of the committee, desired to sit again to discuss at length its activities and corruption and mismanagement.

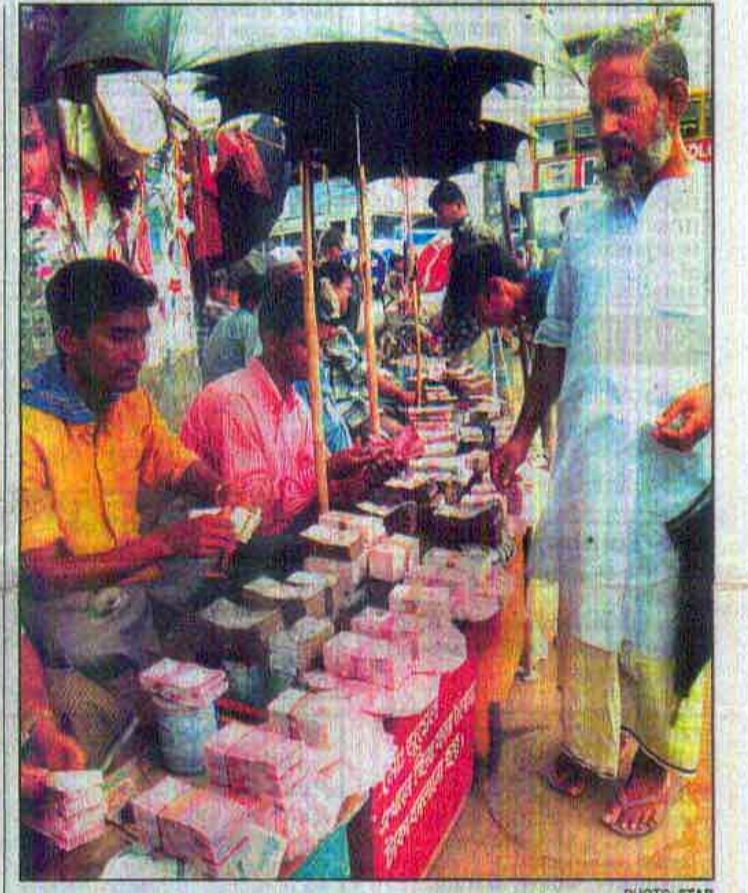
"The PDB incurs huge amounts

in losses every year because of its mismanagement, corruption and systems loss. The PDB chairman also admitted existence of some management anomalies," committee member Dr Rustam Ali Faraji told The Daily Star after the meeting.

In his defence, PDB Chairman Syed Abdul Mayeed cited several problems that led to the loss but assured the committee of taking steps to combat corruption.

"Trade unionism is a huge barrier to attaining a better management at the PDB. We had to compromise with union leaders all the while. We often cannot implement some projects even because of their pressure," a source quoted the PDB chairman as saying.

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As banks refuse to replace old and torn notes, street vendors make a brisk business at Gulistan. The central bank has recently asked banks to accept old notes.

Rejoinder and our reply

Tullow Oil Plc in a rejoinder protested a news analysis headlined "Shell's quit spills slick on investment climate" published in The Daily Star Wednesday.

The rejoinder said the article wrongfully suggested that Tullow acquired its second round licensing interests through corruption.

It said Tullow was evaluated in the official evaluation as top bidder in all four second round blocks. The rejoinder also said Tullow was a public listed company quoted in the London Stock Exchange rather than a 'little known small Irish company'.

The second round blocks were awarded to them on merit having satisfied all the relevant technical and financial criteria, it added.

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Govt to seek time again for upazila elections

SC deadline expires

REZAUL KARIM

A Supreme Court deadline for holding upazila parishad polls ended yesterday and the government will seek extension of the deadline for the 18th time.

The decision on whether the local government system would remain or not also remains hanging.

The Local Government Division of the Local Government and Rural Development and Cooperatives Ministry has so far sought time on 17

occasions in the last 11 years to hold the polls. There is a directive from the Supreme Court to hold the elections as per the constitution.

Officials said the law office of the government is expected to appear before the court tomorrow to seek time.

The upazila system was revived on February 1, 1999, but no direct balloting was held to elect chairmen to the bodies across the country.

Officials said there are some 753 public servants, including 17 class

one officers, under each upazila parishad, but the absence of an elected chairman is hobbling its activities.

The government has been seeking time since the full bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court headed by the then chief justice Shahabuddin Ahmed gave verdict in 1992 for holding election to the bodies in line with Article 59 of the Constitution.

Upazila parishad, one of the vital

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Cab driver gunned down at Agargaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A cab owner and driver was gunned down at West Agargaon in Mohammadpur yesterday.

Three unidentified assailants shot Ashek Ali, a retired army man, in the chest at 7:30am in front of the rented flat of his friend Imran whom he was to give a lift, locals said.

He died on way to Pangu Hospital.

"I heard a bang and Ashek collapsed on the ground pushing the gate of a house. Going out, I saw Ashek's yellow cab but found none there," said Mohammad Nasir, security guard of the building.

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A cormorant swings on a bamboo branch at Bara Bhadurpur while hatchlings cuddle in safety. NACOM has turned the village into a bird sanctuary.

Where birds tweet in bliss

INAM AHMED

When the cormorant was found dead and cold under the bamboo bush, Hakim Uddin stood frozen in the first morning light. He could feel the hot trail of tears rolling down his cheeks. He fondly brushed off the red ants that piled out of the open beak of the black bird.

Later that day he buried the bird. Neighbours joined in the curious funeral.

It is immediately obvious that Bara Bahadurpur village in Manikganj is different. It is a bird sanctuary, run by the Nature Conservation Movement (NACOM) with villagers' participation.

The approach is difficult and

even a bit risky, with the large waves of the choppy, monsoon-swollen Padma breaking on the banks.

As we stepped ashore we saw the cormorants and herons flapping overhead, buffeted by high winds. Next came the cackles, hundreds of hoarse, high-pitched voices.

Hakim emerges from his dingy bamboo lean-to, a thin, hole-pocked, half-sleeved vest clinging to his torso.

"Climb up," he says, pointing to a bamboo ladder, shooting some 120 feet up into the sky in the middle of a thicket of bamboo bushes and mahogany trees. "But keep quiet or they'll be disturbed."

It takes several gruelling minutes

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