

AL MPs visit arson-hit Shahpara

BNP men show black flags to the team, 'assault' 10 activists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A parliamentary team of the main opposition Awami League yesterday visited the arson affected Shahpara village in Natore amid protests from local BNP activists.

Led by Deputy Leader of the Opposition in parliament Advocate Abdul Hamid, the team demanded immediate rehabilitation and security for the arson-affected families. They also demanded punishment to the culprits.

Visiting the arson-ravaged village, Hamid said, "The incident at Shahpara village proves that there is no rule of law in the country."

The victims of the arson attack told the AL team that they lacked shelter, food and water. They were also worried about their security.

Shamsur Rahman Sharif, Panchanan Biswas, Mohammad Motaahar Hossain and Dr Hamida

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Dust, toxic gases dog Dhaka

Pollution double the standards

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The city dwellers have been exposed to a high concentration of various toxic gases and dust in the air and consequent health hazards with the onset of the dry season more than two months ago. Department of Environment (DoE) experts said.

The air quality monitored in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area under a scheme called Continuous Air Monitoring Station (CAMS) showed that most of the time from December till now the Air Quality Index Value (AQIV) was between 198 and 200 and above. An AQIV of less than 100 shows good air quality and over 100 represents unhealthy air quality.

The monitoring station has warned that at present the city air is "very unhealthy" and that the situation will not improve till rain comes.

Although dust content in the air is not measured, it has a high concentration of mainly carbon monoxide, hydro-carbon, sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxide. Most of these gases are emitted by vehicles, brick kilns and industries.

The air quality was however "good" during the recent Eid-ul-Azha holidays when millions of the city population moved out to their village homes.

DoE experts attributed the air pollution mainly to vehicular emission. Thousands of vehicles ply the city streets without fitness certificates turning the metropolis into a virtual gas chamber. Ill maintained construction sites are constantly spewing dust in the atmosphere. Road digging is also causing dust pollution of air.

Moreover, Dhaka is surrounded by at least 2,000 brick kilns, which

function during the dry season. Although almost all the kilns have long chimneys for better disposal of harmful smoke, a large quantity of particulate matters is still sprayed in the air, further polluting the atmosphere.

DoE experts said rapid and unplanned urbanisation is turning the capital into a huge concrete slab engulfing green areas and waterbodies.

"When particulate matters fall on earth or wetlands, they get absorbed quickly. But when these matters fall on concrete, vehicular movements make them airborne and the respiratory system of every individual, particularly children, bears the brunt," one expert noted.

During the four months of dry season, air pollution contributes to various respiratory diseases in

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PHOTO: PID

Recipients of 'Ekushey Padak 2004' pose with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia after the awarding ceremony at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina speaks at a meeting of AL's central working committee at the party's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

Saber, Kamal Majumder get bail

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday granted anticipatory bail for three months to Awami League leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Kamal Ahmed Majumder along with 25 party activists in separate criminal cases relating to violence and vandalism during the February 12 hartal enforced by the party.

A division bench comprising Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Afzal Hossain Ahmed also issued a rule upon the government to explain why the petitioners should not be granted regular bail.

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Violence sweeping country, says Kamal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Dr Kamal Hossain, Gono Forum president and initiator of the Oikya Prochesta, a socio-political platform, yesterday said Bangladesh has now been swept by violence after having been raged by unprecedented corruption.

Criminals are sitting in parliament after winning elections and instead of good governance as promised, the people are now witnessing sweeping corruption, waves of crime and acute lawlessness, he said.

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Outlaws kill Jubo Dal leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Underground operatives allegedly belonging to Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) shot and slaughtered a Jatiyatabadi Jubo Dal leader at Shadhanpur Bazar in Puthia yesterday.

A gang of 10 shot Pakhi, a local leader of Jubo Dal and son of Shilmaria BNP President Joyanal Abedin, at around 7.30pm and hacked him to death, police said.

The gang left the area chanting slogans in favour of the PBCP, locals said.

The 30 years old victim was a close associate of Deputy Minister for Land Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu's nephew Sabbir Ahmed Gama who was shot dead on February 7, sources said.

3 US soldiers killed in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

Roadside bombs yesterday claimed more American lives, killing three US soldiers in separate attacks in Baghdad and Sunni Muslim areas to the north of the capital. At least six soldiers were injured in the attacks, one critically.

In the biggest attack, one soldier from Task Force Iron Horse was killed and four were wounded in a roadside bombing in Baqouba, 35 miles northeast of Baghdad. One of the wounded was critically injured and the other three were in guarded condition, the military said.

A soldier from Task Force Olympia was killed and another wounded by a bomb Monday evening in Tall Afar in northern Iraq. A

soldier from the 1st Armored Division died and another was wounded in a bombing Monday in central Baghdad.

The latest deaths brought to 541 the number of Americans who have died since President Bush launched the Iraq war March 20. Most of the casualties have occurred since Bush declared an end to active combat May 1.

Witnesses said two roadside bombs exploded Tuesday outside the Anbar Medical College and hospital in Ramadi in the Sunni Triangle, damaging a US Army Humvee. It was unclear if any soldiers or civilians were injured. A third bomb was defused.

As the casualties mount, the

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PM calls for nat'l unity to face global competition

Ekushey Padak awarded

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for unwavering national unity to face the highly competitive global system of the 21st century.

She said in a democratic society it is natural to have differences of opinion, but at times they turn into undesired conflict and confrontation.

Khaleda said the worthy sons of the soil-- the intellectuals -- can rise as national conscience and play a non-partisan role.

"You can give the nation right direction in every national crisis and

in times of need," she told the intellectuals while addressing a function organised by the Ministry of Cultural Affairs to give away the 'Ekushey Padak' 2004 to 10 personalities at Osmani Memorial Hall in the capital.

They awardees are Prof Mohammad Muniruzzaman Miah (education), Prof Wakil Ahmed (research), Farida Hossain (literature), Nilufar Yasmin (music, post-humously), Moniruzzaman Miah (music), Mustafa Monwar (fine arts), Nawab Faizunessa (social work, posthumously), Zobaidda

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Bangladeshis held in KSA for Valentine's Day party

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia's religious police arrested more than 200 workers from Bangladesh and Myanmar as they celebrated St Valentine's Day outside the holy city of Makkah, where the traditional event for lovers is banned by fatwa or Muslim edict, a newspaper reported yesterday.

The cleaning workers were caught Monday at dawn partying at a tent camp used by pilgrims at Mina, close to Mecca, Al-Madina said. The enforcers from the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice found that 16 were drunk.

The men, aged 16-28, were employed by a cleaning company to clear the camp after the annual Hajj ended at the start of February.

Organisers of the party, who sold alcohol and food and brought in musicians for Sunday night, a day after the real St Valentine's, managed to escape the clutches of the religious police, the daily said.

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Dhaka eyes \$1.6b in aid this year

Saifur tells reporters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said Bangladesh would go nowhere if the present political culture of conflicts is not changed.

Bangladesh could get \$1.6 billion in aid from World Bank and Asian Development Bank this year by continuing financial reforms and ensuring good governance.

"But we have to improve our political culture to attain this," he said while exchanging views with the Economic Reporters Forum (ERF) at the Jatiya Press Club.

"When in power, we behave just the opposite way we do while not in power," he observed. "But this kind of culture is not good."

On the culture of hartal, Saifur said, "Let parliament be the place where we can settle our differences."

Donors would pump in \$2 billion more for implementation of a three-year interim poverty reduction strategy paper (IPRSP), but that also depends on performance.

The minister said the lending

conditions of the donors are not as tough as our banks'.

Their conditions like good governance, fund-waste control, efficiency and other issues eventually go in favour of the nation.

Being pressed on the donors' recommendation for a small cabinet, Saifur quipped, "If you keep writing on this issue, you will get my support."

The World Bank linked election-funding with the widespread corruption in its recent review on Bangladesh.

But Saifur countered the observation saying that politics does not fall in the jurisdiction of World Bank and that candidates do raise election funds in all countries, even in the US.

On the government's mid-term review of the budget, he said that the spending and revenue earnings are close to the budget projections.

The government disbursed Tk 7,900 crore or 47 percent of the annual development programme in the last seven months and the aid utilisation was 27 percent, which is

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PHOTO: STAR

Barrack-styled housing units of Uttara Residential Project at Syedpur in Nilphamari are set to be allocated to 1,000 Bihari families, allegedly ignoring disabled freedom fighters and other disadvantaged groups.

First to flame, then to grabbers

Mirpur slum dwellers doubly deprived

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Doubly deprived are the victims of a devastating blaze at a slum at Mirpur on Monday -- they lost their houses and households to the inferno and the temporary shelter to overnight encroachment on the slum land.

The blaze broke out at a shanty

on the northeastern corner of the slum at around 11:40pm on Monday to reduce more than 500 dwellings to ashes and render nearly 3,000 people homeless.

"I had everything only 18 hours ago, but I did not worry much when the slum caught fire thinking that I would again erect shanties on the land where I had eight houses

earlier. But, in the morning I found the musclemen have grabbed the land," lamented Shahnaj Begum, who rented the shanties to earn bread for her six-member family.

"Some people whom I had never seen in my 10 years' stay in the slum suddenly appeared in the morning and captured the lands where I had

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BDR pushes back six Indians

BSS, Thakurgaon

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) personnel with the help of frontier villagers pushed back six Bengali-speaking Indian Muslims through Haripur border under Thakurgaon district in the early hours of yesterday.

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) had pushed those Indians into Bangladesh on Monday, official sources said.

BDR personnel of Bashalgaon Border outpost (BoP) under 14 Rifle Battalion in association with the local union parishad (UP) chairman, members of Ansar-VDP and frontier villagers pushed back the Indians at around 4:00am.

"We have put our troops on alert and instructed them to push back any Indian citizen instantly if pushed in by BSF troops," Senior BDR officials of Dinajpur Sector said.

Rejoinder, our reply

State Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Mosharraf Hossain in a rejoinder to a report headlined "Gas pipeline scam: JS body shocked at low quality job" The Daily Star ran on February 13 claimed that some parts of the report are not true.

He stated that he had initiated a probe into the estimate of the work

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Prayer Timings		
February 18		
	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		