

Bush close to slapping sanctions on Syria

REUTERS, Crawford

The Bush administration plans to impose sanctions on Syria within weeks for its support of terrorist groups and for failing to stop guerrillas entering Iraq, congressional officials and other sources familiar with the matter said on Friday.

Though the White House insists no final decisions have been made, senior administration officials on Friday informed Florida Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, a senior member of the House International Relations Committee, that an announcement was "imminent," said her spokesman, Alex Cruz.

Several sources said the administration was leaning toward imposing economic rather than diplomatic sanctions under legislation signed into law by Bush in December.

Washington accuses Syria of

sponsoring terrorism, occupying Lebanon and failing to secure its border with Iraq while allowing anti-American fighters to cross into the country.

"Damascus' destabilizing behavior in the Middle East has only gotten worse," US Rep. Eliot Engel, a New York Democrat, said in urging Bush to act.

The administration's move against Syria would stand in stark contrast to President Bush's decision to ease sanctions on Libya as a reward for scrapping its nuclear arms programs. Bush has seized on Libya's pledge to abandon weapons programs as an example for other countries, including Syria.

The Syria Accountability Act bars trade in items that could be used in weapons programs until the administration certifies Syria is not supporting terrorist groups, has withdrawn personnel from Lebanon, is not developing unconventional weapons and has

secured its border with Iraq.

The law also authorizes Bush to impose at least two other sanctions from a menu that includes barring US businesses from investing in Syria, restricting travel in the United States by Syrian diplomats, and banning exports of US products other than food and medicine to Syria.

The legislation allows the White House to waive the sanctions, but a senior administration official said: "We will implement the Syrian Accountability Act."

The official declined to say which sanctions would be put in place and when.

Several sources said the announcement was likely to be made next week or the week after.

The White House informed

JCD men forcibly stop Azad Mancha programmes

DU CORRESPONDENT

Activists of the student wing of BNP on the Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday forced the Humayun Azad Mancha (HAM) to abandon its cultural programmes to protest the gruesome attack on the eminent writer.

A group of Jatiyatabadji Chhatra Dal (JCD) members snatched away microphones from the stage and threatened the HAM organisers not to hold any further protest programmes under the banner -- Humayun Azad Mancha to Protect Free Thinking and Resist Undemocratic Forces, witnesses said.

"In the face of the JCD's threats we had to stop our programme today after rendering only two songs," one of the HAM members



NO CLASSES! Schoolgirls line up a road leading to Lalbagh to welcome Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on her way to a public rally in Lalbagh yesterday. Allegations are there that local leaders of the key ruling party BNP forced the children under threats of dismissal from school to stand by the street risking hartal violence.

Govt agrees to issue licence to Indo-Bangla medicine venture

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from New Delhi

Bangladesh has decided to issue production licence to the two-million dollar joint venture promoted by a leading Indian drug manufacturing company named Sun Pharma, official sources here revealed yesterday.

Dhaka's decision to grant production licence in favour of the project was conveyed by Bangladesh Foreign Minister M Moshed Khan, who spoke to his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha on Friday evening, the sources said.

The issue of production licence to Sun Pharma has been hanging fire for the last two years even after its plant was cleared by Bangladesh Board of Investment, the sources continued.

New Delhi had long been making strong efforts to win the licence for the company from its counterpart.

More 'vigorous oust-govt' plan on cards

REAZ AHMAD

The opposition political camp is expected to unveil an array of agitation programmes on the heels of yesterday's countrywide general strike enforced by the main opposition party Awami League (AL) and three other parties in a first-ever display of opposition unity against the 30-month-old administration of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

On the historic March 7 today, the AL is scheduled to announce a more vigorous 'oust-government' programme.

On March 9, ex-president Badruddoza Chowdhury is going

Supply dearth leads to diesel crisis

SOME DEPOTS RUN COMPLETELY DRY IN NORTHERN REGION

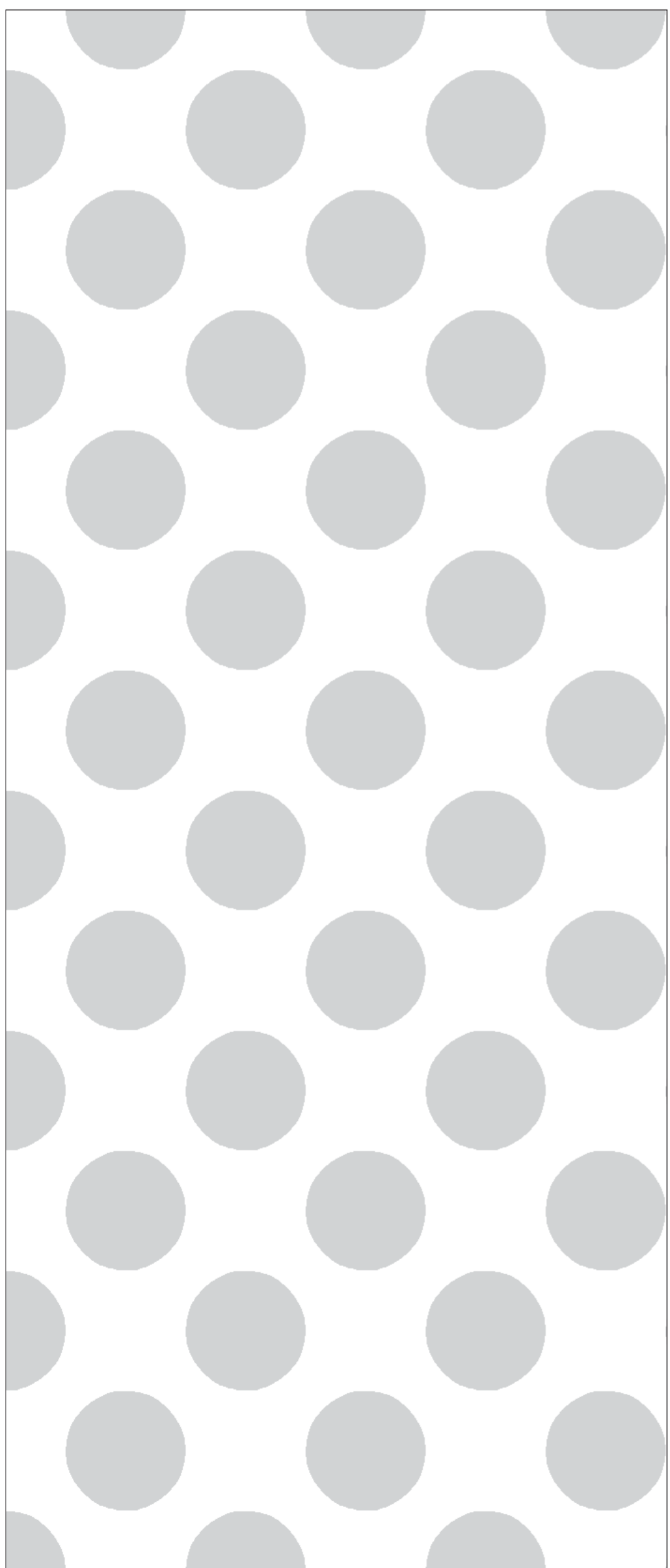
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Suffering from supply constraint and with diesel depots in Rajshahi, Hariari, Rangpur and a few other areas being completely dried up, Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) now finds itself scarcely able to meet even half the demand for diesel in the northern region.

"We are trying to meet the demand for diesel on a day-to-day basis; but this too has become well-nigh impossible due to insufficient supply," said a BPC official in Bogra.

Currently, the state-run oil concern is supplying an average of 30 lakh litres of diesel a day, against a demand of 60 lakh litres in the 16 northern districts, the official said.

The diesel crisis in the region has worsened, as oil tankers cannot be loaded to capacity due to the



Hartal in Bagerhat Cops suspended for firing rubber bullets on Jubo Dal men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two police constables were suspended on charge of firing rubber bullets on two Jubo Dal leaders during hartal hours at Chitalmari Shaheed Minar in Bagerhat yesterday.

Eyewitnesses said Mahabbat Ali and Abdus Sattar, president and senior vice-president of Chitalmari unit Jubo Dal, were chasing the pickets during the hartal.

At one stage, the Jubo Dal leaders locked in an altercation with police, attacked them and made an attempt to snatch their rifles when constables Shamim and Shahiduzzaman opened fire on them.

Injured, Ali and Sattar were admitted to Bagerhat General Hospital. Both of them refuted the allegation.

AZAD'S HEALTH Family blasts false reports

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Family members of prominent writer Humayun Azad yesterday alleged a vested quarter was misreporting his condition that he has improved to a great extent and he could read newspapers and walk.

"We don't know why some people are spreading the rumour that my father can walk, when he is yet to regain the strength enough even to sit up by himself," said an aggrieved Smita, daughter of Azad.

Azad, who suffered critical shoulder and jaw injuries in a machete attack near Bangla Academy on February 27, is under treatment at the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

"It's true that his health has improved a bit and he can now take liquid food, but not so that he can walk, as some people are trying to imply," Smita said alluding to some photographs sent by the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) to the press that show Azad sitting in a



The wife and children of Humayun Azad, on chair, try to cheer up the prominent writer at the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka yesterday.

Zoo vets too cautious to care

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The vets of the Dhaka National Zoo at Mirpur yesterday cold-shouldered some Samaritans' effort to save an owl of a rare kind.

A group of college students led by Raquibul Hasan Johnny from Mirpur rushed the owl to the zoo at around 11:30am, seeking help from its veterinary section. The white and grey owl, a species on the verge of extinction, was shot in the left leg and took refuge at Johnny's house yesterday morning.

But the officials prevented them from entering the zoo with an external bird. Nor did the on-duty vets offer a help.

When this correspondent contacted Mafizur Rahman, curator of the zoo, and sought help, he replied that he could not allow any animal or bird from outside because of the

BB restricts forex forward trade, swap

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has restricted foreign currency forward trade and swapping to cut down risks in such trading.

The central bank will now allow banks to trade foreign exchange only when clients ask for it. Three private banks last year incurred over Tk 124 crores in losses through forwarding and swapping foreign exchange, an investigation of the central bank reveals.

Sources that is more than two decades old had to cover up its loss of Tk 63 crores from its provision. Another bank incurred Tk 53 crores in losses when its own capital was less than Tk 40 crores. The loss of other bank was Tk 5 crores.

The banks usually trade foreign exchange in advance on requests from clients, which is known as forward booking and swapping. However, the banks also go for such

LTTE expels rebel commander Parallel Tamil admn in disarray after split

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's Tamil Tiger rebels yesterday announced expelling a renegade regional commander after accusing him of challenging the group's supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran and leading a split.

The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) said they "discharged" their eastern commander, V. Muralitharan, better known by his nom de guerre Karuna, who tried to lead a break away faction on Wednesday.

"Karuna has been discharged

from the Liberation Tigers organization and relieved from official responsibilities," the LTTE said in a statement issued from their main political headquarters in the northern town of Kilinochchi.

Meanwhile, a parallel administration run by Tamil Tiger rebels in eastern Sri Lanka was in disarray following a split in the guerrilla leadership, residents said Saturday.

Police and courts run by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam

Prayer Timings

March 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation