

Dhaka, Washington

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of the US Embassy in Dhaka, was also included in the US delegation. US Ambassador Harry K Thomas joined the talks at a later stage.

Wills also met Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury after the trade talks.

"Though there is no big difference over any major issues it would take some time to sign the agreement," Suhel told newsmen after the meeting.

Dhaka sought duty- and quota-free access of its goods to the US market and increase in the number of items eligible for the generalised system of preference (GSP) facilities. It also demanded reservation of 20 percent and 30 percent import of apparels and low-tech products by Washington from least developed countries (LDCs) including Bangladesh.

The US officials told their Bangladesh counterparts that duty-free access of Bangladeshi goods is a very sensitive issue in Washington as thousands of people lost their jobs in textile factories in the US in the recent past. They observed that reservation of a certain percentage of import from the LDCs would be difficult for them, as the idea is very new.

The US delegates expressed concern over the non-transparent investment climate in Bangladesh and sought ways to close the trade gap with Dhaka, meeting sources said.

They, however, assured Bangladesh that after signing Tifa, both sides would sit together on all trade- and commerce-related issues including the items to be allowed GSP facilities.

The meeting also discussed the Doha round of negotiations under the World Trade Organisation and agreed that Tifa would cause no harm to the multilateral discussion under the WTO. Instead, it would complement the negotiations.

Later, at a press conference at the American Centre, Wills termed Bangladesh a very good economic partner of the US. "The US signed Tifa with only those countries with which it had a very good and close relations."

"We do not sign Tifa with those countries which do not honour our values," he elaborated.

DU deadlock may end on Saturday

DU CORRESPONDENT

The regular academic activities at Dhaka University (DU) is expected to return to normal as agitating teachers may withdraw their class boycotting programme Saturday.

The DU Teachers' Association (DUTA) started an indefinite strike on February 28, demanding immediate arrest and punishment of "real attackers of eminent writer Prof Humayun Azad, resignation of the home minister and sending Azad abroad for treatment."

Assailants chopped Azad with butcher's knives in front of Bangla Academy at about 9:00pm on February 27 when he was returning to his campus house from the Ekushey Book Fair.

DUTA General Secretary Dr Mohammad Akhteruzzaman yesterday said they will visit Azad at Combined Medical Hospital today. "If his health improves, we'll cancel the boycott programme on Saturday or Sunday but continue demonstration until our demands are met."

Admitting that DU students have suffered for the agitation, he said the government should be held responsible, as it did not pay heed to anyone's demand.

"We'll hold a general meeting tomorrow to discuss the overall situation of the campus in last 20 days. The decision to withdraw the boycott programme may come at the meeting," he added.

Badruddoza

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strength to resist those who oppress people," he said. National committee Member-Secretary Maj (ret'd) Abdul Mannan and committee member Mahi B Chowdhury were also present.

"This government is not working for people's welfare. Without an honest government, proper democracy will not be established," said Mannan.

"On March 11, hoodlums belonging to the government tried to kill the former president. But by the grace of Allah, he is well," said Mahi B Chowdhury, adding the mild was organised to express gratitude to the Almighty for Badruddoza's safety.

"There is no force in Bangladesh that will resist us," he added, urging the ruling party to refrain from politics of revenge.

Afterwards, a procession was brought out.

Cab owner

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from those rooms, victim's brother Salauddin alleged.

Meanwhile, Mohammadpur police said both Ali and Alamgir filed about 15 cases against each other with them.

Victim's father-in-law Abdul Malek lodged a case with Mohammadpur Police Station accusing 10 people for the murder.

Explaining the reasons for his visit to Dhaka, Wills said he came here mainly for two reasons -- one was to discuss about the prospects of signing Tifa and the other was to know Bangladesh's position on trade union rights at its exclusive industrial zones.

He expressed satisfaction about the government's recent decision to allow limited trade unions rights in the export processing zones (EPZs). "We hope that the right to association of the workers in the EPZs will be allowed very soon."

Paralysed Utpal put behind bars

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Modhupur police has put paralysed Garo teenager Utpal Nakrek, who went missing since Tuesday after Modhupur police took him away from a Savar clinic where he was undergoing treatment, behind the bars of Tangail jail.

Shaheen Khan, duty officer of Modhupur Police Station, told The Daily Star that the 16-year-old boy who took a bullet in the back, which completely paralysed the lower half of his body, was sent to jail as he was an accused of an unlawful assembly in Modhupur.

Pointing at Utpal's 'improved' health, he said, "We took him away from the CRP as he can now move with wheel chair and is cured enough."

"We have also contacted his parents and asked them to seek bail for their son, but they are yet to respond to it," he added.

Ignoring the plea of Savar's Centre for Rehabilitation for the Paralysed (CRP) physicians, Modhupur police took the 10th grader with them to an unknown destination on Tuesday, sources said.

CRP doctors were treating Utpal for bullet injuries, which he suffered during police fire on a Garo demonstration last January.

The demonstrators were protesting a government move to convert the Modhupur forest into a national park when police and forest guards opened fire, killing a demonstrator and injuring 25 others including Utpal.

Dhaka to sign FTA with Delhi if NTBs go

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh will sign Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India if it takes necessary steps to remove non-tariff barriers (NTBs).

"There are many impediments to signing the FTA with India. But non-tariff barriers (NTBs) are the biggest ones," Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury told a preparatory meeting yesterday ahead of a three-day Indo-Bangla joint secretary-level talks, beginning here on March 23.

Officials from various government bodies, including Tariff Commission, were present in the meeting.

"We'll sign the FTA with India if terms and conditions are favourable for Bangladesh," the minister said.

Tariff, NTBs and FTA are on the agenda of the Indo-Bangla joint secretary-level meeting, which will first discuss non-tariff and tariff barriers on Mar 23 and 24.

Bangladesh would go for discussion on the FTA with India if the first two days' talks are fruitful. It will take up similar strategies to sign the free trade deal with Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Earlier, Bangladesh identified 14 barriers and stood firm that it would not go for FTA talks unless India remove the non-tariff barriers (NTBs) that made difficult for Bangladesh commodities to enter India.

Bangladesh also pointed out anti-dumping and other trade barriers that impede exports to India. It pressed for inclusion of a provision to give special and differential treatment (SDT) to its exports to India.

India agreed to give some sort of trade preferences to its small trading partners, but did not agree to call it SDT because of certain 'obligations' relating to the WTO (World Trade Organisation) charter.

TU in EPZs

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about the difficulties faced by Korean investors in implementation of the Korean EPZ project in Chittagong.

During the meeting, the FBCCI President assured him of working with all concerned to maintain a working relation in the EPZ in spite of the introduction of TU activities which, he mentioned, is in fulfilment of a requirement of American Federal Labour Union.

Mintoo promised to take up the matter with appropriate authority for ensuring adequate security in future and expediting the implementation of KEPZ scheme.

He further assured that he would take up the matter with all concerned to ensure that any trade union allowed in EPZs is 'not politicised'.

Titas GM transferred for graft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Petrobangla authorities have finally transferred the general manager (Planning) of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Ltd (TGTDCL) for his alleged role in a Tk 60-crore graft.

The TGTDCL board at its meeting last month decided to transfer Titas' GM Planning Engineer Mahubur Rahman so that he could not supervise the Bangabandhu Bridge Approach Road Project (BBARP) pipeline schemes.

Rahman was involved in the project planning and supervision of the extension of two 210km pipelines under the BBARP. The pipeline construction was initially approved at a cost of Tk 30 crore that later doubled in a way that no authority was involved in the process.

The authorities have so far taken no punitive measure against any officials, although evidence of corruption is visible and the quality of the construction has also raised question among a Petrobangla probebody.

8 killed in road accidents

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra and Ctg

Eight people were killed and seven others injured in separate road accidents in Bogra and Chittagong yesterday.

A speeding Bogra-bound minibus rammmed into a Kahalu-bound tempo at Padmogari on Bogra-Durgapur road at about 2:30pm, killing Akbar Ali, 45, Badsha, 45, Maksud Muhuri, 50, and an unidentified man on the spot and injuring nine others, police and witnesses said.

Locals rushed to spot and sent injured Alim Mian, 26, and Kalam, 45, Lutfunnessa, 25, Putu, 30, Ibrahim, 29, Mosharrat, 14, Gopal Chandra, 35, Nepal Chandra, 28, and Miru, 29, to Mohammad Ali Hospital in Bogra, police said.

Alim and Kalam died minutes after they were admitted to the hospital, they added.

Seriously injured Lutfunnessa and Miru were shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, a speeding truck knocked dead Javed, 20, at Fateyabad when he was riding his bicycle on Chittagong-Hathazari road at around 5:00pm, sources said.

In another accident at Charia on the same road, a jeep smashed pedestrian Shafi Alam, 26, at around 11:00am, killing him on the spot, police said.

Separate cases were lodged with respective police stations.

Teenaged boy abducted in Jessore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khlna

Unidentified miscreants abducted a teenaged schoolboy from Keshabpur in Jessore on Monday.

A gang kidnaped Abu Salam, son of Sabaria union parishad member Abu Jamal, at gunpoint from a local fish market at about 10:00pm, sources said.

His captors demanded Tk 2 lakh from Jamal and threatened to kill the 13 years old boy if the ransom was not paid by yesterday, police said.

PM terms CPJ

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countries appeared to her a sweeping comment.

She said her government took no repressive measures against any journalists or newspapers. Sometimes journalists might have come under attacks but those were not for journalism but for other reasons. In such cases, she claimed, her government immediately tracked down the offenders and took action against them.

Khaleda said the CPJ's statement did not reflect the reality in Bangladesh.

She then referred to the conferences of two journalists' forums in Dhaka and as many as 467 foreign journalists' visit to Bangladesh last year. None of those foreign journalists including 14 from US and 86 from UK said anything about repression on journalists in the country, she added.

Opposition Jatiya Party lawmaker Rowshan Ershad, however, said journalists were being repressed and attacked frequently and wanted to know the prime minister's thinking about the killing of journalist Manik Saha in Khulna recently.

In reply, Khaleda expressed her government's firm commitment to ensure safety and security of the media people but she hastened to add that freedom of the media did not mean blackmailing and spreading of wrong information leading to chaos in society.

Responding to another question, the prime minister said the government has taken measures in line with the international children's rights charter for improvement of the condition of children and juveniles in custody.

She told another questioner Bangladesh has no outbreak of bird flu and that the government has taken steps to protect the poultry industry.

Submarine cable

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end in France.

The submarine cable link is also said to provide the infrastructure for large-scale software export and scopes for investment to establish IT-enabled value-added service e.g. call centre, tele-medicine, distance education at overseas universities.

The Executive Committee for National Economic Council (Encec) at a meeting yesterday approved a fund of Tk 40 crore, which constitutes 10 percent of Bangladesh's mandatory contribution to the consortium for project expenditure to launch the initial works.

The fund is to be disbursed by April 4. All consortium members are required to pay 10 percent of their own expenses by that time.

It will cost Bangladesh Tk 657 crore to implement the project and the government will arrange the fund. Dhaka has sought a \$60 million credit from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for the purpose, sources said.

The government conceived a project to have a private submarine cable link with Singapore via Chittagong in the late 1990s with its own fund. The project was originally designed for launch in September 2000, but foreseeable

Prof Azad

FROM PAGE 1
attack on February 27.

Unknown assailants attacked the professor of Bangla at Dhaka University with sharp weapons on his way home from Ekushey book fair at Bangla Academy.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the CMH said the decision to send him to Bangkok was actually taken a few days ago but Azad was not yet not fit to fly.

A team of senior medical specialists at the CMH recently checked Azad's overall condition and said the writer is now strong enough to be flown to Bangkok.

"Now he has improved further and is able to withstand the stress of the journey," said a source at the PMO.

The government will bear all his medical expenses at Bumrungrad Hospital and arrangements for his admission there as well as visa-related formalities are almost complete, a source at the PMO told The Daily Star yesterday.

One of Azad's family members will accompany him, the source added.

Sources said a political secretary to the prime minister has already sent the necessary papers to Bumrungrad Hospital and that the Bangladesh embassy at Thailand has also confirmed his booking at the hospital.

Officials said booking had also been made at Singapore's Mount Elizabeth Hospital but CMH doctors opted for Bumrungrad citing the hospital's good treatment of journalist Tipu Sultan who had suffered serious fractures in a terrorist attack a few years ago.

Sources quoting CMH doctors said Prof Azad can now swallow liquid food and walk with assistance. But he will need more time to be fit enough to move alone.

Khaleda

FROM PAGE 1
BNP renegades-former lawmakers Mannan and Mahi.

Before Khaleda Zia could say anything Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, who was presiding over the session then, intervened suggesting the question raised by the Krishak Sramik Janata League lawmaker was not relevant and the prime minister could skip the reply.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia then opted not to answer the question and skipped to the next question from a ruling party lawmaker.

Blame on ministries

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a member of the committee, told The Daily Star yesterday that despite acute shortage and price spiral of fertiliser and diesel, there was no report of imports.

"The prime minister instructed immediate import of 50,000 tonnes of potash, but any consignment is yet to reach Bangladesh," he said.

"Farmers are getting indirect subsidy on urea only. But they need subsidies on all inputs including potash, diesel and seeds. The minister (MK Anwar) said he was ready to give farmers subsidies, but the finance ministry did not agree."

The committee said that in line with a recommendation of its previous meeting, the agriculture ministry wrote the energy ministry for immediate import of diesel to help irrigation in peak bore season.

But the energy ministry is yet to respond to the request.

On BNP lawmaker Shafi

Shaptahik 2000

FROM PAGE 12
Hossain from Dhaka's Mirpur, threatening to kill him.

"This (the shroud) is your reward for writing about us in Shaptahik 2000 and (your books) Bangladesh Underworld Ebong Rajniti and Ghatana Theke Sangbadh Ebong Sangbadhikata," the letter said.

On the same day, he received an anonymous phone call. "The letter is not meant to just scare you, but to give you tidings of your impending death. The angel of death will visit you within a few days," Mortozza quoted the caller as saying.

Mortozza, who is well-known for his investigative reports on religious fundamentalism, minority oppression, criminal underworld and terrorism, said the caller specifically mentioned his reports on the February 27 terrorist attack on Prof. Humayun Azad and the Kadiani issue.

"I do not consider it an isolated incident. It is part of an attempt to silence free press," Mortozza said, adding he suspects fundamentalist groups are behind it.

Shahadat Chowdhury, editor of Shaptahik 2000, said Mortozza's family and colleagues are extremely worried about the situation and asked the government to protect the journalist.

Mortozza filed a general diary with Ramna Police Station on March 16.

corruption, bureaucratic bottleneck and wrong planning, among other reasons, stalled the project.

The project was also envisaged at a cost of Tk 921 crore, nearly Tk 300 crore more than what Bangladesh has to pay once it ties up with the consortium.

"The idea of implementing the project through a consortium will be cost-effective," said a telecoms ministry official. The consortium will take care of the maintenance at a low cost and Bangladesh will have to make no additional spending to land its cable in the member countries.

BTTB believes government earnings from telecommunications sector will shoot up as it can raise the number of telephone circuits with the consortium members.

The tasks under the project includes construction of cable landing station, a 22,000-kilometre trunk route and 1,200-1,400-km branch route of submarine cable, installation of optical fibre link between Chittagong and Cox's Bazar along the highway, upgrading of the existing Chittagong-Dhaka optical fibre link, installation of optical link between Chittagong and Cox's Bazar over electrical grid line and other installations.

BTTB cellphone

FROM PAGE 12
phone network down to the upazila level and evaluated Siemens and Huawei as the lowest bidders among eight participating companies. Siemens and Huawei offered 403 and 233 base stations but their prices did not fit in the BTTB budget.

Instead of negotiating for lowering the prices sought by Siemens and Huawei, the BTTB asked the two to scale down the network about 34 percent to match its budget. The German and Chinese vendors revised the base stations down to 281 and 160 units.

The BTTB did not mention the consequences of the changes in its purchase proposal. In a presentation to the government, it rather claimed maintaining the original characteristics of the cellphone project.

"We may hold discussions with leaders of the new group in future, though, once they have laid out their policies," Manzursaid.

Gano Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik retorted: "If some parties including the CPB can operate in the Left Democratic Front and the 11-party alliance alike, Gano Forum can also be part of the 11-party alliance and the Oikya Mancha."

Manik reiterated Gano Forum's anti-hartal stand and said there is no chance of the 11-party break-up. "There are alternative forms of protesting the government's misdeeds."

On why the CPB was absent at an alliance meeting at the BSD office yesterday, CPB leaders said the party boycotted the meeting as it has a strong view that if the WP, BSD, and Gano Forum attach more importance the new platform, the left alliance is irrelevant.

But BSD Convener Khalequzzaman said: "CPB leaders were busy with some of their own programmes and couldn't attend it."

Khalequzzaman laughed off any 11-party split, saying: "It is ludicrous to suggest that. The alliance is here to stay."

"Different parties within the alliance can do different things. If Gano Forum wants to launch a new platform, let it go ahead," he said.

Meanwhile, sources in the Department of Explosion said they will start a probe today to find if a rise in temperature or any in-built defect of the tank was the reason behind the accident.

No case was filed in this connection till the filing of this report yesterday evening.

Yusuf hailed from Barguna and was living with his garment worker sister at Nariketola Kalshidighir Par.

Launch land

FROM PAGE 12
Besides, 29,000 acres of land under the roads and highways department, railway, shipping ministry and other government organisations fell to the encroachers' hands.

The standing committee in a previous meeting asked the land ministry to prepare a list of grabbed government land with district-wise distribution.

It decided to sit with law enforcement agencies to work out the details of the recovery drive taking into consideration the strength of the grabbers.

The meeting also asked the land and law ministries to take steps to amend laws in the next three months to stop land grabbing.

The committee said it recommended for a six-month drive in the first phase and another one until the complete recovery of the lost land.

By selling or leasing out the land, the government could raise a good amount of revenue, the committee observed.

It said in Dhaka and other cities the recovered land could be given to city developing authorities for development and allotment of plots to government officials and other professionals.

Mahubur said government agencies with unutilised land received from the land ministry were renting the property illegally.

"Such landed property should be either returned to the land ministry or to the original owners," he said.

The meeting also asked deputy commissioners not to issue land documents to outsiders planning to buy landed property in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The meeting observed that many indigenous people lost their lands to cheats from plains and lived inhuman life in grinding poverty.

Committee members Kabir Hossain, Abdul Karim Abbasi and Ali Kadar participated in the meeting also attended by high land ministry officials.

10-yr old boy remanded for robbery

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna police is holding a minor on remand that started yesterday for a robbery case.

Sumon Pal, a 10-year old boy, is a son of one Surendra Pal of Moulavi para under Khulna thana.

The robbery, in which he was implicated, took place at about midnight on March 11 in the Miapara house of one Mohmud Kamal. The dacoits looted Tk. 15,000 in cash, gold ornaments worth Tk. 1,50,000 and other valuables worth over Tk. 25,000 as mentioned in the FIR lodged with Khulna thana on March 12 naming none as accused. The masked dacoits, aged between 25 to 30 years were carrying arms as learnt from the complaint. However, police could not arrest anyone else but the boy in this connection.

Police picked up Sumon on Tuesday morning and showed him as arrested in the dacoity case and later took him on remand. Meanwhile Sumon's father alleged, the boy was clubbed by the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case and fell sick.

Advocate Syeda Sabiha Manju, programme officer of Khulna unit of Jatiya Mahila Ainjibi Samity has described the arrest and subsequent remand as a flagrant violation of child rights. She intends to fight for the boy in the court, she said.

Ex-MP Sujan

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The judge, however, acquitted Khorsheed Alam, Abdul Mannan alias VP Mannan, Akhter Hossain, Forkan Uddin, kamal Ahmed, Giasuddin jalali and Faruq of the murder.

He said the charges of death penalty against Dr Alam were proved but considering his old age, he was given life term.

Hena Akhter, mother of the victim broke into tears as the verdict was pronounced. She said that she was not satisfied with the judgment. Victim's family will appeal to the High Court against the judgment.

Sujan, 35, a former BNP MP from Brahmanbaria-6 constituency and former vice president of Haji Mohammad Mohsin Hall Students Union of Dhaka University, was abducted by his rivals and found dead near the Doyal Chattrar on the Dhaka University campus on July 3, 2001.

Bitumen tank

FROM PAGE 12
temperature and pressure of gas might have caused the crack on its roof. The company will soon start an investigation to ascertain the actual cause of the accident, he added.

Md Mofazzal, a sub-contractor under whom the victims worked, suspected rise in temperature in the tank led to the blast.

Meanwhile, sources in the Department of Explosion said they will start a probe today to find if a rise in temperature or any in-built defect of the tank was the reason behind the accident.

No case was filed in this connection till the filing of this report yesterday evening.

Yusuf hailed from Barguna and was living with his garment worker sister at Nariketola Kalshidighir Par.

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