

'India ready to offer all help to promote trade'

UNB, Dhaka

Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank has said his country is ready to offer "all assistance" to Bangladesh for promoting bilateral trade, which is heavily lopsided in favour of India.

He recognised Dhaka's concern regarding the issue of anti-dumping duty on Bangladesh's lead-acid batteries and said preliminary consultations on the issue have already been started between the Indian and Bangladeshi missions in Geneva.

The process, he added, would take nearly 18 months for resolving
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BANSHKHALI CARNAGE
Fifth accused arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday announced the arrest of Mohammad Hasan alias Army Hasan, 30, the fifth man arrested in connection with the sensational arson incident in Banshkhali that left 11 members of a Hindu family burnt to death on the night of November 18 last year.

Hasan had been picked up Tuesday morning from Haq Market at Bahodderhat under Chandgaon Police Station in Chittagong city along with Mahub Rashid, the prime accused in the murder case, but police was unsure if they picked up the right man as he lied about his identity.

A resident of Boyeeltoli in
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BENAPOLE PORT

Business suffers badly for Indian strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Benapole land port has been virtually paralysed due to an indefinite strike enforced by the Clearing and Forwarding (C&F) Agents' Association and two other organisations of India at Petrapole land port since March 3.

The three bodies involved in export-import activities went on the strike to protest restriction imposed by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on cross-border trade.

Several rounds of talks held between the C&F agents and Indian officials yielded no results to end the impasse. Because, the BSF still
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Prayer Timings		
March 11		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-12	6-16
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Small NGO foundation plan on way for cabinet's nod

STAR REPORT

The finance ministry has forwarded its final proposal for setting up an institution entitled Bangladesh Small NGO Foundation (BSNF) to the Cabinet Division for approval.

The proposal names nine criteria for an NGO (non-governmental organisation) to be eligible for gaining the benefits from the foundation to be established in line with manifestos in the budget for financial year 2003-04.

An NGO having operations in 10 upazilas or less and an annual budget under Tk 5 crores will be considered as a small NGO and qualify to receive BSNF funds.

According to the plan the government will nominate 10 mem-

bers and the beneficiary NGOs will elect five representatives to form the foundation's general council.

The BSNF's 11-member board of directors is envisaged to be made up of a government-nominated chairman with adequate experience and being well aware of NGO operations, rural development and poverty eradication programmes and three government-nominated and seven elected members from the general council, with at least four NGO representatives.

However, the proposal says the first board of directors will be appointed by the government to serve for a one-year term or until the holding of the first annual general meeting, whichever turns up as the shorter period.

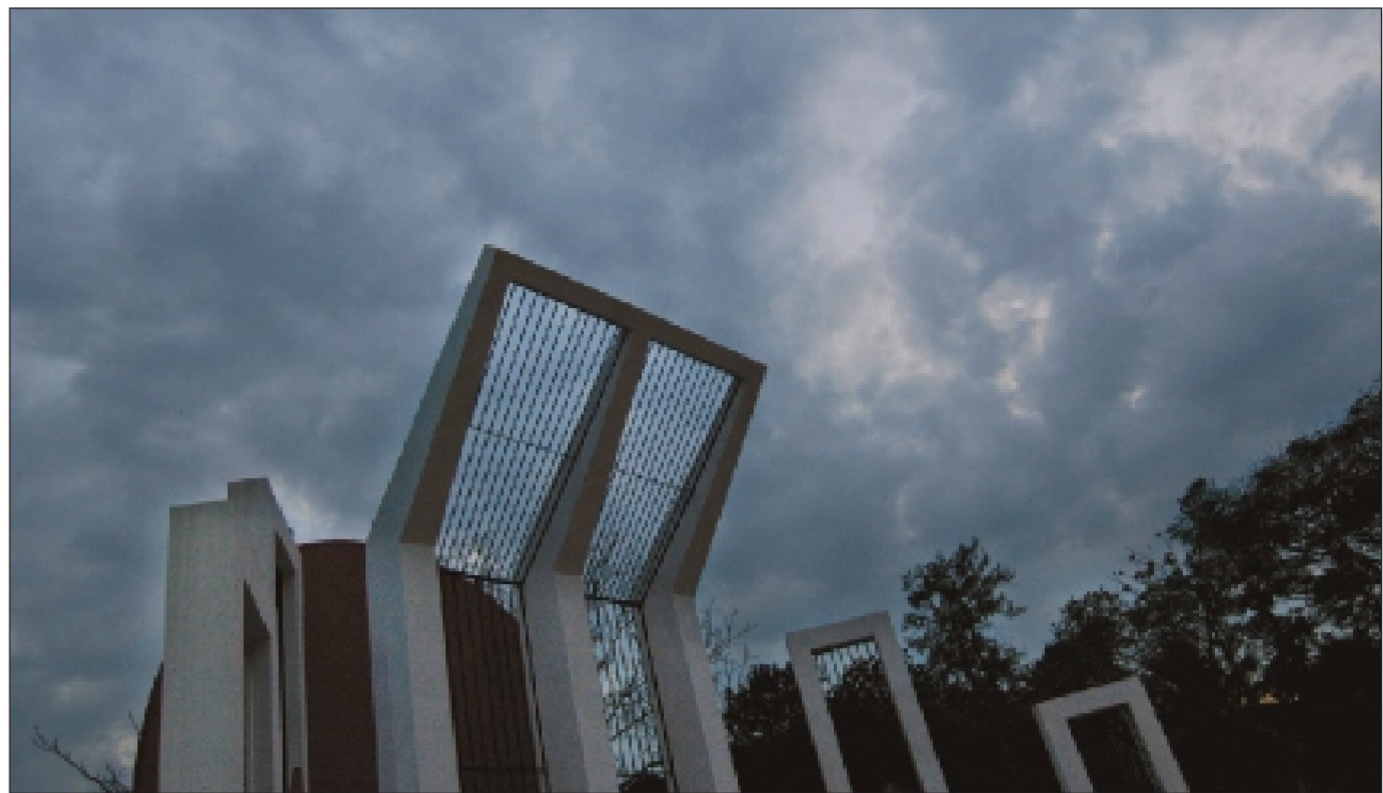
The board members will enjoy a

two-year term each, while one will be entitled to serve a maximum of two terms as the chairman.

The managing director (MD) of the foundation will be appointed under terms of reference set by the board, except the first MD, who will be appointed in consultation with the government.

The government will provide Tk 2 crore for setting up the foundation, Tk 50 crore as its initial fund and a further Tk 50 crore to expand it. There is a condition that at least 90 percent of the BSNF fund will be distributed among the beneficiary NGOs in the first year.

Other than the government provisions, any aid or assistance
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A pall of black clouds leaves the Central Shaheed Minar in sharp outlines against the overcast sky amid a brief spell of drizzle yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



City authorities have removed the roundabout from Gulshan-1 to install modern traffic signals to streamline movement of vehicles. But the busy intersection turned chaotic as traffic moves at will.

PHOTO: STAR

Finance ministry asked for more agri subsidy

REAZ AHMAD

A special review meeting on agricultural development held at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) yesterday directed the finance ministry to immediately examine the scope for providing more input subsidy to the farmers, official sources said.

Chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, the meeting took stock of the overall agricultural development at a time boro paddy growers are hard-pressed due to

diesel price hike and artificial crisis of fertiliser in some parts of the country.

The meeting took place hardly a month after the finance ministry's rejection of a proposal for Tk 310-crore subsidy for diesel-run pumps, dashing some 10 million farmers' hopes for a reduced irrigation cost, the sources pointed out.

The agriculture ministry made conceived the subsidy proposal on August 11 last year, it got the nod from the Cabinet Committee on Agriculture and the parliamentary

standing committee on the agriculture ministry also recommended its approval. But the finance ministry recently turned down the proposal on the ground that diesel-run pumps have diverse usage.

Yesterday's meeting also discussed in details how farmers could be provided with subsidy and financial support both for irrigation and fertiliser. While farmers are already getting indirect subsidy on urea, the meeting resolved there should be
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Azad's family rules out political party help for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Writer Humayun Azad's family said instead of any political party, it will take the assistance of either the government or Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) for taking Azad abroad for treatment.

"Since his health requires treatment abroad, we'll wait for the government's move, as Prime Minister Khaleda Zia pledged us that her government would take him abroad at its expense," Azad's wife Latifa Kohinoor said yesterday.

"If they (government) don't do
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Tk2 lakh rasm demanded for schoolboy

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kusthia

Unidentified miscreants at village Ailchara of the town yesterday kidnapped a schoolboy and demanded ransom.

The abductors in a letter demanded Tk 2 lakhs for the boy's release. Police said, a gang of nine came to the house of one Muzibur Rahman and picked up his 11-year old son, Saidur Rahman Saide, a student of class five of poradah Primary School at about 8.30 p.m.

Police arrested two persons - Alam Hossain, 25, of Milpara and Tapan Ali, 29, of Purbo Mazampur, on suspicion yesterday, but they (police) are yet to trace the boy.

A case was filed with the sadar police station in this connection.

BIOMETRIC IDENTIFICATION
US embassy starts system Mar 18

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The consular section of the US embassy in Dhaka will introduce biometric identifiers into the visa application and issuance process from March 18, 2004.

Visa applicants who will come to the embassy for an interview on or after that date will have their index fingers electronically scanned for identification purposes. This scanning, an inkless process that requires less than one minute, will take place before the interview, said a special release of the embassy yesterday.

After March 18, all visa applicants except children under 14, adults over the age of 79, diplomats

and others engaged in official travel to the US must submit finger scans. Once scanned, the finger images will be sent to Washington D.C. for review. The review process will not change the structure of the visa interview or the standards by which applications are adjudicated. It may result in a slight increase in the time between the interview and visa issuance.

US law requires all visa issuing posts worldwide to implement the new procedures. The US enhanced Border Security and Visa Entry Reform Act mandates the collection and use of biometric identification
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Bangladesh may have 500 tigers

Experts say after joint survey on Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The number of Royal Bengal Tigers in Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans could be around 500, environment and forest ministry officials said yesterday citing discovery of 1546 'pugmarks' or tiger paw prints during the recently concluded India-Bangladesh joint tiger census.

"It seems the actual number of tigers might be more than what we have estimated so far -- the number could actually be in the neighbourhood of 500," Environment and Forest Minister Shajahan Siraj said at a press briefing yesterday.

The official figure had so far
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Small trader and criminal shot dead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Assailants yesterday gunned down a small trader in Ramna and a listed top criminal in Mirpur, while chopping another trader at Maniknagar in Sabujbagh.

Ramna police recovered the body of Afzal Hossain, 28, owner of a canteen on Jonaki Cinema compound, from near Shilpakala Academy at around 12:30am and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy. "No-one knows when and with whom Afzal left his canteen last night," said Aklima Begum, the victim's wife and a resident of South Goran.

In Mirpur, three to four miscreants called out Mohammad Asad, 35, a top criminal of Mirpur and Pallabi, from his roadside hotel at National Zoo Road and shot him
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Nuruddin quits AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League advisory committee member and former minister M Nuruddin Khan announced his resignation from the party at a press conference in the city yesterday.

Briefing journalists at a hurriedly called press conference at his DOHS residence, Khan, also a former chief of the army, said, "I have decided to abstain from any sort of politics and would submit my resignation to the party chief later this evening."

While asked about the timing of his resignation, just a day before the launch of Professor A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury's new
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