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Eight hurt as bombs go off at Bagerhat circus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Eight people were injured, two of them critically, in two explosions at a circus in Bagerhat stadium on Saturday night.

The officer-in-charge of Bagerhat Police Station said two bombs went off at the circus in the local stadium at 11:50pm. A trade fair was going on in the stadium at the same time.

Shahida, 30, and Monir, 14, were admitted to Bagerhat General Hospital in a critical condition. The other injured are receiving treatment at Khulna Medical College and Hospital.

Police yesterday arrested four suspects -- Munna Talukder, Ismail

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13 die, 100 missing as launch capsizes

STAR REPORT

At least 13 people drowned and about 100 others went missing after an overcrowded passenger launch capsized in the Bura Gourango river in Galachipa yesterday.

The launch, Prince of Patuakhali, carrying more than 200 passengers sank in the river at Char Kajal, about 30 kilometres off Galachipa upazila headquarters, at 11:00am.

Ten bodies were recovered until yesterday evening, 11 of them were identified as Asma, 2, Dilara, 30, Habib, 3, Joyful, 50, Alif, 30, Zihad, 1, Tamanna, 6, Juthi, 7, Jahanara, 50, Runu Begum, 30, and Johora, 55.

About 100 passengers swam

ashore. The survivors said the single-decker launch capsized due to overcrowding and strong waves in the river.

Our correspondent from Patuakhali quoting Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) sources said the launch has the capacity of carrying only 80 passengers.

"The capacity of the launch is 80. The overload and strong currents in the river might have caused the accident," said one BIWTA official.

Villagers rushed to the spot after the launch capsized and started rescue operation. Family members and relatives of the passengers also gathered on the bank of the river.

The launch had sailed from

Patuakhali in the morning for Char Montaj.

Mejbah Uddin, upazila nirbahi officer of Galachipa, told The Daily Star over phone from the spot that they have asked for a rescue vessel.

Sultan Ahmed, assistant director of BIWTA, told UNB that salvage vessel Hamza would start rescue operation of the sunken launch.

BDNEWS in Dhaka quoting BIWTA says salvage ship Hamza left Barisal for the accident spot at 3:30pm yesterday.

In the last one decade, over 4,000 people died in major launch accidents in the country. The government however put the number at

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Two outlaws killed in Rab 'encounters'

STAR REPORT

A regional leader of outlawed Janajuddha faction of Puro Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) and an underground operative were killed in 'encounter' with the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday.

Rab arrested the outlaw leader

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Body of slain peacekeeper due tomorrow

STAR REPORT

The body of Private (Gunner) Nur Mohammad, the Bangladeshi blue-beret killed in a rebel militia ambush

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

EC for independent secretariat

Commission to complete reforms proposal this week

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The Election Commission (EC) plans to complete by the end of this week a set of reforms proposals including one for an independent EC secretariat to strengthen the commission.

The EC stresses the need for an independent secretariat as it on numerous occasions in the past had faced difficulties in conducting polls freely due to interference from the executive, said sources.

The demand for reforms in the EC has become a much-talked about issue of late as the mainstream opposition parties and civil

society are calling for the reforms with greater intensity. Like the EC, centre-piece of the opposition's reform proposals too is an independent secretariat for the commission.

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed is drawing up a draft of the reforms proposals, which will be placed before an EC meeting for discussion in a day or two, said sources.

On completion, the draft will be submitted to government before Syed's term as CEC expires on May 22, added the sources.

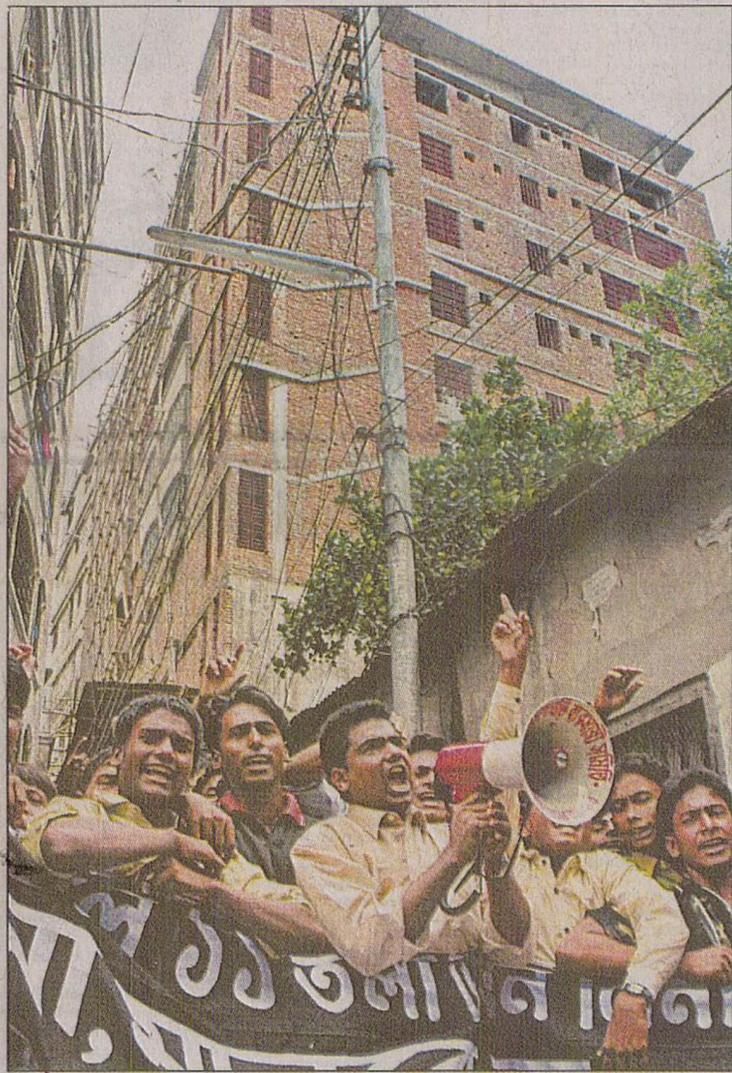
The three other election commissioners requested the CEC to

prepare the draft when he consulted with them on the reforms. "We too will give our opinions to be included in the draft when we sit to discuss it," an election commissioner said.

Besides the proposal for an independent secretariat, introduction of electronic voting machines, mandatory registration of the political parties with the EC, and new rules for appointing officials to the EC secretariat will feature in the draft, sources said.

"I am in favour of the demand for reforming the Election Commission. Some weaknesses in the present structure of the commission

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3



Agitating businessmen of Patuatuli in the capital yesterday demand demolition of an 11-storey building constructed on Patuatuli Lane with permission for a six-storey one.

Seven die in city road crashes

Locals torch vehicle, block road at Agargaon after boy dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Seven people including an ansar were killed and at least 30 others wounded in five road accidents in the city in 16 hours till noon yesterday.

Four people were killed and more than 20 people injured when a passenger bus from Gazipur collided head-on with a truck on Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway at Joarsahara of Badda at about 5:00am

yesterday.

All the four died on the spot. Three of them were identified as bus driver Jalaluddin, 32, truck driver Sabuj Mian, 33, and a passenger Alauddin, 25. Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Combined Military Hospital and seven to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

Police seized both the bus and the truck.

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RUN-UP TO BUDGET FY06

4 ministries get outlay for next 3 years

New framework introduced

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

Under a new budgetary framework, the finance ministry has allocated budgets for the next three fiscal years to four ministries -- education, agriculture, social welfare and women affairs.

The government plans to similarly allocate three years' budget to 15 more ministries from fiscal 2006-

2007 and the remaining 29 ministries and divisions from fiscal 2007-08, according to a finance ministry decision announced Saturday at an inter-ministerial meeting.

The first four ministries were given Tk 29,471 crore for the next three fiscal years.

This new concept, advised by the World Bank (WB), is believed to streamline expenditure, reduce

waste and help the ministries implement their schemes smoothly through advance planning.

According to the WB, the traditional budget formulation process remains an annual routine lacking a strategic medium-term framework. In this process, sector policies are tailored according to resource allocation.

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PM flies to Vietnam tomorrow to talk trade

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khaleda Zia flies to Vietnam tomorrow on a three-day visit that aims at further strengthening cooperation between the two countries, especially in the fields of economy, trade and investment.

"This is the first-ever visit by a Bangladeshi head of the government to Vietnam. The prime minister has rightly chosen to visit Vietnam, now an important country in the region, to promote our trade and investment," said Foreign

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

WB IMMUNITY BILL JS body places report, note of dissent from AL lawmaker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary standing committee report recommending passage of the much-talked about bill that proposes immunity to World Bank (WB) in its operations in Bangladesh was placed in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on finance ministry Mushfiqur Rahman tabled the report in which Awami League lawmaker Mohammad Sayedul

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PM's scolding works as MPs come to JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khaleda Zia's harsh criticism of the ruling party deputies' poor presence in the Jatiya Sangsad seems to have worked as parliament started its proceedings fairly on time yesterday.

Parliament, after a two-day recess, started its business at 5:20pm, five minutes behind schedule, with 73 lawmakers.

The number of lawmakers attending parliament yesterday however was smaller than that in the opening day of the session.

The ongoing 16th session of the

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Govt framing new law on court contempt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Proceedings of contempt of court in recent months on the ground of 'misconduct' in relation to judges outside the courtroom have prompted the government to move to introduce a new contempt law immediately.

The government feels the term -- contempt of court -- should be specifically defined as some judges have sued people on charges of contempt following incidents in their persons.

"It is high time to define what is contempt of court," Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said yesterday at a closed-door meeting with the Law Commission.

He urged former chief justice Mostafa Kamal, chairman of the commission, for expediting drafting of their recommendations to that end.

The law minister also advocated amendments to the rules of the Supreme Court (SC) for resolving problems including delay in the process of completing judgements.

Presently, there is no law on

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BDF dropped

Govt to hold PRSP review instead

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to discontinue the annual Bangladesh Development Forum and to hold a yearly review meeting on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) instead, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday.

"What's the point of this [BDF] meeting? We don't need a development forum to listen to their [donors'] lectures. They have their representatives here. They will hold the review meeting [on PRSP] once a year," Saifur told the press explaining the move.

The annual BDF which has been taking place for decades, used to bring together all bilateral and multilateral donors to review Bangladesh's development policy and performance. But its replacement, the meeting on PRSP, will have a narrower focus limiting the reviews to the PRSP issues. Besides, only local representatives of donors would participate in this meeting.

The PRSP prescribed by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is a three-year

roadmap of the government for poverty alleviation, which is likely to be adopted in July.

The first PRSP review meeting will be held in November, Saifur told the newsmen at his Secretariat office. He said, "The PRSP has clear deadlines. So, whether its programmes are being properly implemented or if there are any deviations that can be easily reviewed annually."

Before the press briefing, Saifur held a meeting with WB Country Director Christine Wallich, also chairperson of the Local Consultative Group (LCG) of donors, with IMF resident mission chief Jonathan C Dunn present. There the finance minister formally informed the LCG about the government's decision to drop the BDF. He also briefed Wallich on the upcoming budget.

Since last year's BDF the government has been looking for ways to avoid this forum, as many donors have raised questions on corruption, poor governance and various other political issues. Earlier this

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