



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XV NO. 52

DHAKA THURSDAY MARCH 10, 2005

People's Right to Know

www.thedailystar.net

FALGUN 26, 1411 BS

MOHARRAM 28, 1426 HJRI

16 PAGES PLUS RISING STARS PRICE: Tk 10.00

Govt to resume canal-digging project

PM tells House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will resume the canal-digging project to develop irrigation and maintain navigation of rivers previously undertaken during the first BNP government of Ziaur Rahman.

The government has made a preliminary list of at least two canals in every upazila to be dug up under a Tk500-crore project, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia told the House yesterday during the PM's question-answer session.

"The Ministry of Water Resources has already formulated a project summary to this end and it's now under the government's active consideration," Khaleda said.

She said her government has emphasised digging the canals for irrigation, as river dredging is very much expensive. Once implemented, the project will also help get rid of waterlogging, she added.

Responding to BNP lawmaker SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

BDR, BSF trade heavy fire over fencing

2 Bangladeshis shot; tension in Kurigram over road building across Bangladeshi enclave

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

After a few days' lull, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Indian Border Security Force (BSF) exchanged several thousands bullets in two skirmishes over construction of fences along the border at Singimari in Lalmonirhat and Ramgarh in Khagrachhari yesterday.

BSF members fired mortar shells on BDR during a two-hour firefight at Singimari, our Rangpur correspondent reports quoting BDR sources.

Two Bangladeshi nationals -- Abdul Malek, 25, and his 5-year-old son Bakul, were hit with bullets during the fight at Lalmonirhat.

The fights, both at Singimari and Ramgarh, ensued when BSF members attempted to erect fences along

the border 150 yards off the zero point, violating the Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Accord, 1974, commonly known as the Mujib-Indira treaty.

Meanwhile, three BSF troops intruded into Bangladesh territory at village Sarali of Sapahar upazila in Naogaon at about 12 noon yesterday during a patrol. Locals caught them and seized their firearms.

They were handed over to the BSF authorities in the evening, BDR sources said.

Apart from Lalmonirhat, Khagrachhari and Naogaon, tension has also been prevailing at Bhurungamari in Kurigram district over construction of a pucca road by BSF yesterday across Kachua, a Bangladeshi enclave.

A top official at the BDR head-

quarters said BDR personnel have been kept on alert. They are patrolling the bordering areas round the clock.

He, however, said the fights ceased at both Singimari and Ramgarh until yesterday evening.

LALMONIRHAT
Our Lalmonirhat correspondent reports: BSF opened fire at about 3:15pm on BDR jawans when they opposed a BSF attempt to erect a fence along the Singimari border in Hatibandha upazila.

During the two-hour gunfight that scared off the inhabitants of two villages, two Bangladeshi nationals were wounded.

UNB adds: Initial reports from the frontier in Hatibandha upazila SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Galib put on 10-day remand

Cops to probe his links to anti-state cases

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Gaibandha and Rajshahi

A Gaibandha court yesterday put Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) chief Asadullah Al-Galib on a 10-day police remand in connection with two bomb blasts, while a Rajshahi court gave police 15 days to investigate his link with anti-state activities after rejecting bail prayers for him and his accomplices.

INGAIBANDHA
In Gaibandha, Galib was produced before a magistrate court in the morning. The court sent him back to jail after six minutes amid tight security, approving the 10-day remand sought by Sub-Inspector Abdul Wadud, who is the investigation officer (IO) of the Mohimaganj Brac office bomb blast case.

Seven lawyers yesterday prayed for Galib's bail. But the court refused to hear the bail petition and set the date of hearing on March 10.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

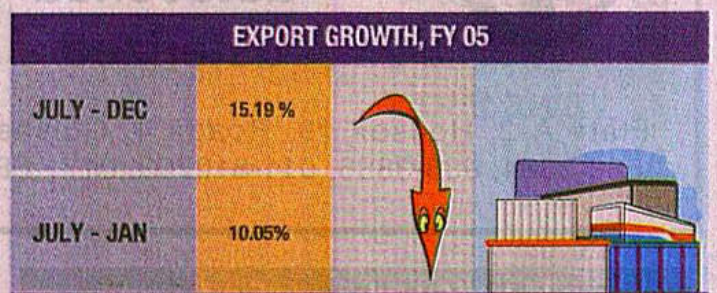
Exports nosedive as RMG stumbles

MONJUR MAHMUD

Bangladesh felt the sting of the quota-phase out just one month after it passed in January, with export earnings plummeting at an alarming rate and indicating a bleak performance in the coming months.

Bangladesh's woven exports nosedived by around 28 percent in January 2005 as compared to the same month in 2004, since the US, the major importer of Bangladesh made woven exports, gorged itself on Chinese made products, accounting for a 546 percent rise of Chinese exports during this month.

The major slump in woven exports dragged export growth down by around five percentage points in a single month. Export growth in the July-December period of the current financial year was 15.19 percent while it came down to 10.51 percent during the July-January period, according to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) statistics.



The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) termed the situation worrisome, saying the government should sit with the BGMEA to solve the problems before buyers shift their orders to other countries.

"With the quota phase out, China shipped an amount to the US in January that we could not match in the last three years combined," Annisul Huq, president of BGMEA, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The government should immediately implement Saarc and Asean cumulation to put exports on track, he said. "We have to be alert without wasting any time. The government should work to get duty-free access to the US market and solve existing bottlenecks at home immediately."

Chinese exports surged in categories like brassieres, cotton knit SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

JAGANNATH UNIVERSITY COLLEGE 50 hurt as BCL, JCD clash with Shibir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

More than 50 students were injured, 15 of them critically, in a triangular clash between Islami Chhatra Shibir on one side and Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on the other on the Jagannath University College (JUC) campus yesterday.

During the conflict that erupted at noon, leaders and activists of BNP-backed JCD and Awami League-backed BCL fought with their common opponent Jamaat-e-Islami-backed Shibir with sticks, cricket bats and stamps. They also pelted each other with brickbats, turning the college premises into a virtual battlefield for two hours.

The agitated students damaged at least five vehicles on the nearby roads. Four platoons of police rushed to the college compound

and lobbed at least 15 teargas shells to quell the situation.

WITNESS ACCOUNT
Campus sources said panic gripped the students as Shibir activists, most of them outsiders, started gathering at the main gate of the college since 8:30am.

Witnesses said Shibir activists went to the office of JUC Principal Ayesha Shirin Rahman to congratulate her on the recent government declaration to turn the college into a full-fledged university.

As the Shibir activists came out of the principal's office, BCL leaders and activists deprecated them, resulting in a scuffle between the two sides in front of the Commerce Faculty.

Soon JCD leaders and activists and a number of general students joined the BCL members at about SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Evening power ban on shopping malls

Bid to ease life for SSC examinees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the country continues to suffer from all-time high load shedding, which shoots up to 900 megawatts every day, the government yesterday decided to restrict power use at shopping malls and super markets in the evening so that household clients -- particularly the SSC examinees -- can receive an uninterrupted power supply.

A high powered meeting at the ministry of power yesterday decided to ask the operators of large shopping malls not to use government supplied power during peak hours from 6pm to 10pm.

"We will encourage shopping centres to immediately start the use of their own captive power during the peak hours. If they do not heed the government's call, we will stop

the supply to them," Iqbal Hasan Mahmood, state minister for power, told the newsmen after the meeting.

He said the restriction is necessary because ensuring an uninterrupted power supply particularly for the sake of SSC and HSC examinees will be impossible in the present situation.

The power ministry estimates that about 600 megawatts of electricity from the present consumption level could be saved in the evening if super markets and shop owners operate with their own generators.

The business community, however, expressed surprise over the government decision, claiming it was taken without their consultation.

"We are ready to comply with the SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

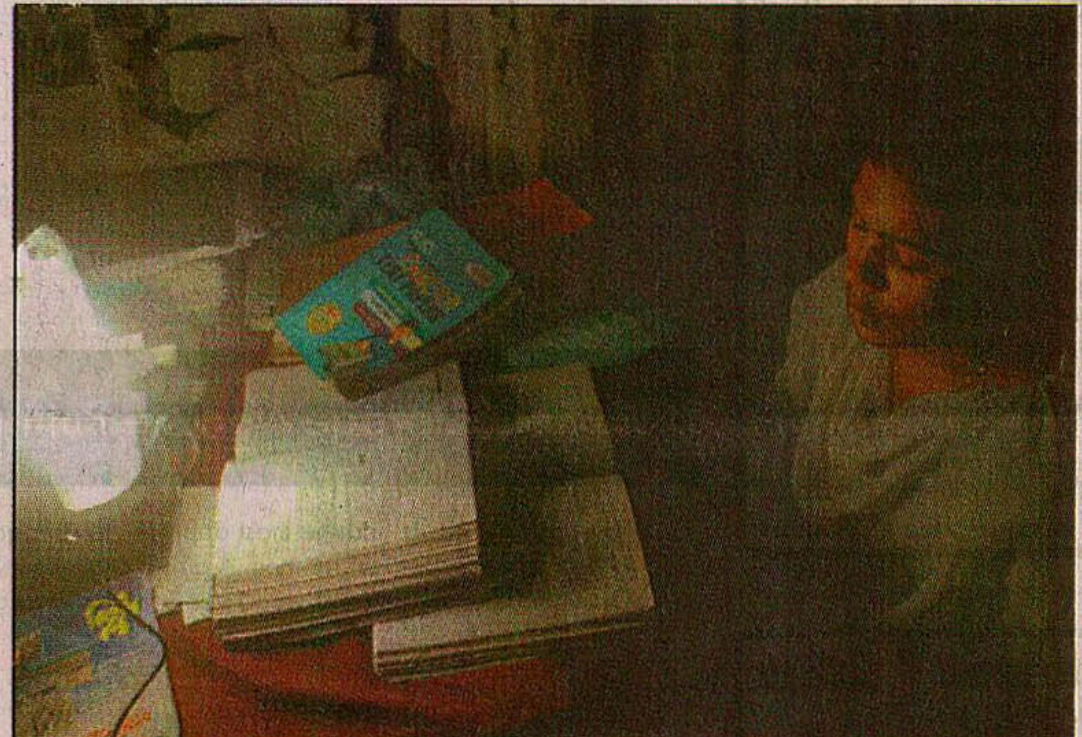


PHOTO: STAR

Frequent load-shedding forces Taslima Akhter of the city's Gopibag to use a rechargeable lamp yesterday to prepare for her SSC exams that begin today.

SSC exams begin today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Secondary School Certificate (SSC), Dakhil and SSC Vocational examinations under nine education boards begin today with the English first paper.

The education ministry has taken all-out measures to hold the examinations in a peaceful academic atmosphere.

As many as 9,55,365 examinees SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

ACC in dilemma over Bac cases

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) does not know whether it has jurisdiction to run 4,000 under-trial cases filed earlier by the now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac).

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan yesterday said he will SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

RUN...CHITTAGONG...RUN

Run with the wind behind you and the passion within you through the streets of Chittagong. It's the Maltova Recharge Marathon. Jumpstart from Prabartak More, rehydrate at our Maltova Recharge Points in between and finish up outside the M A Aziz Stadium, where confetti, crests, certificates and gift hampers await the fastest three.

Marathon date: Friday, March 18, 2005
Starting point: Prabartak More
Finishing point: M A Aziz Stadium
Flag off: 9:00 am, Prabartak More
Track length: 3.5 km (approx.)

Maltova Active Rechargers

MARATHON2005

Entry forms available at selected outlets and also at: Maltova Recharge Marathon 2005 Office, 15B Chatterway Road, The City Health (2nd Floor), Chowk Bazar, Chittagong 4000 or call 031-623117/0189362367. Last date of registration is March 16.

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