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PM flies to Singapore today

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia goes to Singapore today, the first by a Bangladeshi leader in decades, aiming to explore new avenues of economic and commercial cooperation with the southeastern business bastion.

In the context of government's "Look East" policy and economic diplomacy, the three-day official tour of the prime minister is seen as "significant" on various counts, new Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin told reporters on the eve of the visit.

Khaleida will hold official talks with Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsein Loong on March 21 reviewing the entire gamut of bilateral

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Dumped into desert

24 Italy-bound Bangladeshis return after languishing in Sahara, Mali jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Less than a month into the Mediterranean tragedy, yet another horrible story came to light yesterday as 24 Bangladeshi fortune-seekers returned home a year after travel agents had sent them to western African country of Mali promising to get them job in Italy.

The manpower agents dumped the unsuspecting youths in the deep Sahara desert where they wandered for a few days with no food and water and were thrown into jail in Mali after police rescued them from the deep desert.

Manpower agents Monir and

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PHOTO: STAR

A relative hugs one of the 24 Bangladeshi fortune seekers at the airport as they returned home from African nation of Mali yesterday.

Petrol import may stop to check octane adulteration

UNB, Dhaka

The government is likely to stop the import of petrol in a bid to check the adulteration of octane.

Octane sells at Tk 35 per litre while the price of petrol is Tk 33 per litre.

But it is alleged that a section of dishonest petrol pump operators are adulterating octane by mixing petrol with it to make extra profit.

State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain said after the present stock of petrol exhausts, the government will stop its import.

"We will ask the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to

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Jatrabari flyover gets govt nod

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs yesterday approved in principle the seven-kilometre Jatrabari flyover project to be implemented by a joint venture of Bangladesh, United Arab Emirates and India under a 'build, own and operate (BOO)' basis.

If the prime minister endorses the cabinet body nod, Orion of Bangladesh, UAE's Belhasa and Indian Acom will work together to connect the city's Jatrabari with Gulistan in 30 to 36 months at a cost of Tk 700 crore.

The flyover will have seven exit-entry points including one at Tikatuli and one at Syedabad.

But, this is going to be a paid ride

for city commuters. For a five-kilometre flyover trip, a motorcyclist will have to pay Tk 5, a CNG autorickshaw Tk 10, car Tk 35, jeep Tk 40, microbus Tk 50, minibus Tk 100 and trailer Tk 200.

It was also proposed that the toll rates would be increased every three years to match the inflation. The Orion-Belhasa-Acom will collect the tolls for 24 years under the BOO contract.

The joint venture will get a 15-year tax holiday, although the finance minister who chairs the committee meetings earlier down-right rejected the idea. The government's draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) also discourages tax holiday.

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Rice finds Bangladesh becoming 'quite troubling'

BDNEWS, Dhaka

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has said Bangladesh is becoming "quite troubling" and there is more that the USA and India could do.

"There is more that we probably need to do on Bangladesh which, I think, a place that is becoming quite troubling. So in the region, there is a great deal that we can do," she said in an interview with Raj Chengappa of India's leading magazine 'India Today'.

As Chengappa asked on the South Asia region saying, 'we're

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MEGHNAGHAT POWER PLANT Rookie consortium set to get contract

PDB under political pressure, seeks cabinet body nod tomorrow

SHARIEF KHAN

Under the influence of a political lobby, the Power Development Board (PDB) tomorrow seeks approval of the Cabinet Purchase Committee to award a contract to set up the 450 megawatt second phase Meghnaghat Power Plant to an inexperienced consortium.

The UAE-based trading company Belhasa along with newly

formed Bangladesh Orion Power Company showed an experienced Japanese power company -- Nissho Iwai Corporation -- as the 'lead sponsor' to pre-qualify in the tender for this power plant back in September 2003.

But after pre-qualifying, Belhasa changed the name of the lead sponsor to BN Consortium while submitting bid. Getting away with new

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Galib denied bail again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A weary looking Asadullah Al Galib, chief of Able Halith Andolan, was denied bail yesterday by the Gaibandha magistrate court in two consecutive bomb blast cases.

He was later sent to Gopalganj, where he will face a nine-day remand.

It was the second time Galib appeared before the Gaibandha magistrate court in connection with the bomb cases. At the same time, 15 other militants arrested in the same cases were also produced before court.

Galib's defence lawyer, Sirajul Islam Babu, had prayed for bail, but after it was denied the court fixed a

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WITHDRAWAL OF 2 EU ENVOYS New foreign secretary not aware of move

UNB, Dhaka

New Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin expressed his ignorance of the reported government move to request two European countries to withdraw their envoys from Dhaka for their interference in internal political affairs.

"I've no knowledge about it," he told his first media meeting at the foreign ministry yesterday afternoon, in the wake of a storm stirred over the issue by press reports.

Asked about the prime minister and the finance minister's critical

remarks about what they said foreigners and donors "dictate," he said, "The prime minister's statement is final and conclusive. I have no comment on it."

Asked about the reports on US-India joint initiative discussed during US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to New Delhi to deal with security concerns in Bangladesh, Hemayet avoided a direct reply, saying, "That's a speculation. I can't react to this speculation."

Hemayet, who took over the office of the foreign secretary last

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PHOTO: STAR

Khilgaon flyover, scheduled to be inaugurated Wednesday, has become a favourite spot with city-dwellers to stroll along in the evening.

pundits from pakistan
on tour with india, 2003-04

debuts at etc.
21 March 2005

From the pavilion of Pan Macmillan, the grand debut of "Pundits from Pakistan" by Rahul Bhatnagar is taking place on the pitch of Etc's Pan Macmillan Book Month.

Pundits from Pakistan - a look about the extraordinary occasion of the first proper tour by India to Pakistan - the matches, the journeys, the places, the encounters, the interviews, the moods, the players

The author, Rahul Bhatnagar, will be present for the official Book Launch to personally autograph each and every copy of the book for you.

Are you geared up for the "Tour"?

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Dravid puts India in driver's seat

REUTERS, Kolkata

India vice-captain Rahul Dravid struck hundreds in each innings for the second time in his career to help his team push for victory against Pakistan in the second Test on Saturday.

Dravid hit a masterly 135 after his first innings 110 to steer India out of trouble as they piled on 407 for nine declared in their second innings an hour after tea on the fourth day.

Set an imposing fourth innings target of 422 never achieved before, Pakistan reached 95 for one at stumps but will be confident of securing a draw after their battling display from a worse situation on Day Five in the drawn first Test in Mohali.

Attacking opener Shahid Afridi

lashed a 59-ball 59 before leg-spinner Anil Kumble removed him when he top-edged a sweep to short third man in the penultimate over.

Left-hander Taufeeq Umar was 29 not out with vice-captain Younis Khan yet to score.

Dravid had earlier anchored the India's second innings to score his 20th Test hundred and steer his team out of trouble.

The 32-year-old played a more cautious knock than his first innings effort sharing in a crucial 165-run partnership with teenage wicketkeeper Dinesh Karthik, who missed out on his maiden hundred when he was dismissed for 93.

Leg-spinner Danish Kaneria eventually removed both batsmen in successive overs.

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Abdul Muktadir, Managing Director of Incepta Pharmaceuticals receiving the Enterprise of the Year Award

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