

Govt positive about Tata's \$2b investment plan

UNB, Dhaka

The government is apparently positive to a proposal from major Indian industry Tata to invest \$2 billion to set up a power plant, a steel mill and a fertiliser factory in Bangladesh.

The positive signal was shown when some senior executives from Tata yesterday met a number of ministers concerned and senior government officials to pursue for the projects involving a total investment to the tune of Tk 12,000 crore.

They met State Minister for Energy AKM Mosarrat Hossain, State Minister for Power Iqbal Hassan Mahmood and Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamaluddin Siddiqui. Board of Investment (BoI) Executive Chairman Mahmudur Rahman was also with them.

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837 contract pneumonia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pneumonia continues to be the most prevalent disease in flood shelters with 837 more children reported to have contracted the infection yesterday.

Last week, doctors treating the ailing infants in medical camps across the country described the widespread outbreak of the infection of the respiratory tract, mostly in newborns, as 'very alarming'.

In the past two weeks, 55 infants died of the deadly infection, largely caused by two leading types of bacteria that attack and cause inflammation of the lung.

Characterised by cough and fast laboured breathing, pneumonia or

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Lailatul Meraj on the night of Sept 12

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Lailatul Meraj will be observed on the night of September 12 as the moon of the Hijri Rajab month was sighted yesterday.

With the sighting of the moon, counting of Rajab month will start from today.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the National Moon Sighting Committee at the Islamic Foundation yesterday with Vice-President of the committee and Secretary to the Ministry of Religious Affairs Rafiqul Islam in the chair.

After deluge, seed crisis stalks Narsingdi farmers

REAZ AHMAD, back from Narsingdi

Badly hit by the monsoon deluge thousands of Narsingdi farmers now find it difficult to recoup the losses due to a looming seed crisis pushing the seed prices to an exorbitant level.

The worst flooding of recent years has ravaged large tracts of farmlands in the vegetable-rich Narsingdi causing a Tk 96 crore loss in ruined vegetables and aman seedbeds, according to the statistics compiled by the district office of Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Now that the government is pursuing a post-flood agricultural rehabilitation programme in a meagre way, majority of the flood-affected small and marginal farmers remain out of its bound and find it almost unbearable to manage high-priced seeds for fresh plantation.

At Joshor Bazar in Raipura, long

bean seeds were selling at Tk 140 a kilogram, up from Tk 80 in normal time, Abu Taher Munshi, a vegetable farmer of Nayachar village, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Munshi, like other flood-hit farmers whose homesteads also had gone under the floodwaters destroying the seeds preserved at home, now ill-afford to buy them from the market.

Prices of bean, bitter gourd and cucumber seeds also marked a steep rise, by at least 50 percent, making post-flood life even more difficult for farmers who hoped for an immediate drive to recover from the losses in lost crops and vegetables.

Seller seller Amir Ali at Sirajnagar in Raipura told The Daily Star, "Last week I sold bean seeds at Tk 120 a kilo, compared to last season's price of Tk 60 only." Ali regretted selling up his entire stock and the missed opportunity to make more quick bucks as the same

bean seeds are now selling at a much higher rate of Tk 160 a kilo.

Abdul Hye Mridha, a vegetable grower of Brahmandhi village under Shibpur upazila in Narsingdi, invested Tk 20,000 to grow summer vegetables on a three-bigha land, but the July deluge damaged the whole lot. "If the standing vegetable plants could withstand the floodwaters, I could reap a harvest and sell the same at Tk 60,000 within the next one month," bewailed Mridha.

Deputy Director of District DAE Office Bipad Vanjan Das told The Daily Star ripe summer vegetables in 11,223 acres out of a total 12,585 acres of land were completely damaged by the flood.

Besides, aman seedbeds in 3,476 acres out of a total 5,121 acres of land and broadcast aman crops on 6,795 acres out of total 8,452 acres were totally damaged.

Bipad said the government's

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Abu Taher, a farmer of Nayachar village in Raipura in Narsingdi, clears the withered remnants of aubergine plants from his farmland ravaged by recent floods, as he prepares for fresh planting to make up for the loss.

PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN



Floodwaters erode the stretch of a road from Madartek to Trimohini in Sabujbagh, one of the low-lying areas in and around the capital still reeling under stagnated water.

POST-FLOOD PROGRAMME Saifur rules out ballooning budget

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday ruled out forming a special fund or expanding the size of the budget and said about Tk 5,000 crore set aside for maintenance and repair would be utilised for post-flood rehabilitation programme.

"Let (the ministries) spend the money first," Saifur told reporters after a meeting with

Administrator of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Mark Malloch Brown at his Secretariat office.

Brown and Saifur later told the reporters they discussed the status of UNDP projects in Bangladesh, governance and flood, among other issues. However, they did not discuss the contradicting flood damage estimates of the UN, the government and the Centre for Policy Dialogue, an independent civil society think-tank.

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Rebels force Nepal top firms to close Luxury hotel bombed

AFP, Kathmandu

Many top companies in Nepal shut down yesterday after Maoist rebels bombed a luxury hotel, raising fears for the health of the Himalayan kingdom's tourism-dependent economy.

No one was injured late Monday when two suspected guerrillas on a motorcycle threw bombs onto the tennis court of Kathmandu's Soaltee Crowne Plaza, but the hotel said it would shut down after earlier vowing to defy a rebel deadline for 24 top firms to close by yesterday.

"Most businesses have decided to close for the time being in light of the situation," said N.M. Singh, general manager of Bottlers Nepal, which distributes Coca-Cola in the kingdom.

"With the government utterly failing to protect its people, how can we run our businesses?" added Binod Shrestha, president of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

Industrialists said they would closely follow developments before deciding when to reopen.

Kathmandu has a 10-week stockpile of vital goods such as food and fuel, but businesses could raise prices if the Maoist shutdown is prolonged, said Harendra Shrestha, president of the Nepal Consumers Forum.

Most of the 24 firms threatened by the Maoists, who are waging a bloody insurgency to overthrow the monarchy, have connections with the royal family or multinationals.

The Soaltee Crowne Plaza was inherited in 1980 by King Gyanendra, who was then a prince, although a hotel statement late Monday stressed that the monarch had converted his holdings into a n

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GUJARAT RIOTS
Court reopens 2,000 cases amid bias claim

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday reopened about 2,000 cases from Hindu-Muslim riots which ravaged Gujarat two years ago amid allegations of bias by the state's Hindu nationalist government.

The court told the western state's government to set up a high-level police committee to have a fresh look at cases which were closed when investigators said they could not trace the culprits.

The sweeping judgement will affect nearly half of the estimated 4,200 riot cases recorded during the 2002 bloodshed, in which about 2,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed.

The violence broke out after an allegedly Muslim mob torched a train, killing 59 Hindus. Human rights groups claimed police often looked the other way during the riots and that state authorities have been lax in prosecuting the perpetrators.

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PM asks for steps to make up loss in education

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday asked the authorities concerned to take steps to make up the losses the students suffered during the devastating floods.

At a meeting with Education Minister M Osman Farruk, State Minister for Education Ehsanul Huq Milon and Education Secretary Faruk Ahmed at her office, the prime minister said the teachers should take extra classes, if necessary.

She also directed the departments concerned to repair the damaged school buildings for immediate resumption of classes.

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Indian pirates kidnap 10 fishermen

UNB, Sathkira

Indian pirates kidnapped 10 Bangladeshi fishermen from Raimongal river in Sundarbans early yesterday.

They threatened to kill the fishermen if a ransom of Tk 10 lakh was not paid within 72 hours.

Shyamnagar police said they were trying to rescue the fishermen.

Sources said the pirates swooped on a trawler on the Raimongal river while it was heading towards the deep sea with the fishermen aboard. They (pirates) took away the fishermen at gunpoint.

The pirates threatened to kill the fishermen if the money was not reached South Talpatty within 72 hours.

New bird species found

AFB, Manila

A new species of flightless bird has been discovered living on a tiny island in the northern Philippines where the inhabitants formerly ate them, scientists and birdwatchers said yesterday.

The bird, named the "Calayan Rail", is the size of a small crow and has dark brown plumage and bright orange-red legs and beak, said Carl Oliveros, who helped lead the joint Filipino-British expedition that found it.

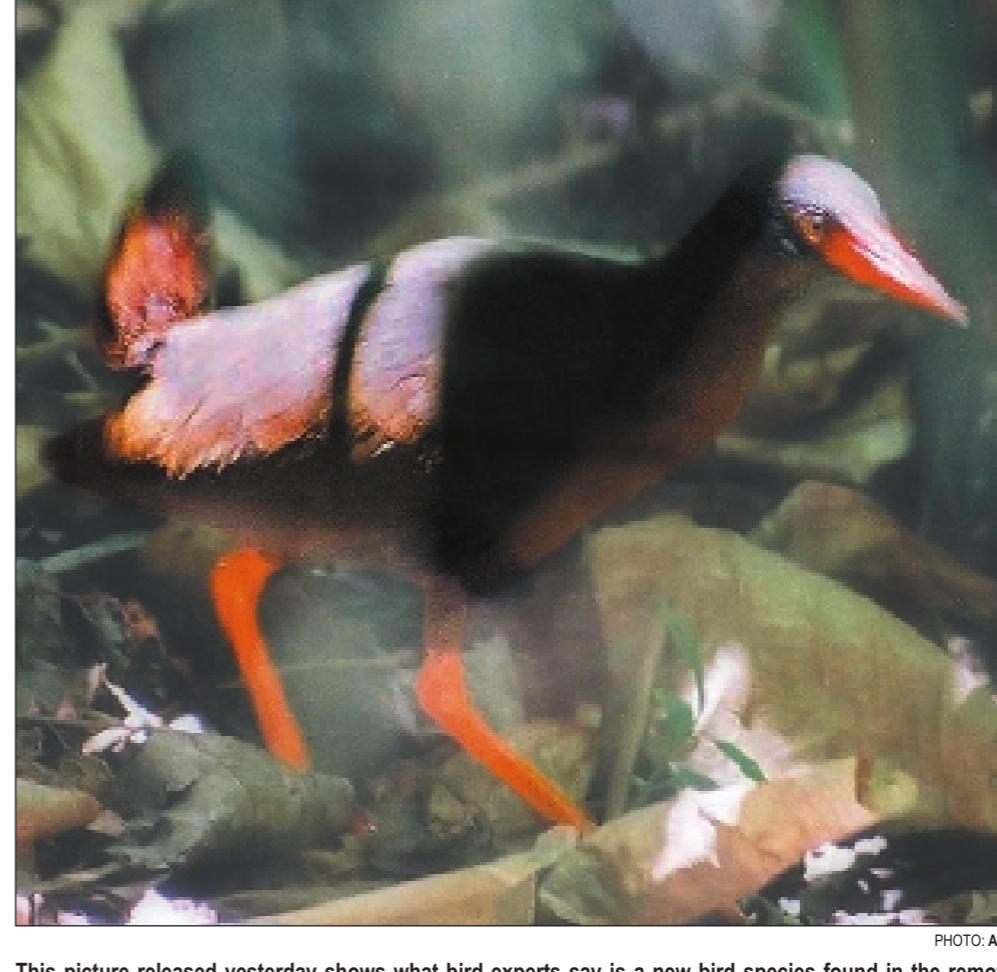
The researchers had been doing an inventory of wildlife in Calayan, which is one of a volcanic chain of islands off the main Philippine island of Luzon and can only be reached by boat, for weeks before finding the creature.

Filipino wildlife biologist Carmela Espanola made the discovery in May when she saw a group of unfamiliar birds foraging in the undergrowth as she was walking through the rainforest.

Islanders said the bird was known as "piding" and that they had even caught it for food in the past but they were unaware it was a previously unclassified species, according to Oliveros.

The new species is apparently not under immediate

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This picture released yesterday shows what bird experts say is a new bird species found in the remote northern Philippine island of Calayan. Christened the Calayan rail, the bird with its bright and orange-legs and beak is believed to be only found in the Philippines.

PHOTO: AFP

7 killed in Baghdad mortar attack Police officer, Sunni insurgent commander gunned down with aide

AFP, Baghdad

Seven people were killed, including two children, and 47 others wounded when at least one mortar bomb landed near a Baghdad police station yesterday, the health ministry said.

"Seven people were killed, two of them children, and 47 injured, including two women. The other 35 were men," said a spokesman for the health ministry.

A US soldier and a civilian security guard were also wounded when another mortar fell between the convention centre, where a key national conference began its last day, and the interim Iraqi government building, the military said.

An interior ministry spokesman said at least one mortar hit a business

district in central Baghdad, near the Bab al-Muadammen police station, on the opposite side of the Tigris river.

"At first we thought it was a car bomb, because one building was very badly damaged, but ballistic experts have concluded it was a mortar bomb," said Colonel Adnan Abdul Rahman.

Witness Saadi Shawi, 45, said there were casualties after mortar rounds hit dress-making workshops and damaged cars behind the Hader Khana mosque near Rashid street at around 11:25 am (0725).

Meanwhile, a senior Iraqi police officer was killed late Monday in the flashpoint city of Ramadi, west of Baghdad, but Sunni Muslim militants denied any responsibility in

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KERANIGANJ KILLING Youths flee as cops file case against 200

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Youths fled the Golmabazar village in Subadda union after cops filed an assault case against 200 people, linking them with the attack on a police camp at Keraniganj over the killing of rickshaw garage owner Bashir Uddin on Monday.

A tense situation is prevailing over the Golmabazar, Chulkatha, Kaliganj and Khajur Bagh areas.

Bashir's family meanwhile alleged police and cadres of the ruling BNP's student wing are trying to put down the bid to seek justice for the victim apparently beaten dead by cops.

"Some locals approached us in the morning today (yesterday) and warned of dire consequences if we file murder case against police," Bashir's daughter Sajeda Begum said.

Refusing to disclose the identity of intimidators for fear of their lives, the family members only said they are cadres of the Jatiyatabdhi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and policemen.

Witnesses said police at

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Prayer Timing		
August 18		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-38	6-41
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation