

Ministry, BPC slammed for shady kerosene affair

Cabinet body for state-to-state deal with Kuwait on diesel and kerosene import

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Cabinet Purchase Committee, accusing the energy ministry and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) of corruption in petroleum products purchase through tender, yesterday decided to flag a state-to-state deal with Kuwait on diesel and kerosene import.

The committee at a meeting blamed the ministry and BPC for a cooked-up crisis of kerosene and diesel, which swept much of Bangladesh hitting farmers the

most.

But the crisis did not figure in the ministry's January 15 quarterly report, the committee told the meeting, chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman.

If the two-year deal proves effective, the government may extend it for another year - making Kuwait the lone source of petroleum for Bangladesh that consumes 3.5 million tonnes a year.

As part of immediate efforts to grapple with the crisis, the commit-

tee approved a proposal to import 0.7 million tonnes of petroleum products from India and Kuwait on short-term deals.

The BPC has recently imported 0.4 million tonnes of diesel and jet fuel worth Tk 668 crore from Kuwait and will import 0.22 million tonnes of diesel and kerosene from India by the end of this month.

The committee also approved optional import of another 60,000 tonnes of diesel and 30,000 tonnes of kerosene from Kuwait.

SWIPE AT MINISTRY-BPC

At the meeting, the finance minister and Cabinet Secretary Saadat Hossain accused officials of cooking up the crisis in underhand dealings with bidders and businesspeople.

Saifur pointed out the oil crisis began three days after the committee cancelled a proposal on January 24 to purchase 1.2 million tonnes of petroleum products as it gave the

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PHOTO: STAR

Police stand guard as they locked anti-government demonstrators in the main opposition Awami League's headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue during a third hartal in five days in Dhaka yesterday.

Commoners feel harsh about hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People of different sections of society yesterday expressed their grave concern over hartal enforced repeatedly by the opposition, paralysing life.

Most of them felt that hartal is a destructive programme that brings economic and all other activities to a virtual standstill, greatly harming the country.

"None of the two major parties (ruling BNP and opposition Awami League) has patriotism. Both are leading the country to ruin in their desperate bid to grab and stick to power through political anarchy or at any cost, paying no heed to people's miseries," said Sabekun Nahar, a student of Dhaka University.

Hartal harms all as it cripples life and increases insecurity, she said. Abdur Rahim, a bamboo trader at

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10 awarded Ekushey Padak

UNB, Dhaka

The government has awarded 'Ekushey Padak' 2004 to 10 personalities for outstanding contributions to their respective fields.

The awardees are Prof Mohammad Moniruzzaman Mia (education), Prof Wakil Ahmed (research), Farida Hossain (literature), Nilufar Yasmin (music, post-humously), Moniruzzaman Monir (music), Mustafa Monwar (fine arts), Nawab Faizunnisa (social service, posthumously), Zobaida Hannan (social service), AZM Enayetullah Khan (journalism) and Chashi Nazrul Islam (film).

Each of the awardees will get Tk 40,000 in cash along with a gold medal weighing three tolas and a certificate, an official announcement said yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Even in this city of concrete jungle, nature still supports living for many such as this woman and her family. Monwara collects leaves from Suhrawardy Udyan and carts them to markets for sale as fuel.

Dhaka contradicts WHO figure of AIDS patients

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Health and Family Welfare Minister Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain yesterday shrugged off United Nations agency reports that Bangladesh has 13,000 AIDS patients, pegging the figure as assumption-based.

Replying to a question in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, Mosharraf said the figure was the estimate of the World Health Organisation and UNAIDS, not of the government.

He said until last December, 57 AIDS patients and 363 HIV-infected people were detected in Bangladesh.

BSF pushes in 6 Indian Muslims

BSS, Thakurgaon

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) pushed six Bangla-speaking Indian Muslims into Bangladesh through Balihara border under Haripur upazila of the district in the early hours of yesterday.

The Indian nationals include two men, a woman and her three children. They are Mujibur Rahman, 35, Shahabuddin, 50, Saburzan Begum, 30, and her daughter Fatema and sons Abdus Sattar, 15 and Abdul Gaffar, 7.

They are in the custody of the local union parishad (UP) chairman and will be pushed back, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) officials said. They said the troops of Barogaon BSF Camp pushed the s

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South Asia bird flue-free

SAARC demands ban on import of poultry products

AFP, New Delhi

Health officials from seven South Asian nations yesterday claimed the entire region to be free of bird flu and demanded a blanket ban on the import of poultry products, at an emergency meeting here.

"Poultry and poultry products of this region are safe for human consumption," the officials from the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation said in a statement after a meeting in the Indian capital.

Monday's meeting unanimously called for a "temporary ban" on poultry products, including vaccines.

The Pakistani representative,

director general of livestock and fisheries Baz Mohammad Junejo, declared that no case of the bird flu had been noted in Pakistan since December.

"The meeting is discussing possible cooperation to tackle the problem of bird flu," Indian health ministry spokesman Harsh Bhal said.

Saarc groups Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

New Delhi says heightened vigilance at its borders has so far prevented the H5N1 virus, which has emerged in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam, from

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Saddam trial within 2 yrs unlikely

REUTERS, London

Saddam Hussein is unlikely to stand trial for at least another two years, a British newspaper quoted a top Iraqi lawyer as saying yesterday.

Salem Chalabi, who is coordinating the toppled dictator's trial, told the Guardian "there are frustrations" over establishing a war crimes tribunal to try him on charges that could include genocide and crimes against humanity.

The paper said delays have been caused by the need to select and screen judges, prepare courts and establish well-guarded jails to hold suspects.

"I think it will take two years to get to Saddam being tried," said Chalabi, a US-educated Iraqi lawyer and nephew of Governing Council member Ahmad Chalabi.

The United States last month declared Saddam a prisoner of war, meaning he has certain specific rights under the Geneva Convention

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Hakaluki bird killing goes unabated

Thousands are poisoned daily belying govt claim of end to poaching

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government's claim of putting an end to poaching of birds in the Hakaluki Haor flies in the face of the ground reality there and birds are still being hunted in their thousands, said an official of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa).

Also the government's estimate of only a maximum of thousand

birds falling prey to poachers so far is grossly misrepresented, said Abu Naser Khan, secretary-general of Bapa.

Hundreds of birds are reportedly found floating in the water every day after being fed poisoned rice. "The government probe report totally failed to assess the situation. The situation there is really bad," he told The Daily Star yesterday after a

recent trip to the area.

Environment minister Shajahan Siraj during a press conference last Sunday said the situation is under control. "The number of birds killed would not be more than a thousand. We have notified the local administration to check the situation and poachers have fled the area."

But even yesterday, a poacher

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2 GIs, US civilian killed in Iraq

AP, Baghdad, Iraq

Roadside bombs killed two US soldiers in separate attacks yesterday in Baghdad and a city northeast of the capital, the US military said. Gunmen also killed an American civilian and wounded three others in a weekend ambush south of here. One soldier from Task Force Iron Horse died and four others were wounded when a bomb exploded at about 9:40am in the center of Baqouba, about 35 miles northeast of here, the 4th Infantry Division said.

Two Iraqis were arrested, includ-

ing one who had a cell phone that may have been used to detonate the bomb, according to Master Sgt. Robert Cargie, a division spokesman in Tikrit.

The other fatal bombing occurred in the center of Baghdad about 9:20 a.m., killing one soldier from the 1st Armored Division and wounding another, the military said. The 1st Armored is due to leave Iraq in the coming weeks and be replaced by the 1st Cavalry Division.

The latest deaths bring to 540 the number of U.S. service members have died since the United States

launched the Iraq war in March. Most have died since President Bush declared an end to active combat May 1.

Also Monday, the US command said gunmen in a white sedan opened fire Saturday on a taxi that was taking Americans from a religious group from the site of the ancient city of Babylon back to Baghdad. The three wounded were taken to a hospital in Mahmudiyah, about 15 miles south of Baghdad, the US military said.

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Universe's most distant known object seen

AP, Pasadena, California

In a discovery that offers a rare glimpse back to when the universe was just 750 million years old, a team of astrophysicists said Sunday they have detected a tiny galaxy that is the farthest known object from Earth.

"We are confident it is the most distant known object," California Institute of Technology astronomer Richard Ellis said of the galaxy, which lies roughly 13 billion light-years from Earth.

The team uncovered the faint galaxy using two of the most powerful telescopes -- one in space, the other in Hawaii -- aided by the natural magnification provided by a massive cluster of galaxies. The gravitational tug of the cluster, called Abell 2218, deflects the light of the distant galaxy and magnifies it many times over.

The magnification process, first proposed by Albert Einstein and known as "gravitational lensing," produces double images of the galaxy.

"Without the magnification of 25 afforded by the foreground cluster, this early object could simply not have been identified or studied in any detail with presently available telescopes," said astronomer

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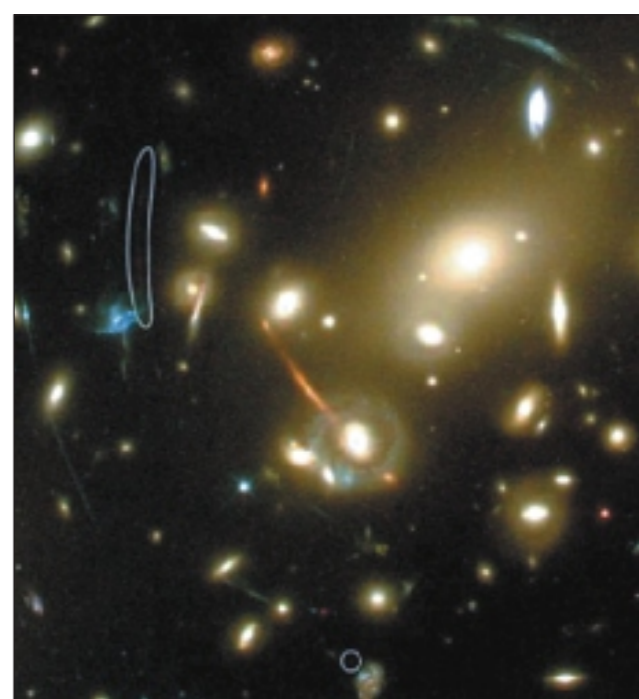


PHOTO: AP

Astrophysicists yesterday said they detected a tiny galaxy, outlined in white at left, that may be the farthest known object from the Earth.

Prayer Timings		
February 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	6-00	6-05
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation