

54 schoolgirls die in Indonesia bus inferno

REUTERS, Jakarta

At least 54 people, most of them schoolgirls returning from a holiday in Bali, were killed when their bus burst into flames after colliding with a truck and a minivan in Indonesia's East Java, officials said yesterday.

The bus was taking the children from Bali to their school in Yogyakarta when the accident occurred on a coastal highway in Situbondo regency, 515 miles east of the capital Jakarta, late Wednesday night.

Distraught parents gathered at the Yogyakarta school to check the

bus's passenger list. Sobbing relatives clutched each other and several women collapsed. Family members were later put on buses to be taken to the hospital to begin identifying the dead.

Situbondo Police Chief Tugan Dwi Priyanto said the bus burst into flames after colliding with the other vehicles and most of the victims were thought to have burned to death.

"They were part of a three-bus group. The other two have safely arrived at their school this morning," he said. At least 47 of the dead children were girls, he said.

Many victims were so badly burned identification may require dental records or DNA testing, doctors said.

Police said they had apprehended a man believed to have fled the scene with the driver of the truck. The driver was still at large. The minivan rammed into the back of the bus, police said.

It was not immediately known what caused the crash. Indonesia has a poor record for traffic accidents, especially on densely populated Java island.

Television footage of the scene

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



PHOTO: STAR

Caused by a sustaining low-pressure system on the Bay of Bengal, rains disrupted daily life in Dhaka for the third straight day yesterday.

Adel, two sons acquitted of sedition case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The former deputy mayor of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Jahangir Mohammad Adel, and his two sons were yesterday acquitted of all charges in the sedition case, filed against them for hoisting the Pakistani flag atop Adel's Old Dhaka residence on Pakistan's Independence Day on August 14, 2000.

Judge HS Ahmad, reading the verdict in front of Adel and his son, Tareq Mohammad Adel, said the prosecution had hopelessly failed to prove its case and so the accused were entitled to the benefit of doubt. Adel's other accused son, Zobeayd Mohammad Adel, has been evading arrest since the trial began.

The case was filed on August 21, 2000 by Noor-e-Borhan, the then officer-in-charge of Kotwali police station. The court framed charges against the accused on January 14, 2001, and the trial began on June 26 last year.

Both the prosecution and defence completed their arguments on September 14 after the court heard the statements of seven prosecution witnesses in the case.

Take river-diversion issue to int'l forum

Water experts urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Water experts at a seminar yesterday urged the government to assess immediately the impact of India's river inter-linking project on Bangladesh and place the issue before an international forum.

The Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) Teachers Association organised the seminar on the impact of water transfer from the Brahmaputra and the Ganges river basins at its Council Bhaban.

"Once implemented, the plan to withdraw water from the Brahmaputra and Ganges will have a detrimental impact on the country's agriculture, ecology, morphology, navigation, fisheries, and the entire natural geological features," said BUET Prof Jahir Uddin Chowdhury while presenting the keynote paper.

"During the low-flow season, Bangladesh requires 90 percent of its water from the Brahmaputra alone to prevent salinity intrusion in the lower Meghna basin," Prof Chowdhury continued, adding, "We must remember that a river also requires a certain minimum amount of water to maintain its navigability."

The areas that the proposed water transfer will affect include the condition during the low-flow season, the recharging of wetlands and the ground-water level, ground-water depletion, inflow to the Padma and lower Meghna, tidal propagation, and shoal land livelihood among many others, the paper said.

"The shrinking of the tributaries of the two mighty rivers will cause disastrous salinity intrusion in the haor eco-system, dry up wetlands and disrupt Dhaka city's water supply," Chowdhury said.

Water scarcity will also destabilise wild-life habitats, destroy aquatic plant-life, and, more critically, deprive those who make a living on the water.

Noted water expert Prof Ainun Nishat said, "We have to remember that India is a country that has the power to adopt any means it wishes to further its own interests regardless of the consequences to its neighbours."

"It will be difficult on our part to reach an acceptable solution to the water crisis unless and until a signifi-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Lenders, rich nations slated for trade barriers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commonwealth parliamentarians at a workshop yesterday criticised richer nations and international lending agencies for putting up barriers to market access and setting tough preconditions for loans.

The least developed and developing nations cannot sell goods to the markets of developed countries because of trade barriers, said the parliamentarians mostly from African countries, who attended the workshop as part of the 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) conference at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

They also accused the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) of imposing stringent preconditions on poor countries for sanctioning loans.

They urged the developed nations to come forward to resolve disputed issues like farm subsidy and barriers to market access.

The negotiation capacity of a poor country slackens because of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Three held for Keraniganj triple murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Keraniganj police held three persons in Pargandaria area for their alleged involvement in Wednesday's fierce gunfight that left three ruling BNP adherents dead.

They are named Mujib, Sohel and Sumon.

Conflict over establishing supremacy in the locality was the reason behind the shootout which started at 8:30pm, police said.

"The clash seems to be a result of rivalry between the feuding groups rather than centring around Tk 3,000 that Marbel lent to Jahangir."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Villagers gouge out eyes of a robber in Bagerhat

UNB, Bagerhat

Villagers gouged out eyes of a robber at Shayambagat village in Fakirhat upazila of Bagerhat district in the early hours of yesterday.

Police said the villagers chased and caught Hossain Ali, 35, at about 3:00am as he along with his accomplices were fleeing with the booty they looted from the house of one Sanaulah.

The villagers beat up the robber mercilessly and gouged out his eyes. A pipegun and some of the looted money were recovered from him.

Police rushed to the spot and arrested another robber, Golam Mostafa, 40, from a nearby place.

The robbers stormed the house of Sanaulah and looted money and valuables, including gold ornaments, worth over Tk one lakh.



PHOTO: STAR

Relatives look after stranded patients at Dhaka Medical College Hospital as student nurses went on an indefinite strike since October 7 in protest at the government's decision to recruit nurses from private institutes.

Strong parliamentary bodies better for democracy

CPA workshop observes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The best way to achieve balance between legislative and executive branches in a parliamentary democracy is to bolster the parliamentary committee system.

This view came from a workshop of the 49th conference of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday.

Manohar Joshi said the legislature in a parliamentary system must ensure that the executive remains constantly responsive and account-

able to it. "The parliament is supreme and its relationship with the executive is not one of equal partners."

"But the relationship between the parliament and the executive should not also be limited to critical and adversarial action. The executive must enjoy all the freedom it needs, remaining at the same time responsive to the parliamentary influence and direction and ultimately to the aspirations of the people at large."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: PID

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, second from right, presides over the first plenary session of the 49th Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference at Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

Top criminal Sweden Asalm acquitted in arms case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Listed top criminal Sweden Asalm has been acquitted in an arms case but his accomplice Shariful Islam sentenced to 24 years' rigorous imprisonment in the same case.

The Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, delivered the judgement yesterday.

The judgement said though the firearms and ammunition were recovered on the basis of information and statements of Sweden Asalm and Shariful Islam, the latter kept those in his possession for a longer period than Asalm, who gave those to him. So, Asalm was acquitted of the charges while Shariful was convicted.

Shariful has been absconding since coming out of jail on bail.

Proceedings of the case against the other accused Billal-- were stayed on an order of the High Court.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

9-yr girl raped

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A local thug allegedly raped a girl child at Balurmath in Kafrul, Mirpur yesterday.

The rapist also sent the nine-year-old victim to her aunt's residence as her condition deteriorated.

The girl, class two student of a local school, was fighting for life at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). However, identity of the rapist could not be known immediately.

The culprit forcibly picked her up when she was going to her school at around 9:00am, said her grandfather Tayub Ali.

He dragged her to a nearby five-storied building and raped her on

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

25,000 shrimp beds washed away in rain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

More than 25,000 shrimp enclosures of Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira districts have reportedly been washed away by heavy rains due to the latest depression in the Bay.

Met office sources said since Monday morning 185mm of incessant rains have been recorded till 6:00pm on Wednesday. Three fishing trawlers have also capsized in the Bay. Twenty fishermen have been feared missing.

The rivers in the region have swollen due to the torrential rain that caused breaches in most of the embankments at Koira, Paikgachha and Batiaghata of Khulna and Shyamnagar and Ashashuni of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Bangladesh tops teen mothers' list of South Asia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has the highest number of teen mothers in South Asia with more than 50 percent having their first child by 19, according to a United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report.

The report, released in Dhaka and in other capitals across the world yesterday, says half the maternal deaths in Bangladesh result from early pregnancies, with teenage girls accounting for 35 percent of all pregnancies.

Bangladesh's projected population will stand at 146.7 million at the yearend and will be 254.6 million in 2050, with the average growth rate of 2 percent a year, the State of World Population Report 2003 forecasts.

UNFPA Country Representative Suneeta Mukherjee unveiled the report devoted to adolescents this year with its theme "Investing in adolescents' health and rights", at a programme at the Jatiya Press Club, where UNFPA Assistant

Representative Nurul Ameen and some members of a youth forum were present.

The report says the world's current population is 6,301.5 million: 1,203.3 million live in more developed regions, 5,098.2 million in the less developed region and 718.1 million in the least developed countries.

Despite the high growth rate, Bangladesh has achieved success in controlling total fertility rate in South Asia where the rate remained stagnant at 3.46 percent for the last few years, it says.

Contraceptive prevalence rate among eligible couples is 54 percent, behind the government target of 60 percent; and maternal mortality rate was reduced substantially and now stands at 3.77 percent, securing a better position in the regional context next to Iran at 0.76 percent and Sri Lanka at 0.92 percent.

But birth rate per 1,000 women,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Oct 10		5-37 pm
Oct 11	5-54 am	

Prayer Timings		
October 10		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-00	5-25
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-25	4-40
Maghrib	5-46	5-51
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation