

HORROR STRIKES AT SAVAR



PHOTO: STAR

A nine-storey garments factory collapsed at Savar in the early hours of yesterday, leaving at least 22 people dead and 350 others trapped. (Clockwise from top left) Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visits the victims at Savar Military Hospital yesterday; a fire service man tries to communicate with those trapped under the rubble; people walk on the rubble of the building and army men search for the victims trapped under the rubble.

Protect forestlands from land grabbers

Tariqul asks DCs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment and Forest Minister Tariqul Islam yesterday asked the deputy commissioners (DCs) to enforce laws and powers vested upon them to protect forestlands from land grabbers and settle the pending cases expeditiously.

Addressing the concluding session of the three-day conference of the deputy commissioners, he said around 65,599 cases under forest act have remained pending across the country, and the pace of settlement is very slow.

The minister said, "Under the forest act, the deputy commissioners are empowered as forest settlement officer. So you (DCs) have the authority to settle cases, protect forestlands, and declare lands as reserve forest after proper survey."

He said around 14.41 lakh acres of land has not yet been declared as reserve forest.

The minister regretted that indiscriminate hill cutting is continuing in different parts of the country, and asked the DCs to stop it for maintaining ecological balance.

He laid emphasis on conducting mobile courts against black smoke emitting vehicles and marketing of polythene shopping bags for environmental improvement.

The minister informed that the government is going to launch a

three-month-long tree fair across the country on June 1, and urged the DCs to take steps to turn the tree plantation into a movement for making the country livable for future generation.

Presided over by Cabinet Secretary Dr Saadat Hossain, the session was also addressed by State Minister for Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury.

UNB adds: Agriculture Minister MK Anwar yesterday called upon the DCs to strengthen the monitoring system to make sure that the farmers get the full amounts of agricultural subsidy.

He told them to be more active to stop production and sale of adulterated fertilizer and marketing of sub-standard seeds.

The minister was speaking at the concluding session of a three-day deputy commissioners' conference at the ministry.

He apprised the district administrators that the government had raised the farm subsidy from Tk 100 crore to Tk 600 crore in the last three years. The amount would be further raised to Tk 1000 crore, including Tk 185 crore for flood-rehabilitation programme, in the current fiscal.

He asked the DCs to help establish industries at local level for processing agricultural products to ensure fair price to the farmers.

Shishu Swasthya Hospital bhaban foundation laid

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said apart from international and regional commitments, her government is implementing multifarious child development and welfare programmes as per her party's election commitments.

She said children are the future of the country and any investment to protect the future is the best investment.

"We remain active in implementing the pledges through various programmes," the Prime Minister told the foundation-laying function of an extended Bhaban of the Institute of Child Health and Shishu Swasthya Foundation Hospital at Mirpur.

She unveiled the plaque of the foundation of stone of the 15-storied building of the hospital.

The extended project will need Tk 15 crore. The hospital authority has collected one-fourth of the amount through two lotteries and from donations, it was informed at the function.

Khaleda announced a donation of Tk 2 crore for the project to further expand the facilities of the hospital and improve the health services.

The Dutch Bangla Bank Foundation also provided Tk 1.20 crore yesterday for construction of first and second floors of the extended building of the Shishu Swasthya Foundation Hospital.

PANGSHA OC MURDER

Four get death, 14 others acquitted

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced four people to death for killing Mizanur Rahman, Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Pangsha Police Station in Rajbari district, on January 31 last year.

The convicts are Ram Chandra Biswas, Bhim alias Mohammad, Mohammad Ukil Biswas and Mojibur. Judge AR Masud of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 pronounced the verdict at 11:30am at a jam-packed courtroom in presence of the convicts.

The court acquitted 14 others — Bashir alias Nasir, Wazed Sheikh, Shamsu Member, Munnaf, Kamal, Sagor alias Bhulu Doctor, Dulal, Abdur Rob, Kala alias Kalai, Abdur Matin, Abdul Kashem, Murad, Rashid and Mantaz — as the charges brought against them were not proved.

The convicts can appeal to the High Court against the verdict within 30 days from the date of receipt of the judgement copy, the judge said.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 22 prosecution witnesses.

Mizanur Rahman, 32, was shot dead by the unidentified gunmen at about 11:30pm on January 31 last year while leading a police team on an

operation to nab extremists.

The assailants shot him in the head and fled firing blank shots.

In the attack, Tajul and his son Rezaul of Muchidah village under the same police station, were also injured.

Later, Sub-Inspector Asaduzzaman filed a murder case with Pangsha Police Station in this connection the next day. Following the incident, Police arrested a dozen of people for their alleged involvement in the killing.

The investigation officer pressed charges against 18 people on October 26 the same year. The court framed charges against the accused on February 2.

Mizanur Rahman took over as OC on November 11, 2003 on being promoted as inspector. He went to Angola, Kosovo and Bosnia as a member of UN peacekeeping force after joining police service in 1989. He received UN awards for his performances, sources said.

Victim's family members were not found on the court premises during the delivery of the judgement.

Special Public prosecutor Aminul Islam appeared for the state while advocates Faziul Haq and AFM Abdul Wadud defended the accused.

Wasa to demolish illegal structures on Katur canal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To restore natural flows in the city's drainage canals, the Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) will demolish illegal structures on the Katur canal today and on the Ramchandrapur canal in Mohammadpur tomorrow.

The Dhaka Wasa started the demolition drive on March 29 to free the capital city from waterlogging during the monsoon.

The drive will continue until May to evict the encroachers from the capital's eight open canals and branch canals.

The Wasa authorities conducted the drive on the branch canals of the Kalyanpur canal in Mirpur and Gabtoli areas on March 29 and April 7.

According to an investigation by Wasa, the illegal structures on the Katur and Ramchandrapur canals include bamboo-made houses, rickshaw garages, tin-shed houses, shanties, semi-pucca building, makeshift bazaar and road.

The Dhaka City Corporation, the Rajuk and the district administration are assisting the Wasa in its efforts.

The Wasa will also conduct similar drive against encroachment on the Begunbari canal, Mohakhali canal, Zirani canal in Rampura, Ibrahimpur canal and a cross-dam barrier on the Gulshan-Banani lake.

Death anniversary



The 8th death anniversary of Mohiuddin Ahmed, a politician and parliamentarian, will be observed today, says a press release.

On the occasion, 'Mohiuddin Ahmed Jatiya Smriti Sangsad' will place wreath at his grave at the Martyrs' Intellectual Graveyard at Mirpur in the city at 9:00am.

Qurankhwani followed by a milad mahfil will be held at his residence at Dhanmondi in the city after Asr prayers.

Obituary

UNB, Dhaka

Noted Home Economist Munira Khatun, wife of agriculturist Sultan Ahmad of Sherpur, died of cancer at a city clinic on Sunday at the age of 45.

She left behind her husband, only daughter and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn her death.

She was laid to rest at the Banani graveyard. Her Quikhwani will be held at her elder sister's residence at House No. 18, Road No. 3 Prominent Housing, Mohammadpur after Asr prayers today.

Seven Japanese volunteers arrive

UNB, Dhaka

Seven New Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) arrived here on Friday to extend cooperation in various sectors of Bangladesh, including rural development, midwifery and infectious disease control.

They will work in public organisations for the next two years, a news release from Japanese Embassy here said yesterday.

At present there are 62 volunteers engaged in various activities in Bangladesh.

The New JOCV members called on Japanese Ambassador Matsushiro Horiguchi on Sunday at the Chancery.

British HC closed Apr 14

BSS, Dhaka

The British High Commission in Dhaka and its office in Sylhet will remain closed to the public on April 14 on the occasion of 'Pahela Baishakh', says a release of the High Commission.

'Cell phone call charge highest in world'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Private mobile telecom service providers in the country have long been exploiting the subscribers with the imposition of highest call charge in the world, said the speakers at a seminar yesterday.

The seminar on 'Corporate governance: Mobile phone and gas sector' was organised jointly by three NGOs Supra, Pradip and Citizen Rights Movement at the WVA auditorium in the city.

"They suck people's blood while remain arrogant when asked for their accountability," said opposition lawmaker Dr Abdur Razzak, a member of parliamentary estimate committee.

At present, per minute call charge including value added tax in the country is Tk 7, while it is Tk 1 in India, Tk 2.5 in Nepal, Tk 3.5 in Pakistan and Tk 6 in the United States, said an NGO activist Golam Nabi Jewel while making a keynote presentation at the seminar.

Abu Saeed Khan, a telecom analyst, said the government has issued nationwide license to the

mobile telephone operators, but they have arbitrarily divided the entire country into different zones and imposed different call rates.

Tushar Rehman of Karmakur Foundation demanded that the cell phone call charge be lowered to 50 paisa.

The speakers said multinational companies under the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) have been putting pressure on the government to export natural gas although the proven gas reserve of 15.3 trillion cubic feet will be inadequate for domestic need in future.

Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Post and Telecommunications Ministry GM Faziul Huq, Mohammad Shahidullah of Bangladesh Oil-Gas Preservation National Committee, Abdul Malek Ratan of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Kazi Faruque of Consumer Association of Bangladesh also spoke at the seminar moderated by Rafiqul Islam, director of a Khulna-based NGO Rupantar.

BCL leaders demand new council

Hasina holds meeting with university unit presidents, secretaries

DU CORRESPONDENT

More than one hundred leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of the Awami League (AL), yesterday demanded that the new council of the BCL be held immediately.

They chanted slogans in support of their demand in front of AL President Sheikh Hasina at the party office at Dhanmondi at around 12:15am.

The leaders entered the party office as soon as Hasina ended a meeting with the presidents and general secretaries of different BCL units at public universities.

Hasina convened the meeting to give them direction about their future activities, said BCL General Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu, who attended the meeting.

Talking to The Daily Star, many BCL leaders said it was the first time that they demonstrated for holding a council in front of the party chief, but they did not get any response immediately.

The present BCL committee headed by Liaquat Sikder stepped into its fourth year on April 3.

BCL Joint Secretary Khan Moinul Islam Mustak said a new council of the BCL is needed to intensify the anti-government movement as well as to reinvigorate the organisational activities.

He also said the leaders and activists have become frustrated as the council was not held in time.

During the meeting with the BCL leaders, Sheikh Hasina expressed dissatisfaction with the activities of the

university BCL units as they failed to launch any effective anti-government movement, sources said.

Hasina asked the BCL leaders to intensify demonstrations on university campuses and launch a tough movement against the alliance government's move to narrow down the scope for higher education and the politicisation of education sector.

She also asked them to launch a movement to press for reforms in the caretaker government system and to resist fundamentalist forces.

KHILGAON FLYOVER

AL to form human chain April 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) will form a human chain under the Khilgaon flyover in the city on April 16 demanding completion of the work of the flyover as per its original design.

"The hour-long demonstration will start at 4:30pm, and people of Khilgaon, irrespective of their political affiliation, will join it," said Saber Hossain Chowdhury, organising secretary of the AL, at a press conference yesterday.

Saber, who was elected to parliament from Khilgaon-Sabujbag constituency in 1996, said he would continue agitation until the government constructs another loop in the flyover at Sabujbag edge.

He claimed that it was possible to complete the Khilgaon flyover with two loops without causing any damage to any house or market in the area. "People of Khilgaon and adjacent areas are being deprived of using the flyover as the government has omitted the second loop," he added.

In support of his contention, Saber quoted a remark of LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan as saying that more people in Khilgaon area would be benefited if the flyover contains two loops.

The AL leader alleged that being instructed by local BNP leaders, police beat up his party activists at Khilgaon when they were distributing leaflets and collecting signatures in favour of the demand.

"Six AL leaders and workers including three women were injured in the police baton charge," he added.

Saber said, "We will continue to mobilise people at the area in favour of the demand."

"I've no intention to do politics over the issue, but people have right to know what was in the original plan, and I'll prove that Khilgaon flyover had two loops instead of one," he told the reporters rejecting an allegation made by Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, the present lawmaker of the area.

Earlier, the AL leader invited the minister to a roundtable over the issue, but he rejected the offer.

AL leaders of Khilgaon, Motijheel and Sabujbag thana units were present at the press conference at the party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue.

DHAKA TODAY

Film show

A film titled 'Move Me' by Danish filmmaker Morten Arnfred will be screened as part of Bangladesh-Denmark cultural festival. Venue: British Council. Time: 7:00pm.

Seminar

A seminar on 'Improving the business environment: The role of local government and the regional chambers' will be held. Venue: Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. Time: 10:30am.

Discussion

Karmojibi Nari, an initiative for working women, will hold a discussion on the impact of free trade. Venue: WVA, Dhanmondi. Time: 3:00pm.

Seminar on ICT

Bangladesh Computer Society organises a seminar on 'ICT windows of opportunity for Bangladesh through submarine cable network'. Venue: Seminar Hall, Civil Engineering Building, BUET. Time: 5:00pm.

Cultural function

The Bangladesh-Bharat Sampriti Parishad will hold a discussion and cultural function to mark the Independence Day. Artists of the Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra will perform at the cultural function. Venue: Supreme Court Bar Association auditorium. Time: 4:00pm.

Seminar on UP

The Khan Foundation will hold a national seminar on 'Function of Union Parishad: Procedural problem'. Venue: Democracy Auditorium, Khan Foundation, Momenbagh. Time: 10:00am.

Astrologers' Society

The Bangladesh Astrologers' Society organises a discussion on 'The contribution of astrology to the society and civilisation'. A reception will also be accorded to elderly astrologer NA Chowdhury. Venue: Purbani Hotel. Time: 4:00pm.

BCS reunion

The Bangladesh Computer Society will hold a BCS Reunion 2005. Venue: Sheraton Hotel. Time: 5:30pm.

Rotary Dhaka

The regular weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 5:30pm.

Rotary Ramna

The regular weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Ramna will be held. Members are requested to attend the meeting. Venue: Dhaka Club. Time: 5:30pm.

DHAKA TOMORROW

Art exhibition

The British Council organises an outdoor art exhibition to celebrate the Bangla New Year. A performance of Baul songs, traditional lathikhela and songs on Mymensingh will also be held at the inaugural session. Venue: British Council premises. Time: 5:30pm. The exhibition will remain open from 10:00am to 7:00pm daily till April 30.

Nazrul Institute

The Nazrul Institute organises a drawing competition and Nazrul song competition for the children to celebrate the Pahela Baishakh. Venue: Kabibhaban at the Nazrul Institute. Time: 4:00pm.

WEATHER TODAY

No change in temperature likely

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely at a few places over Chittagong, Barisal and Sylhet divisions and at one or two places over Rajshahi, Khulna and Dhaka divisions in the next 24 hours till 6.00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 35.7 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and lowest 21.0 degree Celsius at Comilla.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:19pm today and rises at 5:39am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	33.6	24.8	79	68
Chittagong	29.4	22.6	80	92
Rajshahi	35.7	23.4	76	58
Khulna	34.0	24.6	83	82
Barisal	34.6	25.6	80	83
Sylhet	30.1	21.2	82	75
Cox's Bazar	32.0	23.2	78	82