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Sangsad goes into budget session today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its budget session today amid boycott by the main opposition Awami League (AL).

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman will place the budget for fiscal 2005-06 on June 9. It will be the fourth budget of the BNP-led alliance government that will place another budget before its tenure expires next year.

The AL at its parliamentary party meeting yesterday decided that its deputies will not take part in the passage of the next budget which it said will "cheat and deceive" the people.

"The government has repeatedly

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Dhaka urges KL to speed up manpower hiring

Joint commission talks start, Malaysian FM in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

On the first day of the two-day high level joint commission (JC) meeting in Dhaka yesterday, Malaysia responded "very positively" to look into the causes of Bangladesh, including the reduction of a huge trade imbalance and increasing the flow of investment into Bangladesh.

The Malaysian export bill stood at around \$254 million against Bangladesh's \$8.66 million in the 2003-04 fiscal year.

At yesterday's meeting, the Bangladesh side was led by Secretary of the Economic Relations

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Galib denied bail in blast case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

The Gaibandha tribunal court yesterday rejected the bail petitions of Ahle Hadith Andolon Bangladesh (Ahab) movement chief Dr Muhammad Asadullah Al Galib and four others accused in a Takier bazar open stage drama bomb blast case under Palashbari Upazila.

Galib, who is now staying in Naogaon jail under tight security, was not present in the court during trial. His lawyer, Sirajul Islam Babu, appeared in the court to argue his bail move. The court, however, rejected the bail petition of five of the six charges sheeted accused, including Galib.

One AKM Taibur Rahman, an employee of the jute directorate included in the charge sheet, was allowed formal bail. He was already

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Rejoinder, our reply

In a rejoinder, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Undertakings Chairman Abdul Alim has contradicted a report headlined "Guests' squat in MP hostel rooms"

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Ershad divorces Bidisha

Flies to Saudi Arabia; JIC quizzes dumped wife

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad divorced Bidisha on Friday and flew off to Saudi Arabia yesterday with their son Eric Ershad.

Bidisha is now being quizzed by the joint interrogation cell (JIC).

"I sent a divorce notice to all addresses of Bidisha on June 3 after I came to know that she has another husband," Ershad told reporters at

the VIP Lounge of Zia International Airport.

The former president said he decided to part ways with his second wife after he found that she cheated on him as she married him without divorcing her British husband Peter Stuart Wilson.

His allegations could not, however, be cross-checked, as Bidisha has been in police remand since Sunday.

Ershad also refuted claims that

he made all the decisions about Bidisha under intense government pressure and said he divorced her with a clear head since their marriage has been on the rocks for quite sometime.

"It was her misconduct and arrogance that made me take the harsh decision. How can I have a wife who has another husband?" Ershad asked.

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PHOTO: STAR

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad talks to journalists as he along with his son Eric leaves his house for Zia International Airport to fly to Saudi Arabia yesterday.

Robbers kill driver to hijack rice-laden truck

BSS, N'ganj

Robbers took away a Comilla-bound rice-laden truck, killing its driver and injuring a helper at Tribordi Kamargao under Sonargaon Police Station yesterday morning.

The driver was identified as Tulu Mia from Khulna and the helper, Mohammad Ali, 30, also from the same district.

Police quoted the injured helper as saying the truck was loaded with rice from Karwan Bazar in the capital at 4:00am yesterday. A gang of four robbers boarded the truck in the guise of passengers.

When the truck was crossing Tribordi Kamargao, the robbers forced the driver to stop at Tribordi bus stand and got down from the truck.

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Four die of 'heatstroke' at Geneva Camp

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four persons died in the Mohammadpur Geneva Camp yesterday due to excessive heat, as the camp has been out of electricity since last Friday, claimed the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee (SPGRC).

Salimun Nesa, 45, of sector two, Mahmud Hossain, 50, of sector seven and Habibun Begum, 65, of sector eight in the Geneva camp died due to excessive heat. The identity of the other that died could not be known.

About 50 lakh stranded Pakistanis, living in 66 camps across the country, are suffering through the hot weather, as the electricity supply in all their camps was cut off

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Poverty reduction trails behind MDG target

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

A latest government survey puts the annual poverty reduction rate at 0.52 percent, while the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) sets the target of poverty reduction at a rate of 1.35 percent.

The government has targeted to bring down the poverty rate to 29.4 percent by the year 2015 to keep pace with the MDG set by the United Nations.

According to the recent Preliminary Report of the Poverty Monitoring Survey (PRPMS) 2004, incidence of poverty by head count ratio on the basis of Food Energy Intake (FEI) was 44.7 percent in 1999

before it came down to 42.1 percent in 2004.

According to the survey, the poverty rate declined 2.6 percent in the last five years, meaning the poverty reduction rate was about 0.52 percent on average each year.

In urban areas, the rate of poverty went down by 5.4 percent from 43.3 to 37.9 percent during the period, which means a rate cut of 1.08 percent each year on average.

At rural level, it came down from 44.9 to 43.3 percent with the average reduction rate of 0.32 percent each year. This shows that poverty reduction pace is even slower in the rural areas than urban areas.

Every year, the finance minister

claims in his budget speech that a big chunk of public money is spent on poverty reduction. Even in the last budget speech, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman had said that poverty alleviation would get 62 percent of development budget and 42 percent of revenue expenditure.

But the survey reveals that the poverty reduction rate has actually slowed down as compared to the last decade. According to the PRPMS, 2004 survey, poverty incidence decreased by 10 percentage points in the decade from 1990 to 2000, which means poverty reduced at a rate of 1 percent on average.

Referring to the PRPMS, 2004

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BSF's Ulfa claim found false

No Ulfa hotels, bank accounts exist

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The seven hotels run by the United Liberation Front of Assam (Ulfa) in three cities of Bangladesh, as claimed by a top official of Indian Border Security Force (BSF), do not exist at all, reveals an investigation carried out by The Daily Star.

The BSF official's claim that the Ulfa members are operating accounts in two private banks in Bangladesh also proved false in the investigation.

Indian state-run news agency PTI quoted SC Srivastava, BSF Inspector General of Assam,

Meghalaya, Manipur and Nagaland, as saying that the Ulfa has been running the international standard hotels in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

Srivastava at a news conference in Shillong on Friday named three hotels -- Surma International on Taj Mahal Road, Hotel Mohammadia in Mirpur and Padma International in Banani in Dhaka. According to him, these hotels are managed by Subal Barua alias Ahmed, Satish Sharma alias Kamal and Ashish Deka alias Hossain.

The Daily Star correspondent

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Moeen new army chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Major General Moeen U Ahmed has been appointed the chief of army staff for a three-year term with effect from June 15, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Defence yesterday.

He succeeds Lt General Hasan

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53 killed in Nepal as Maoists bomb crowded bus

AFP, Kathmandu

At least 53 people were killed and 40 injured in southwestern Nepal when a crowded bus was bombed by suspected Maoist rebels yesterday, state radio and officials said.

The powerful blast occurred in the district of Chitwan, about 180km southwest of Kathmandu, early in the morning.

"The bodies of dead were badly mutilated or blown to pieces by the explosion," a senior police official told AFP.

State radio, quoting Superintendent of Police Surendra Bahadur Shah, said that 16 seriously injured people had been transferred to hospitals in the capital for treatment.

An army official in Chitwan district, who declined to be named, said a homemade bomb planted in the road was detonated by suspected rebels.

"As the bus came near, the improvised explosive device was set

off by remote control," he told AFP.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility from the Maoists, who have been fighting to install a communist republic in Nepal since 1996. The insurgency has already claimed more than 11,000 lives.

The Maoists stepped up their campaign through road blockades and attacks on troops after King Gyanendra sacked the coalition government, imposed a state of emergency and assumed absolute power on February 1.

The attack, if confirmed, is the bloodiest by the rebels on a civilian target since the king's takeover.

Army spokesman Brigadier General Dipak Gurung said last month the security situation in Nepal was "definitely better today" than before the king sacked the government for failing to control the Maoists and hold elections.

"We are able to focus more on our main job" of fighting the insurgency rather than containing civilian disturbances, said the general.

SingTel to invest \$150m on network expansion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pacific Bangladesh Telecom Limited (PBT), owning company of CityCell, that signed the biggest partnership deal in the sector with SingTel four days ago, hopes to be the number one mobile phone operator in the country in two to three years and provide the cheapest service.

SingTel (Singapore Telecommunications Ltd.), South East Asia's largest mobile phone company, bought for \$118 million a 45 percent stake in PBT under a deal signed in Singapore on June 2.

Moreover, SingTel has a call option to increase its equity interest in PBT to 60 percent for an additional \$65 million. The option can be exercised between April 1 and June 30, 2007.

The company will also invest \$150 million in PBT to expand its network for another 3.5 million subscribers.

PBT is now the third largest cellular operator in the country with 3.5 lakh subscribers.

"PBT will take 24 to 36 months

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SUMON'S DEATH IN 'ENCOUNTER' Mother files murder case against ministers, Rab men

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Mother of slain Jubo League leader Sumon yesterday filed a murder case with a Dhaka court against home and public works ministers, home secretary, three high-ups of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and a Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia who holds the portfolio of home minister and Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas have been accused in the case filed by Amela Khatun with the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka.

The other accused are Home Secretary Safar Raj Hossain, Rab Director General Abdul Aziz Sarkar, the commanding officer, second-in-command and seven to eight

unknown members of Rab-3 and Rubel, vice president of Dhaka city JCD (South).

After recording the statement of Amela, Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mujibul Haq ordered a judicial enquiry into the matter.

Sumon Ahmed, 21, was killed in a Rab-claimed "encounter" with the anticrime force in Hindupara under Khilgaon Police Station sometime between 9:00pm of May 30 and 5:00am of May 31, the complainant said.

Amela said Sumon left their East Goran house at 8:30pm on May 30 for his workplace Loren International at Berek Plaza in Goran. Some plainclothes Rab men went to his office at about 9:30pm and enquired about his identity.

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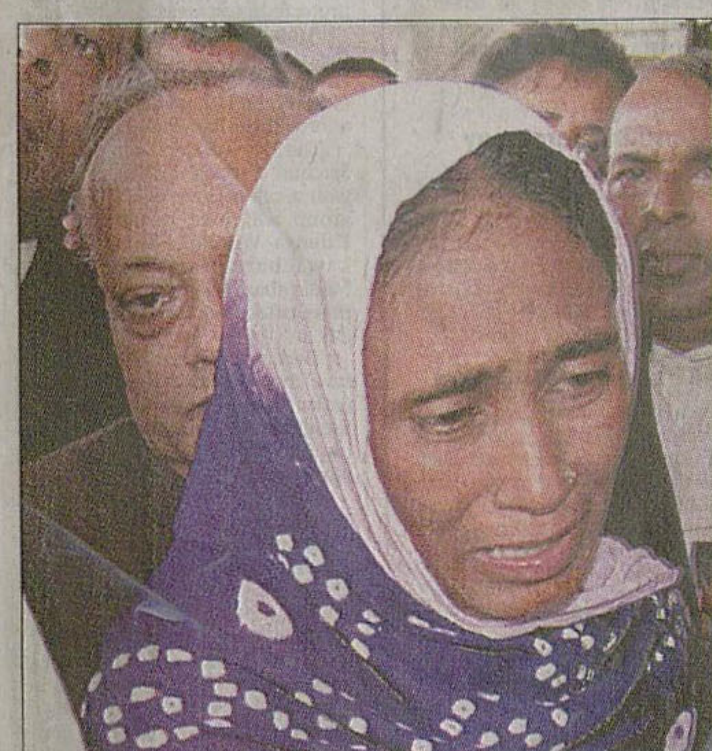


PHOTO: STAR

Amela Khatun, mother of Jubo League activist Sumon who was killed in an "encounter" with Rapid Action Battalion on May 31, comes out of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, after filing a lawsuit yesterday.

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