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SAARC SUMMIT India hints at readiness to attend anytime

UNB, Dhaka

India has indicated to the Maldives its readiness to attend the twice-postponed Saarc summit in Dhaka any time convenient to other members of the seven-nation organisation, which also includes Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh.

"We discussed when the 13th Saarc summit could be convened. Both India and the Maldives are ready to meet at any time convenient to other leaders," visiting Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom said at a press conference in New Delhi yesterday.

"We hope that dates convenient for all will be identified soon," said Gayoom, who held discussions with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and other Indian leaders during his six-day visit, a PTI report

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RAJUK PLOTS BNP men grab lion's share

STAR REPORT

True to its tradition, Rajuk yesterday allocated most of the 100 residential plots in Banani and Uttara to ministers, lawmakers, ruling party leaders and their relatives, prompting critics to term the allotment 'a bid to set up two more BNP villages'.

The list of beneficiaries, published in several newspapers yesterday, shows that all the 50 allottees in Uttara and 46 of the 50 in Banani are ruling party men and their relatives.

The list comprises of 19 ministers, 52 ruling coalition MPs, the mayors of Rajshahi and Barisal, two advisers to ministries, a son of the president, sons of ministers and ruling coalition lawmakers, BNP leaders and the pro-ruling coalition vice chancellor of National University and chairman of University Grants Commission.

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SCBA ELECTION Mahbubey president, Enayetur secretary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Awami League-backed panel of Sammilito Ainjibi Parishad yesterday made a clean sweep of the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) election for 2005-2006.

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TENGRATILA FIRE Charge framed against Bapex MD

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Petrobangla has framed a charge against the managing director of Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Limited (Bapex) for his alleged neglect behind Tengratila gas fire accident.

Petrobangla on Tuesday also asked MA Based, MD of its subsidiary organisation, to clarify his position in seven days, sources said.

After receiving Based's statement, Petrobangla, the state-run oil, gas and mineral corporation, will form a one-member committee to review the entire matter, service rule and recommend next course of action.

The Energy and Mineral Resources Division, on the basis of an enquiry committee report, had earlier asked Petrobangla to take action against Based.

Major police reshuffle

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry yesterday transferred 23 senior cops in an effort to soup up the police administration.

Additional Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police Shah Zaman Raj at Dhaka Range has been given the charge of DIG in the newly formed highway department of police while six additional superintendent of police have been asked to act as superintendent of police (SP) in different regions.

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26,348 project cars in unauthorised use

Establishment ministry suggests action against misuse by 43 govt organs

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The establishment ministry has accused 43 ministries and divisions of using a total of 26,348 vehicles violating the existing rules for the use of public transports.

The ministry in a report suggested action against those responsible for the misuse and steps to identify the reasons why the ministries and divisions did not return the vehicles on completion of different development projects.

The report says the vehicles

should have been returned to the central transport pool within three weeks of the completion of the projects. But the ministries and divisions have not returned the vehicles and are still using them.

"The existing rules do not allow such usage," the establishment ministry said in its report submitted to a parliamentary standing committee yesterday. The ministry also suggested amendment to the public transport rules, if necessary.

Reviewing the report, the parliamentary standing committee on

establishment ministry endorsed the recommendations for proper use of public vehicles.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Committee Chairman Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul said the committee observed that there should be proper rules for using public vehicles as the ministries and divisions need to use these vehicles.

The report says 615 development projects were implemented from 1997 to 2004 under 43 ministries and

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Dawn-to-dusk hartal today

Hartal curtailed in
Dhaka, Gaibandha,
cancelled in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) and its left-leaning allies enforce a dawn-to-dusk hartal today across the country, except for eight hours in the capital and six hours in the tornado-hit Gaibandha district, keeping Chittagong City out of the programme.

The members of the 14-party opposition line-up called the shutdown as a part of its ongoing simultaneous movements demanding an immediate resignation of the four-party coalition government to pave way for an early general election.

The hartal has been shortened by four hours, from 6:00am to 2:00pm, in Dhaka metropolis to facilitate a demonstration called by the family

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HC INJUNCTION AGAINST AUDIT TO UNEARTH GRAFT

Govt may lose 60m euro German grant for power

SHARIER KHAN

Bangladesh is on the verge of losing a German grant of 60 million euro earmarked for two power projects of the Rural Power Company Ltd (RPCL), as a High Court (HC) injunction has stopped a German audit to unearth corruption in the projects.

The deadline for a decision on this grant, which is tagged with a condition of this audit, expires today.

According to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) sources, the government expects Germany to extend the deadline till the six-month HC injunction expires in June.

"We have not formally requested

Germany to extend the deadline yet, but we hope this grant will not be cancelled," said an ERD source.

While the government was willing to cooperate with Germany in this regard, a business lobby involved in the corruption has so far succeeded in stopping the audit as well as deteriorating the government's relationship with Germany, said an official.

Germany provides grants and loans in health, private sector development, power transmission and solar power.

The business lobby that dominates all affairs of the RPCL through its German consultant, Lahmeyer Bangladesh, apparently convinced a section of government policymakers

to ditch German aid, be it a grant or loan.

"The RPCL is now resorting to raising funds from the Palli Bidyt Samities (PBS) and has approached the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) to finance two over-priced projects to be awarded to a particular company on a term that will favour the business lobby only," said an RPCL source.

Following a report in The Daily Star in January last year on corruption in the German funded first phase of 450 megawatt Dhaka North Power Project (DNPP), the German government made an initial review and recommended that an auditor should independently review the

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PHOTO: STAR

A large number of arches have been thrown up on the road in Mirpur to greet the prime minister who is to attend a function at Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium today to celebrate hundred years of cooperatives movement.

BTTB launches cellphone, legal questions remain

ABU SAEED KHAN

The government commercially launches its cell phone service today without a valid licence, which may prompt filing of lawsuit leading to possible suspension of the service.

The telecoms watchdog transferred ownership of the licence to Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd, a state-owned company, in clear violation of the telecoms law. It had earlier issued the licence to Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) to run the mobile phone service.

"A licence and any right acquired thereunder, wholly or partly, shall not be transferable, and such transfer, if any, shall be void," says Section 37(1) of the telecoms act. This legal provision is also incorporated verbatim in clause 28.01 of BTTB's

mobile licence.

The BTTB had planned to launch the mobile service, but donors objected to the state telecom operator's running the service on grounds of its incompetence.

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnc) accordingly on September 17, 2002 segregated the proposed cellular mobile from BTTB's portfolio and asked it to be operated by an independent entity.

But a defiant BTTB decided to go on its own and obtained a cellular phone operating licence alongside the radio frequency from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) on September 1, 2004.

The BTTB also claimed the state-owned mobile network's ownership and signed memoranda of under-

standing for interconnection with the private mobile operators on December 23, 2004.

However, the telecoms ministry established Teletalk Bangladesh Ltd. on December 26, 2004 to run the mobile phone business. Two days later, the prime minister spoke to the president using the state-owned mobile phone service, which was publicised as the soft-launch of Teletalk.

In reality, Teletalk neither has a licence nor it has frequency. It has also not acquired the assets and liabilities of BTTB's mobile network, which means the soft-launch is inconsistent with the law, according to Section 35 of the telecoms act.

The telecoms ministry failed to convince the outgoing BTRC commissioners to transfer the BTTB's

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PM calls for more private medicare initiatives

Apollo hospital opens on high hopes

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said her government is updating the national health policy as part of its relentless effort to enhance the quality of healthcare to ensure people's access to improved medicare.

"Access to healthcare is a basic right of the people," she said while inaugurating the most modern hospital with a call for the private sector to supplement government efforts.

"It is not possible on part of the government alone to ensure this rights of all citizens due to resource constraints, but medicare facilities can be provided through setting up new hospitals," she stated.

The 450-bed world-class Apollo Hospital in the Basundhara housing enclave will have over 60 speciality medical departments to provide all high-end medical services.

Promoted in Bangladesh by STS Holdings Limited, the 38th branch of worldwide hospital chain in Dhaka is equipped with world's latest technologies.

The prime minister in her speech said that it is possible to create modern treatment facilities in the country through private initiative.

Khaleda listed the incentives introduced by her government for setting up modern, specialised and referral hospitals in Bangladesh.

"The referral hospitals can now import necessary equipment duty-free. Taxes have been reduced on some lifesaving medical items," she pointed out.

"We have a new infrastructure guideline that paves the way for building quality hospitals by foreign investors," she said, hoping that entrepreneurs from home and abroad will come forward in a big way to set up more hospitals in the country.

She lauded the decision of Apollo Hospital authorities to keep 10 percent beds free of charge for the poor and hoped that others would follow suits.

The PM urged the authorities to keep fees for treatment of various complex diseases and tests to a tolerable limit.

She told the audience that the government is formulating laws to ensure the standard of service in the private hospitals. "A policy would soon be announced for private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres," she said.

She also informed that appointment of foreign doctors in exchange for technology transfer to the foreign-invested hospitals is being considered by the government, which, she hope, will help enrich local doctors' experience.

She also mentioned her government's efforts in the health sector,

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MP's son beats up traffic cop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The son of a ruling BNP lawmaker yesterday beat up a traffic constable on Manik Mia Avenue after he stopped the car of the lawmaker's son for defying the red signal.

The youth got down from the car that was heading for Asad Gate from Dhanmondi and introduced himself as a son of BNP lawmaker from Jessore-1 constituency Ali Kadar, police said. He also rebuked Constable Abdul Majid, prompting the latter to brawl with the youth at

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Jamaat MP refused Danish visa for 'tampered' passport

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Danish Embassy in Dhaka last month refused visas to a ruling Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker, his wife and son, and seized their passports on the grounds that those were grossly tampered with, sources said.

The embassy found clear evidence of gross forgery in the passports and informed the foreign ministry of the matter. It also requested the foreign office to take necessary steps.

Jamaat-e-Islami MP Mizanur

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Saarc secretary general due tomorrow

BSS, Dhaka

Secretary General of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Chenkyab Dorji arrives in Dhaka tomorrow on a three-day official visit.

He will be accompanied by his wife and Director of the Saarc Secretariat Sufur Rahman, said a foreign ministry source.

During the visit, the Saarc secretary general is expected to pay a

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