

European Union takes in 10 new members

AFP, Prague

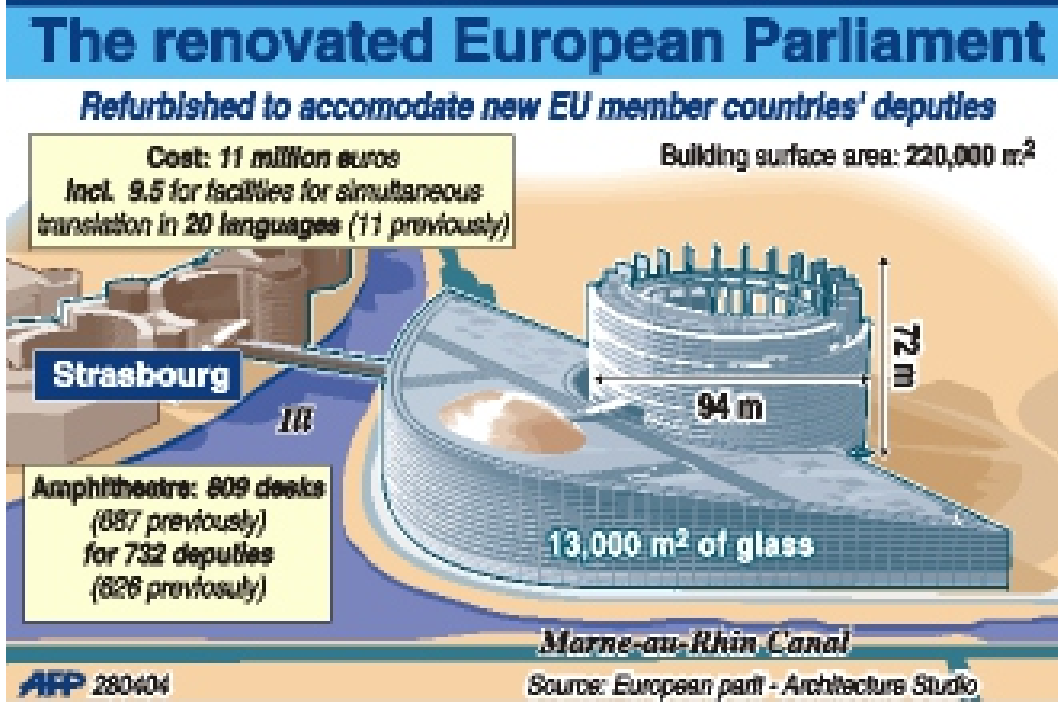
Flags from the soon-to-be 25 European Union states were already out in the Czech capital as 10 countries, eight from the former Soviet bloc, began celebrating their EU accession due to take place at the stroke of midnight.

A Polish couple explained why they had come to the EU fair on historic Na Prkope street in the baroque splendor of Prague, where national as well as starry blue EU flags were flying from stands for each of the 25 EU states – the 15 present western European members, plus the 10 candidate nations.

Wojtek Luranc, who is from Warsaw, said he and his wife "had decided to go for this weekend to Prague in order to celebrate this day in the capital city of our neighbor."

"It's a great day. Tomorrow we enter the EU. We have waited for this moment for 60 years," said 25-year-old Luranc, speaking of the long journey Europe has taken since its inception.

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Simi's teasers now threaten her family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The family of Simi, whom persistent eve teasing of local delinquents had forced to commit suicide last year, is in panic again, as the eve teasers, released on bail, have started to bombard them with threats and harassment.

Jalil and his brother Khalil, who were arrested for teasing and abusing Simi, a promising student of Narayanjan College of Fine Arts, that goaded her to suicide, are now free on bail.

In Thursday afternoon, a gang of hoodlums gathered in front of Simi's house at Bhujiyapara, Khilgaon and stormed it with brickbats. As the family members sought help from Khilgaon Police Station, a police team instantly arrived and arrested Jalil and Khalil, the prime accused of

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8 months' pay denied to 115 Bangladeshis in Malaysia

TAWFIQUE ALI

One hundred and fifteen Bangladeshi workers in Sitiawan state of Malaysia are in dire straits as their Port Dickson-based employer, Linsun (M), has been withholding their eight months' wages for long, violating even a Labour Office directive.

Linsun owes the Bangladeshi expatriates Tk 1.3 crore (Malaysian ringgit 839,936) in arrears from June 2002 to January 2003. On February 5 last year, Sitiawan Labour Office ordered the company to pay the labourers their dues by March 1, according to local media.

"The workers, many of whom are jobless, have since been living a precarious life on borrowed money and staying with friends in cramped places," says Habibur Rahman, a cousin of a victim. "They had to

abandon their own quarters failing to pay rent and utility bills."

A New Straits Times report on December 17, 2003 said: "While some workers managed employment elsewhere, others were jobless finding it difficult to survive." The report quoted two of the workers, Monirul Islam Ramjan, 32, and Abul Bashar Abdul Ghani, 45.

"It [the company] should have paid us in March 2003. But none of us has received a single sen to date," the report quoted Monirul as saying.

Secretary of Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Dalil Uddin Mandal said: "I'll talk to the Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur about it right now and ask the office to look into the matter."

If a contractor is found to have done any wrong to the Bangladeshi

workers, the wing concerned at the high commission will seek redress from the labour court according to Malaysian laws, the secretary said. It will also provide legal aid, if required, he added.

Admitting that such incidents occur quite often, Secretary General of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira) Ali Haider Chowdhury said, "There're bad employers everywhere."

"If any Baira recruiting agent is found guilty of such a malpractice, we ask it to compensate the victims. And on non-compliance, the agent has to face organisational punitive action," Ali said.

But, he noted the ministry concerned was the most competent

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'Ratify Rome Statute to fight crimes against humanity'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a workshop on the International Criminal Court yesterday underscored the necessity for ratification of the Rome Statute by the world's major powers to institute an effective international justice system to try the perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

"The crimes of any descriptions are committed by a man not by an abstract entity," said Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain at the workshop organised by Odhikar, a human rights group, at the city's BRAC Centre Inn.

"There can be no peace without justice, no justice without law and no meaningful law without a court," Mudassir added.

Termining criminal liabilities as personal liabilities, he said, "We must not be happy seeing that crimes against humanity have been quite largely committed and most of the perpetrators of those heinous crimes have gone unpunished."

Barrister Mainul Hossain said frequent human rights violations occur in Bangladesh in the process of political programmes.

"In the name of politics and

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Suicide blast kills 2 US marines

AFP, Baghdad

Two US marines were killed and six wounded in a suicide bomb attack yesterday near Camp Falluja, the main military base outside the flashpoint city of the same name, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt told reporters here.

A Johannesburg report says, a South African was killed in Iraq yesterday, the second to die in as many days and taking to six the number of nationals killed in the conflict, the foreign ministry said.

"We can only confirm at this stage that a South African was killed in Falluja today," foreign ministry spokesman Ronnie Mamooepa told AFP, adding: "It is a matter of great concern to us that more people are dying in Iraq everyday."

On Thursday, a South African citizen was killed in Iraq.

THE STRENGTH WITHIN



PHOTO: STAR

Barind farmers harvest rice in the western part of Rajshahi.

Going green in Barind

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Rafiqul Islam has seen a change over the last 14 years of his life in terms of celebrations: from one harvest with one celebration to three harvests with as many celebrations.

Rafiq is a farmer from Arishpur village in Godaigari upazila in the western part of Rajshahi, known as the Barind area, where the naturally dry landscape has been dabbled with the greens in 18 years with the help of a seemingly innocuous device: a deep tubewell.

Over the past century, Barind farmers have become used to its dry and desolate landscape that is only suitable for cultivating crops during the monsoon for the absence of one crucial yet unavoidable element: water.

"We had to collect water from the puddles at the bottom of ponds. It may have been dirty but that was all we had in most seasons," said Rafiq, eyes watery from recalling the pain brought about by the scarcity of water.

In his early age, Rafiq

learned from his father the hard way of ploughing Barind land in the west of Rajshahi.

Evident from the lack of greenery in the vast area starting from the Rajshahi's west to Chapainawabganj, the scarcity of water has prevented farmers from fully occupying themselves with one profession.

Rafiq like thousands around him used to sell his crops in advance to feed his family during the near-famine in the dry season and migrate to other districts looking for work.

As a migratory labourer, Rafiq spent a winter digging canals in Panchagarh, worked as a construction-worker in Rangpur and pulled rickshaws in Dhaka besides the innumerable days he spent as a day-labourer in other cities.

"I did not think myself as a farmer any more. I was not sure what profession I would have to take the next day to feed my wife and four children," Rafiq recalls.

The barren land meant that the area was squalid with the imprints of poverty that can still be seen in Barind where a

famine-like situation still drives the farmers away and the green of nature has not touched the dry land as yet.

Things have changed when a government official, Asaduzzaman, from Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation challenged foreign experts who said that no water can be extracted from beneath the surface in the area. He sank a tubewell 250 feet underground, to begin with.

After the initial success, Asaduzzaman went on to install deep tubewells in the dry fields in 1986, which by now has given the lifeline to farmers in all 49 Baring upazilas, including Rafiq's.

In what came to be known as the Barind Multipurpose Development Project, one of the rare self-sufficient and efficient wings under the agriculture ministry, arable land has expanded from a paltry 129,000 acres to 531,000 acres in 18 years. The project has now as many as 6,274 deep tubewells.

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The Iraq flag is waved from the car of Iraqi Major General Jassem Mohamed Saleh, who will command the newly-formed Fallujah Protection Army, upon his arrival to the US military checkpoint at the entrance of Fallujah yesterday. Two US marines, right, rest prior to leaving their temporary base in the city of Fallujah.



PHOTO: AFP

Khulna outlaws and criminals use arms whose licence not renewed since '50

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna

Licences for over 11,000 firearms out of 17,000 issued since 1950 in Khulna district have not been renewed and the unlicensed arms are now in the hands of outlaws and other criminals, official sources said.

About 2,000 listed criminals in the city and the district, mostly belonging to outlawed organisations, hold these illegal arms including revolvers and pistols. They also possess AK-56 and AK-47 rifles, SLRs (self-loading rifles), nine-shooters and pipeguns, said sources in Khulna Metropolitan Police, district administration and intelligence agencies and at the office of the deputy inspector general of police.

Two factions of Purba Banglar Communist Party, New Biplobi Communist Party, Biplobi Communist Party, Chhinnamul Communist Party and some other outlawed organisations mainly possess the illegal arms.

Moreover, armed cadres of godfathers in different political parties hold many of the unlicensed arms.

Licences for only 5,500 have so far been renewed. A list of 357 people has been sent to different authorities and to district police across the country in a bid to seize the unlicensed arms, the sources added.

Meanwhile, 82 firearms looted from police and ansars in the district in 2002 are yet to be recovered. Only three of 19 rifles looted from Daulatpur Jute Mills Ansar camp at Khalishpur on April 24 last year have so far been recovered.

The list of criminals prepared before launching the Operation Clean Heart last year included 160 godfathers, who hold positions in different political parties. Only 34 arms were recovered during the Operation Clean Heart and Operation Spider Web.

Huge arms and ammunition previously possessed by notorious criminal Ershad Shikder, who is to be hanged shortly, have not been recovered yet. Over 200 of these arms are now allegedly in the possession of two influential ward commissioners of the city corporation, a former ward commissioner and a political leader.

Police stations on high alert

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

All police stations, camps and outposts in Khulna have been put on high alert after the Janajuddho faction of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) issued death threats in letters to police officials.

Security was also tightened at the Khulna Press Club where the extremist organisation mailed leaflets Thursday afternoon containing similar death threats.

The leaflets referred to the murder of journalist Manik Saha who the PBCP said was liquidated for not supporting the elimination of "class enemies" as part of its ongoing

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CONGRESS SAYS Sonia candidate for top job

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's main opposition Congress party, boosted by a strong showing in exit polls, said yesterday its choice for prime minister if it wins a tight national election.

Sonia, widow of assassinated former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, has been attacked for her foreign birth by the ruling Hindu nationalists in the election that ends in just over a week.

After playing down the issue of who would be prime minister for most of the campaign, the Congress now says there is no other contender in the grand old party.

Television exit polls from the first three rounds of voting up to Monday said Congress, helped by hectic campaigning by Gandhi and her daughter, Priyanka, and son, Rahul, had made strong gains although it still trailed the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party-led coalition.

"If the Congress gets majority on its own, Sonia Gandhi will be prime minister," said party spokesman Abhishekh Manu Singhvi.

Two more rounds of voting, including in the giant heartland state and key to power in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, are due next Wednesday and May 10.

Birth no issue Congress, which ruled for decades after independence from Britain in 1947, could win anything from 190 to 210 seats, along with its allies, far

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Prayer Timings		
May 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-15	4-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-31	6-35
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Abductors kill hostage

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Kidnappers have slaughtered a bus driver three days after they abducted him, as his family members failed to pay ransom.

Police yesterday recovered the five-part sliced body of Shariful Islam, 24, son of late Shamsul Haq of Harishankarpur, from the Garai River near Sheldidah in Kumarkhali.

Family sources said a gang allegedly belonging to Hamidul-Rashidul group, which had a feud with the victim over social matter, stormed into Shariful's house and picked up him at gunpoint at about

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Red tape halts language labs

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Bureaucratic tangles and corruption have stalled the Tk 9 crore language laboratory project aimed at enhancing English and Arabic language skill of students and job-holders having at least a Secondary level certificate for jobs abroad.

The education ministry first halted the project for alleged corruption and then for a legal battle by a supplier of books for the project alleging violation of contract by the education directorate.

The ministry is now considering scrapping the project as it could not be implemented even in two years,

sources in the ministry said.

The four-party alliance took up the project as part of its 100-day programme after it came to power and it was scheduled to be implemented in less than a year.

Officials said the ministry is likely to initiate a new project with similar features to replace the present one, considering its importance.

The education boards will implement the new project, if it is taken up. Initially, six language laboratories are to be established at six divisional headquarters.

The project would immensely benefit jobless youths as proficiency in English and Arabic is greatly

helpful in getting overseas employment, the officials said.

The existing project first hit the snag when a section of unscrupulous officials of the education directorate in connivance with some book suppliers tried to procure unnecessary reading materials without consulting experts to misappropriate huge amounts of money, sources alleged.

The directorate had floated a tender for supply of 458 books in English and Arabic, most of them allegedly unnecessary in learning the languages.

The list of books was prepared

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Outlaw lynched in Rupsha

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An armed cadre of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) was found dead yesterday in a paddy field at Shamantashena under Rupsha upazila.

Police said Jalil Shaikh, 30, was lynched by a mob. But locals alleged that he was beaten to death by the joint forces. They recovered the body in the morning and sent it to Khulna Medical College Hospital morgue.

When asked, the police superintendent refuted the allegation of involvement of the joint forces in the

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