

Graft, high freight

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preferential market access to Japan and dominate global garment trade especially with the GSP (generalised system of preference) facility in the European market, low-labour cost and improved quality.

Still, they suggested, the garment sector should be well prepared to compete with other international players.

Speaking on the issue of "How to make Bangladesh more attractive to the foreign investors", Eiji Sekine, managing director of YKK Bangladesh Pre Ltd, said corruption in government offices and complexity in investment procedure and export-import process are a cause of concern for foreign investors.

"If excess freight charge and high inland haulage charge from Chittagong to Dhaka ICD continue in future foreign investors will be discouraged to invest here," Sekine said. "Besides, foreign investors are also worried because of hartals and I think there is no need for calling hartals," he added.

He also had words of hope for Bangladesh. "Things are changing and I believe Transparency International will soon change Bangladesh's position in the corruption index."

Sekine said many apparel buyers not only from the European countries but also from the US and other countries are setting up offices in Bangladesh. "I think they are coming as they are benefited

from Bangladesh and they will be benefited even after post-MFA regime."

Sotaro Nishikawa, representative of Jetro Dhaka, said the Japanese investment in Bangladesh last year stood at around \$48 million. "Japan would invest more in Bangladesh in near future," he asserted.

Toyoyuki Morita, chief executive of Prominent Apparel, Dhaka, and Takao Kobayashi, general manager of Marubeni Corporation, Dhaka, spoke on the theme, "how to export Bangladeshi garments to the Japanese textile market."

Morita said although China controls major share of Japanese apparel market, Bangladesh has an opportunity to enter into the Japanese market.

JBCCI President Matiur Rahman said the launch of newly-formed JBCCI has advanced the cause of further strengthening and promoting trade and investment between the two countries.

JBCCI Vice-President Hideo Ueno presented a paper titled 'Japanese Business Culture' that focused on how Bangladeshi businessmen can venture into Japan market. Abdul Haque, another JBCCI vice-president, also spoke.

Rafiqul Alam, president of Bangladesh Japan Information Technology (BJIT), and Hamidul Islam, general manager of BJIT, made a multimedia presentation on "how to penetrate into Japanese software market".

UCBL staff dies of burn injuries

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) staff, who was set on fire, died of her injuries at a city clinic on Monday.

With 95 percent of her body burnt, Shailla Chowdhury Irani, 30, receptionist and operator of the UCBL, died at City Hospital at about 7:30pm after a 22-day struggle.

Police sent her body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy at 11:30pm. Her relatives received the body yesterday noon.

She was buried at Charkania village of Pakundia upazila in Kishorganj. She left behind her husband and a 10-year-old son.

Shailla's colleague Ranjit Barua, who set fire on her on May 15 after discussing her with petrol on being refused an affair, jumped himself to death under a train in Motijheel area the same day.

Lara solace

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"The most significant point he made was about the mental aspect. He told the boys that before trying to win it in the middle, they had to win it in their heads. That's something Brian thought was lacking in the Bangladesh team," Faruque added.

"He showed what greatness is all about by coming to our dressing room and giving us those tips. It meant a lot to all the players," said wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud.

So what did Lara say?

"I spoke to the guys. I went to their dressing room to tell them that I was very proud at the way they played their cricket.

"This was my first Test series against Bangladesh. I know the West Indies team was down there a couple of years ago. My only encounter with Bangladesh has been in a World Cup match and a few one-dayers back in Bangladesh a few years back. They played good team cricket. They faltered in the field a bit and I think they need something similar to the West Indies. They need to understand that it's got to be each session each day for five days when you are playing Tests.

"If they get that together, they'll see that it's not a necessity to have any stars and individuals in your line-up to win games. As long as they have a good collective effort, move forward and play consistently, they're going to get that first Test result very soon," said Lara

The world record holder in Test and first-class cricket also took aside a couple of individuals and talked to them personally.

"He asked Mohammad Ashraful why he got himself out like that in the second innings stressing on the fact that a batsman should never give his wicket away even if he is batting with the last man or is in a hopeless situation," said Faruque.

Budget session

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Committee (Bac) sits at 4:30 this afternoon to decide the duration of this 12th session of the seventh parliament which begins at 5pm and to allocate time for budget discussions.

During the session, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, the new political party floated by former president Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury, joins the House represented by lawmaker Mahi B Chowdhury. Mahi had resigned from the BNP and parliament on March 10 and was re-elected by the same constituency, Munshiganj-1, in June-8 by-election.

Apart from the passage of the next fiscal year's budget, women lawmakers to the much-talked-about 45 reserved seats are expected to be elected and several laws will be passed during the session.

The AL plans to join in the session after the budget is placed, sources said, adding, taking part in the budget discussions, its lawmakers would speak on law and order situation, price-spiral of essentials and corruption.

The main opposition started its boycott of the JS proceedings on June 25, 2003. After 11 months, it returned to parliament for one day on May 12 last to participate in an obligatory request for its slain lawmaker Ahsanullah Master.

To her deputies, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh

Hasina expressed her eagerness to participate in the budget session. Hasina has to attend the session also to save her membership in parliament, as she has been absent for about 80 consecutive days from its proceedings.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid told The Daily Star yesterday that they had not decided yet when they would join the House. "It's certain that we are not joining the inaugural day of the budget session. But we are eager to participate in the session."

The AL will hold its parliamentary party meeting next week to decide its strategy in parliament. "I'll consult the leader of the opposition on holding the parliamentary party meeting," Hamid said from his constituency in Kishorganj over telephone. He will return to Dhaka today.

Talking to The Daily Star, opposition party whip Faruk Khan said, "Let the government place the budget first, then we'll decide whether we'll join the session," adding, "If we get scope to speak, we'll join."

The AL also has not decided yet whether it will nominate its deputies to different parliamentary standing committees in the budget session. The party has representation only in six JS standing committees, and abstained from nominating deputies to other 45 committees, including those on 39 ministries.

Trauma at traumatology

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found no doctor in their rooms till now. Could you kindly treat me?"

"Are you making complaints against doctors?" Sayed asked the patient.

He said politely "No, I just request you to see me and my diagnostic reports."

The doctor then told him it was not his business to see whether doctors were in their rooms and that he should not talk about it. He should just keep on waiting outside till doctors come.

Sixty-year-old Mojibur Rahman with fractured foot bone came to the outdoor wing at about 7:00am from Dashedina in Patuakhali and was nervously waiting for a doctor in front of Room No-5. The duty doctor came at 9:30am.

Another patient, Shimu, 14, along with his father waited in front of Room No-4, where Dr Shamima came at 9:45 am. "I would not have come so early if I knew about such delayed arrival of doctors," the boy

said.

Shefali Begum, who came for treatment of her two-year-old daughter, said "I have been waiting here but don't know when a doctor will see my child."

Rubel Ahmed from Mohammadpur said, "Dr Shamima neither saw my X-ray report and other pathological test reports nor did she tell me whether my bone joint dislocation was now alright or not. She just asked me to come again on Saturday next."

Patients and hospital sources alleged many of the doctors behave this way mostly to compel patients to see them at their private chambers.

Nitor Director Prof Sirajul Islam said, "Doctors are not supposed to come at 9:30 am or later. As patients' ticket entry starts at 8:00 am, they must be on duty by 8:30am at the latest."

"I will take steps to improve the situation," he added.

Revenue ombudsman

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and is expected to change the garment exports in a big way from January 2005.

As all these measures call for huge spending, the budget for FY 2004-05 has been designed at a massive figure of Tk 60,000 crore, Tk 8,000 crore higher than the current one.

The demands for the new but unavoidable expenditures come at a moment when the government has become more cash-strapped than ever, as the country for the last few years has been getting progressively lesser amounts of foreign aids.

In the first nine months of the current fiscal year, low-cost foreign deficit financing has seen a 69-percent or Tk 2,448-crore decline to stand at Tk 1,070.99 crore, compared to the corresponding period of the previous fiscal year. High-cost domestic deficit borrowing on the other hand has increased over the period by 22.45 percent to 3,970.25 crore.

"Such a downturn in foreign aids calls for increasing internal borrowing. But increasing domestic borrowing leads to accelerated inflation rate and bigger interest burden on the government, which the finance ministry wants to avoid," said an foreign ministry official. "That's why the government will strengthen collection of internal resources," he explained.

The new budget sees higher income prospects. It has set a target for the National Board of Revenue (NBR) 16 percent higher than the current one. "This means the NBR will have to raise more than 32,000 crore taka in the coming fiscal," an NBR source said.

In the non-NBR area, the government has set a revenue target of Tk 8,000 crore.

The combined revenue collections by the NBR and non-NBR entities will leave a deficit of about Tk 20,000 crore, which has to be covered by foreign aids and internal borrowing.

In the next fiscal year, the government also projects a lower import tax collection with a view to fulfilling the trade liberalisation conditions, sources said. "That's why the government will pay more focus on VAT [value-added tax] and income tax collection," an NBR source noted.

In this background, the decision to commission a revenue ombudsman comes as a precautionary measure so that the drive to achieve revenue target next year does not produce harassment for the taxpayers.

"The ombudsman will see whether taxes are collected justly and properly. If taxpayers feel they

Venus, Sun

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among schoolchildren of glimpsing the celestial alignment not witnessed by anyone living since 1882.

Salauddin Swapan, a student of University of Development Alternative, said he was waiting for the rare moment -- informed by the media a few days ago. "I was worried about the weather as the cloudy sky hinders visibility of the sun."

The spectacle could be witnessed, weather permitting, by five billion people in a giant swathe stretching from Australia to America, embracing all Europe, Africa and much of Asia, AFP reports.

The special alignment of the Earth and Venus required to bring about such an event occurs in irregular pairs, with the next set for 2012.

"The event 2012 may not be the same as today's as the orbit is not quite circular," said Professor Tofazza Hossain of the physics department at Dhaka University.

He said the next transit could be witnessed from here as the latitude line runs through Bangladesh.

Earlier, astronomers cautioned that looking directly at the sun with the unaided eye, and worse still through an open telescope or binoculars can result in blindness.

The phenomenon has particular historical significance. The 17th and 18th century transits were used by the astronomers of the day to work out fundamental facts about the solar system.

Employing a method of triangulation (parallax), they were able to calculate the distance between the Earth and the sun -- the so-called astronomical unit (AU) -- which is about 149.6 million km.

This allowed scientists to get their first real handle on the scale of the solar system and the universe beyond.

13 die

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Hospital sources said a Dhaka bound bus hit Golam Mostafa Rubel, 18, a first year student (Science Group), while he was crossing the road near Ayesha Mosharrar Market at around 12:30pm.

Fatally injured Rubel was rushed to Orthopaedic Hospital and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), where he succumbed to his injuries in the evening.

Son of Asadullah Mian, assistant manager of Bangladesh Bank in Motijheel, was returning to his residence at South Dania Bank Colony from the college.

AL man

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statements of 10 witnesses who described the incident but failed to identify any of the assailants.

Meanwhile, condition of Monwara Begum and Jognu Akhter who suffered critical burns in the arson remained unchanged till yesterday. Doctors said the victims would need at least three months to fully recover from the injuries.

SUST teacher

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at 3:30pm where a board of forensic experts is expected to perform the dissection, morgue sources said.

According to the primary inquest report, the partly decomposed body had black marks in the hands and legs, stitches and bandages in the stomach and blood oozed out of the nose.

A Dhaka court ordered Gulshan police to exhume the corpse to confirm the cause of her death following a petition filed by her mother Hosne Ara Islam with the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate on Monday.

Hosne Ara, in her petition, alleged that Motawakkel and Mituli killed her daughter in a pre-planned manner by taking her to hospital in the name of treatment.

The victim's relatives yesterday claimed that the assistant professor went to her husband's apartment house in Gulshan at 11:15pm on May 26 in good health but hours later Mituli told them that Fahmida fell sick and was taken to a hospital in critical condition.

She died the next day at 10:15pm at Shamorita Hospital where she was transferred from a private clinic though her relatives insisted on her shifting to another hospital, they added.

Another trader

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Family members said they were trying to negotiate a deal with the kidnappers for Daud's release.

Harinakundu police said they have heard about the kidnap but nobody filed any case yet.

Police in Chuadanga district captured an alleged outlaw with five bombs from village Kairadanga in Alamdanga upazila on Monday.

Police said they raided the house of late Samser Malitha. Members of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) were holding a secret meeting there. Police nabbed Saker Malitha, son of Samser Malitha but could not arrest anyone else.

Police said the gang was preparing for a dacoity. A case has been filed against Saker.

Four hostages freed in Iraq

Gunmen kill American in Riyadh

REUTERS, Baghdad/Riyadh

US-led special forces have freed three Italians and a Pole held hostage in Iraq and captured some of their abductors in a bloodless rescue mission in Iraq, coalition officials say.

"This was a happy ending to a story that could have been tragic," Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi said on state television yesterday. He said the men were being flown by helicopter to Baghdad and were due to return to Italy on Wednesday.

Four Italians working for a US security firm were abducted on April 12 near Baghdad. One was killed after Italy refused to bow to demands to withdraw its 2,700 troops from Iraq. The Polish businessman was seized at his Baghdad office last week.

In Riyadh, gunmen shot dead an American who worked for a US contracting firm in the Saudi capital, the fifth assault on Westerners in the world's leading oil exporter in five weeks.

The latest killing in the kingdom, battling militants loyal to Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda network, heightened fears on Tuesday among tens of thousands of expatriates, many of whom work in the oil industry.

In Washington, a US State Department official confirmed that an American man was killed in Riyadh but said he could not provide details, pending notification of the family.

"I can confirm that an American was killed," said the US official, who asked not to be identified. "We don't yet have any details...to say who did this."

Ctg scrap

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when a third LPG tank was cut open sending gas gushing out," a shipyard worker said. "The other two tanks were sunk in the sea for sludge or chemical remains inside to wash away. The tanks will be retrieved after they become danger-free."

OBSTRUCTION TO JOURNALISTS

Earlier, a group of pressmen who went to cover the incident from the city faced obstruction on their way to the yard.

The guards and staff of the shipyard, who stopped the journalists visiting the ship, denied the gas leak.

Locals alleged some shipyard workers threatened them with dire consequences after they talked to the reporters.

All activities at the shipyard remained suspended, as Nurul Islam, the cutting contractor of Foyjun Shipbreaking Yard and general secretary of ruling BNP's Sitakunda unit, died in a city clinic early yesterday.

Locals believe Nurul died after inhaling the gas as he was at the shipyard all day when the ship was being broken.

But the clinic in its death certificate said Nurul died of a cardiac arrest.

Later, it turned out that he was taken to the clinic drunk and physicians quoting his family said he took sleeping pills shortly before 10:00pm Monday.

Unanimous support

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Chinese Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said positions on the draft were "coming close".

The US ambassador to the UN, John Negroponte, said earlier that Washington and London had made a major effort to take the views of various delegations into account during the closed-door consultations.

"We are putting it to a vote on Tuesday afternoon," Negroponte told reporters during a pause in the discussions.

Addressing the Security Council before it began discussing the draft, UN Iraq envoy Lakhdar Brahimi said it would take eight months from the time of forming an interim government before credible elections could take place.

"The solution to Iraq's current challenges will take years, not months to overcome," he said in a report on his fact-finding mission to Iraq in April.

The US rejected a proposal by France that would have given Iraq a virtual veto over operations by coalition forces in Iraq after the 30 June handover.

But later, the text was amended to cover "the full range of fundamental security and policy issues, including policy on sensitive offensive operations".

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshiyar Zebari has told the BBC that the new resolution will allow for closer co-operation on key security issues.

Police said an American was killed after gunshots were fired at his house in eastern Riyadh.

Other security sources quoted witnesses as saying the American was leaving a clinic when gunmen in a car followed him to his home and opened fire at him, killing him instantly.

The American had worked for US contracting company Vinnell, a unit of Northrop Grumman Corp which helps train the Saudi National Guard, an elite force for the pro-U.S. monarchy.

Yesterday's shooting came after suspected al-Qaeda militants shot dead on Sunday Irish cameraman Simon Cumbers, 36, and critically wounded BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner, 42, in a Riyadh area known as a militant stronghold.

Al-Qaeda militants also killed 22 people, 19 of them expatriates, in a shooting and hostage-taking spree in the oil city of Khobar last month. The assault helped push oil prices to record highs on fears of instability in the kingdom.

Plane crashes off Gabon coast, 19 feared killed

REUTERS, Libreville

A passenger plane carrying at least 29 people has plunged into the sea off Gabon and 10 people have been rescued, officials from the aircraft's operator Gabon Express say.

A French army helicopter helped rescue the 10 who were taken to a hospital yesterday in the central African country's capital Libreville. Divers were still trying to reach others trapped inside the plane hundreds of metres (yards) away from the coast.

Local fishermen were also helping in the rescue effort.

"Rescuers have managed to get into the aircraft and we are waiting to see what the outcome is," an official from Gabon's transport ministry told local television.

The plane was travelling from Libreville to Franceville in the southeast of the former French colony, via Port-Gentil, the economic capital.

One airline official and a Western diplomat said that 26 passengers, including Africans and Westerners, and three crew members were aboard the plane when it crashed.

"There seem to have been 26 registered passengers plus a pilot, co-pilot and a steward. Of those so far we know that 10 have survived and are in hospital," the diplomat told Reuters by telephone.

"The tail is sticking up out of the water. It clearly landed in such a way that some people had time to get out before it was submerged," he added.

Africa's poorly maintained airlines are prone to disaster. Three planes crashed into the ground shortly after takeoff around the continent last year.

Oil-rich Gabon, home to 1.3 million people, is one of Africa's wealthiest countries with per capita income of \$4,700 a year according to central bank figures -- many times the average for sub-Saharan Africa.

Two Indonesian volcanoes rumble

2 killed, 20,000 evacuated

REUTERS, Surabaya, Indonesia

Two volcanoes in Indonesia have spewed rocks and ash high into the air, killing two tourists and forcing the evacuation of 20,000 people, officials say.

Police said a Singaporean man and an Indonesian were killed when Mount Bromo, a popular tourist destination in East Java province, hurled rocks the size of footballs. Five other Indonesians were badly injured, police said.

A separate volcano in the country's far northeast also belched out dust and smoke yesterday, forcing authorities to evacuate as many as 20,000 people near its slopes.

Indonesia sits astride the geologically active Pacific "ring of fire". It has more than 100 active volcanoes.

Officials said towns in the area had been covered by light ash after Bromo blasted out smoke 1.8 miles high. Few people live in the immediate area of the volcano, some 46 miles south of Surabaya, the capital of East Java and Indonesia's second largest city.

Visitors climb Bromo's slopes to watch the sunrise and the volcano features on brochures that advertise Indonesia's natural wonders. But while it has long been active, erup-

tions of the 2,392-metre mountain are rare.

Mount Awu on Sangihe Island, 1,400 miles northeast of Jakarta, began spewing ash last week and authorities put residents living on the island near the Philippines on the highest level of alert on Monday.

As many as 20,000 people have been evacuated. The island's population was unclear. There are a number of islands nearby, although many are uninhabited.

"There is a lot of smoke coming out, and there are indications that it will erupt," said Samuel Dalompha, an official of the Directorate of Volcanology based on the island, part of North Sulawesi province and site of the 1,320-metre volcano.

"Earthquakes are also happening continuously, although they are still not very strong."

The island's airport had been closed, officials said.

More than 80 percent of residents in the danger zone on the island had been evacuated, but some men had stayed to guard their villages, officials added.

Scholastica

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managing committee in violation of government rules and avoids discussions with guardians, they said.

The guardians said they met the state minister for education and sought his intervention to end such a situation.

"We believe the government should come forward to break the vicious circle of English medium schools, which do not follow any government rule," said another guardian.

Speaking to The Daily Star Chairperson of the school Yasmeen Murshed however said they did not enhance annual enrolment fee by 50 per cent, rather it was enhanced to Tk 15,000 from Tk 12,000 previously.

"It is not an exorbitant rate and we fixed it keeping in view the fees in other leading Bengali and English medium schools," she said.

Yasmeen said tuition fees were enhanced considering the huge establishment cost. "We need to pay house rent and utility bills as a commercial entity despite being an educational institution," she added.

She also said students are advised to buy only school diary from a particular shop and nothing else.

If guardians have some grievances, they can be resolved by sitting across the table, she said.

B Chy demands

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He assured the bereaved family members that BDB would not let the culprits get away