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The Daily Star

TODAY'S ISSUE 20 PAGES

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REGD. NO. DA 781 • VOL. XIV No. 114 • DHAKA SUNDAY MAY 16, 2004 • COMMITTED TO People's Right to Know • JAISTHA 2, 1411 BS • RABI-UL-AWAL 25, 1425 HURI • 20 PAGES PRICE: Tk 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

BIMAN STAFF-TRAVEL AGENTS NEXUS Hajis cheated out of Tk 2cr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

About 1,000 Hajj pilgrims and the national flag carrier got cheated of over Tk 2 crore during the last Hajj season due to a nexus between a section of Biman officials and travel agencies.

Sources said the agencies charged a government-fixed rate of \$1050 each as Dhaka-Jeddah return fare from these pilgrims under private management. But they deposited \$660 to Biman showing the tickets to be of Umrah group category.

During the Umrah period of April to November, Biman offers a special discount in fare on this route, which is not applicable at other times.

This means Biman lost \$390 or Tk 22,815 per ticket with the total amounting to about \$ 3,90,000 or Tk

2,28,15,000. None of the Hajj pilgrims however got any benefit out of this unauthorised 'discount' in fare.

Sources pointed out that such unauthorised deals between an unscrupulous section of Biman officials and some travel agencies have long been depriving the national airlines of huge sums in revenue. But the scams remained undetected, they added.

It was found that a ticket issued by Kazi Air International (Pvt) Ltd, a travel agency allegedly backed by some high officials of Biman, on January 21 this year was shown to be of Umrah group category.

Umrah ticket fare is \$840 for individuals but travel agencies always take the advantage of Umrah group fare that allows a group of five to buy ticket at \$725 each. The agencies give Biman \$660 keeping their

commission of nine percent.

Biman cannot issue any return ticket to travellers other than the pilgrims during the Hajj season of January-March. During the last Hajj season, Biman carried 20,000 of the 40,000 pilgrims.

Mahmoodur Rahman, director, marketing and sales, of Biman, admitted the issuance of Hajj tickets at Umrah rate. "We have received allegations and we are now investigating those to find out the travel agencies and Biman officials involved in the incident," he said.

He however did not say anything about the action the travel agencies and Biman officials would face.

Travel agency sources said the agencies deserve cancellation of Biman approval as well as licence for such financial crimes.

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Constitution change bill set to be passed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14th constitution amendment bill with eight provisions including introduction of 45 reserved seats for women and rise in the retirement age of supreme court judges is set to be passed today amid protests by the opposition.

The main opposition Awami League (AL), which strongly opposes the bill terming the judges' retirement age provision as 'politically-motivated', will not attend the Jatiya Sangsad in protest.

Frontline AL leaders took the decision last night in consultation with party President Sheikh Hasina. Hasina, also the leader of the opposition, at a rally in Paltan earlier asked the government to withdraw the bill.

"They are bent on passing the law to cling to power, but people won't accept the provisions," she said.

The left-leaning 11-party alliance, which has no representation in parliament, yesterday asked the government to refrain from passing the bill, saying the alterations would further compound the constitution.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Congress chooses Sonia for PM

Leftists endorse her leadership, hold discussion on joining federal government

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's Congress chose Sonia Gandhi yesterday to be the next prime minister, two days after her party won a stunning victory against BJP-led alliance in general elections.

Although the election of 58-year-old Italy-born widow of slain prime minister Rajiv Gandhi as Congress Parliamentary Party leader was a formality, it assumes significance ahead of her being chosen formally as the leader of lawmakers belonging to parties which are allies of Congress and set to join a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



Congress President Sonia Gandhi, right, leans forward to be given a sash in party colours by an unidentified newly elected MP during the parliamentary party meeting at Parliament House in New Delhi yesterday.

AHSANULLAH MURDER Statements link Jubo Dal leader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three of the First Information Report (FIR)-named accused in the Ahsanullah Master murder case yesterday gave statement linking local Jubo Dal leader to the killing of the lawmaker, Criminal Investigation Department (CID) sources said.

The First Class Magistrate's court in Gazipur yesterday placed each of the three accused on a 10-day remand.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) police yesterday filed a petition seeking 10-day remand for Mahub, Monir and Dalal, the three First Information Report (FIR)-named accused who were picked up from a house at North Badda.

CID officials in hearing of the petition said all of the three arrestees are FIR (first information report) named accused and they need to be intensively interrogated to ascertain possible leads to the killing.

Meanwhile an officer in the CID

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AL, 11-party, Bikalpa Dhara for unity against govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Key leaders of the Awami League (AL), 11 left parties and Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) yesterday underscored a broad-based unity of like-minded parties to unseat the present government and sew up a responsible administration.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina urged all democratic, secular and pro-liberation forces to forge a greater unity in an effort to what she termed unseat the present government failing to deliver and govern the nation.

"It's time to unitedly resist the misrule of the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government, setting aside all differences," she said in a speech to a rally at Paltan Maidan,

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Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury discusses some points with Awami League President Sheikh Hasina after his speech at a Paltan Maidan rally organised in memory of slain AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master yesterday.

Efforts to salvage sinking Chinese ship fail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A rescue team failed to salvage a sinking Chinese ship at the outer anchorage of Chittagong Port until yesterday evening.

The cargo vessel, MV Un Lu Jiang developed a leak at its base after a gusty wind drifted it from the port channel near Patenga coast on Wednesday, port sources said.

The vessel loaded with over 12,000 metric ton of fertiliser started to sink as seawater flowed into its hatch, they added.

On the half-sunken ship, Quamrul Hossain, deputy conservator of the port, said it developed an opening after it hit a sunken wreck near the channel.

"Our rescue team has been trying to salvage the ship with our tugboats, but it could not be floated," he added.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

India is truly shining, now

MAHFUZ ANAM

India may not have been shining because of what the Vajpayee government did but it is definitely shining because of the majesty of democracy that the Indian electorate has demonstrated in the just-held elections.

India today is truly shining because of the conduct of the Indian voters, the Indian political parties and the Indian political leaders (Modi and gang aside).

India is also shining because of the performance of its Election Commission, its bureaucracy, both central and state, and its law-enforcement agencies including the army that worked under the EC. Finally, India is shining because of the smoothness with which power

transfer is taking place.

As a co-member of Saarc, as another country practicing democracy, as a partner in the struggle against poverty, as a member of the developing world, and as a fellow South Asian country we feel proud at what India has achieved as a democracy. Not only India is the biggest democracy, following this election India can also claim to be a highly matured democracy.

Let's start with the conduct of the electorate. It is simply amazing what millions of poor, illiterate, economically backward, caste-ridden and ethnically and linguistically different masses were able to sense that the sophisticated Indian media, the high-tech analysts and the intellectuals totally missed. Most, if not all, educated guesses went in favour of

the BJP and its allies while the electorate thought otherwise.

It was the neglect of the core issues of development like poverty, sanitation, water supply and education that did Vajpayee and his allies in. Seldom have the masses spoken with such clarity and firmness and with such a devastating effect. If there is any message from this election it is that voters can make a change. What is even more significant is that poor and disadvantaged voters can make a change, and they have. What can be a more heartening message for the believers of democracy than such a resounding assertion of peoples' voice?

The Indian political parties and its leaders deserve kudos for playing within the rules of the game and not

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

4 shot, trader stabbed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Criminals yesterday shot and injured a Jatiyabadi Jubo Dal leader and three others while a gang stabbed a trader in separate incidents in the capital.

A gang allegedly belonging to Tofazal group shot and wounded Nuru Mian, 25, organising secretary of Jubo Dal unit of Galistan and supervisor of Baishakhi bus counter, at Fulbaria at about 4:30pm after he told them not to set up a bus counter near his business, sources said.

He was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), they added.

Ramma police, however, could not provide details about the incident till 8:20 in the evening.

A gang of nine opened fire indiscriminately in front of Toab Store at Sheikh Sahab Bazaar in Lalbagh at around 2:30pm as the shop-owner Shafiqur Rahman, 35, refused to sell goods to them on credit, sources said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Police to get big revamp

Dhaka to have 28 new cop stations; highway, marine police to be formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has sketched a massive build-up and restructuring programme for police which envisages recruiting 19,277 new cops, setting up 28 new police stations in the capital and forming separate corps for highways and waters.

Under the three-year strategic plan drawn by the home ministry, another seven new police stations will be established in the areas adjacent to Dhaka - Gazipur, Savar, Keraniganj, Narayanganj and Narsingdi. A riot control division

(RCD) and a bomb disposal unit will also be commissioned in Dhaka metropolis to cope up with its awful crime situation.

The scheme presented at the 33rd meeting of the cabinet committee on law and order yesterday noon by the inspector general of police also allots an RCD for the port city of Chittagong.

The high-powered body approved the plan in principle, which proposes to raise the number of police stations to 565 across the country and to 50 in the capital from the present 22. The new recruits will

raise the number of police in the country from around 108,000 to over 127,000.

The reorganisation will augment the police-people ratio to 1:1070 from the existing 1:1300, the lowest in the world. In India the ratio is 1:728 and in Pakistan 1:623.

The plan also calls for raising the sub-inspector-constable ratio from the present 1:13 to 1:10 with a view to infuse more dynamism in supervision, investigation and case management.

Local Government and Rural

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Villagers pour acid on 11 pirates' eyes

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Villagers on Friday night caught a dozen of pirates and poured acid into their eyes in Dashmina upazila in the district.

The pirates who were on a looting spree on Bura Gouranga river were handed over to Dashmina Police at 10:00am yesterday.

At least 15 villagers were injured while confronting the pirates. Of the injured, Shanu Mollah, 48, was rushed to Barishal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

Patuakhali Police Super Aurangzeb Mahubub and local sources said an organised band of pirates engaged in robbing the travellers returning from Vania Bazar of Galachipa upazila on Friday evening. They robbed at least 20

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5.4pc revenue outlay increase proposed

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has proposed an increase in revenue expenditure by 5.4 percent because of more spending on defence, law and order, education, telecommunications and debt servicing.

The revenue budget increase proposal, sent to different ministries by the finance, comes in the wake of a deep 6.4 percent cut in development outlay this fiscal year.

The gross revenue outlay for this fiscal was set at Tk 44,736 crore. This has been increased by Tk 2,414 crore.

The ministry is now working on preparing the budget for the next fiscal with an aim to place the annual balance sheet on June 10 before parliament.

The Internal Resources Division and the Finance Division have near-

finished the task of finalising revenue income and expenditure proposal for the new budget.

Sources said the revenue income target for this fiscal may cut because of an already Tk 837 crore deficit in the first 10 months of the fiscal year.

Finance Division got an enhanced allocation of Tk 676 crore mainly because of increased debt servicing. Defence ministry allocation increased by Tk 243 crore, home ministry Tk 237 crore because of creation of the Rapid Action Team, primary and mass education ministry received Tk 129 crore extra fund, education ministry Tk 237 crore because of allowance of 10 percent dearness allowance to teachers and Prime Minister's Office Tk 12 crore, among others.

FM hopes new Indian govt won't go for schemes like river-link

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday hoped that the new government in India would not undertake any scheme like reported river-linking project detrimental to Bangladesh's interest.

Talking to diplomatic correspondents at his office, he said regional leaders should make joint efforts for water management in the region ensuring the interest of both upper and lower-riparian countries in accordance with international laws.

About the outgoing BJP government's planned river-linking project, Khan said Bangladesh was not officially informed of the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

HC asks govt why judge Shahidur's removal not illegal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sacked High Court additional judge Syed Shahidur Rahman yesterday filed a writ petition against his removal order, prompting the court to ask the government to explain in four weeks why the removal order should not be declared unconstitutional.

Shahidur was removed from the High Court (HC) on April 20 on recommendation of the Supreme Judicial Council following allegations of his taking bribe to fix bail in a women repression case.

The HC bench of Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Momtazur Rahman and Justice Zubaer Rahman Chowdhury issued the rule, but rejected the petitioner's prayer for a stay on the removal order till disposal of the rule.

Shahidur argued in the writ that

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Tigers in tatters

RABEED IMAM, from St Vincent

There was family picnic atmosphere on the approach road to the Amos Vale ground. Snack-basket and bag carrying dads, moms, kids, the young and the elderly even a lady on a wheelchair all heading towards the gates to the stadium with half an hour to go for the action to start.

As the two captains went to toss, the loudspeaker at the venue actually played the popular Bangla number 'Krishna ailo Radhar kunjee...' and the cheerleaders were already in their elements in their stand by the Caribbean Sea.

However there was nothing party-like for the tourists after

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Merged ministries see cut in secretaries too

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The administration under the four ministries merged into two is now being reorganised with the number of secretaries reduced to two from four.

The cabinet at a meeting on May 6 merged the Ministries of Food and Disaster Management and Relief and, Ministries of Jute and Textiles.

According to a government order, there will be only one division and one secretary in the newly formed Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

The ministry will have four wings - food, disaster management, administration and food planning and Monitoring Unit. The administration wing will be headed by an additional secretary and the other wings by joint secretaries.

The Ministry of Textiles and Jute

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