

PM accorded warm

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During her visit Khaleda will discuss with the Japanese leadership various bilateral matters, including official development assistance (ODA), existing trade imbalance tilted to Japan, training of Bangladeshi workers and Japanese assistance for construction of Padma Bridge.

Formal talks between Khaleda and her Japanese counterpart Junichiro Koizumi will be held on July 14, official sources said. She will address a meeting of Japan-Bangladesh Parliamentary League on July 13.

Khaleda will have a meeting with representatives of Japan External Trade Organisation (Jetro) and address the Bangladesh Business Seminar to be organised by Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industries in collaboration with other organisations on July 14.

The prime minister will also lay foundation of a 'Shaheed Minar' in Tokyo city and attend a Bangladesh community reception in her honour on July 12.

The prime minister will call on the Emperor of Japan before leaving Tokyo for home on July 15.

After official talks between the two countries, an agreement is expected to be signed on cultural exchange.

Earlier, a special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines with the prime minister and her entourage departed from Zia International Airport at 9:30 am.

Senior ministers, chiefs of three services, diplomats and senior civil and military high officials saw the prime minister off at the airport.

Khaleda is leading a high-profile delegation that includes Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and State Minister for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment M Quamrul Islam.

A 24-member investment and trade delegation led by Adviser to the Energy and Mineral Resources Division and Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment Mahmudur Rahman is also accompanying her.

AL won't join polls

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decision-making body of the party, sat in the meeting with AL President Sheikh Hasina in the chair at the AL's Dhanmondi office.

The AL left 11-Party alliance, Jatiya Samaitantrik Dal (JSD-Ilu) and National Awami Party (NAP) will present their much-talked-about proposals for reforms in the caretaker government system as well as the Election Commission at a joint press briefing on July 15.

Referring to the prime minister's call for placing the reform agenda in parliament, the meeting said at long last the prime minister has felt that reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems are necessary for the elections to be free and fair.

When asked about the probability of AL joining parliament, the acting general secretary of the party said, "There is no decision yet on joining parliament to place the reform proposals. We will submit the proposals to the nation through media."

"We will wait for the government's response to our reform proposals and a decision will be made only after their reaction is known," he added.

The AL and its allies on Sunday finalised a joint draft proposal for reforms in the non-party caretaker government and the electoral systems.

CARETAKER GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

The agreed draft proposal suggests that the chief adviser and the other advisers of the caretaker government should be appointed through consensus of all political parties. It also proposes that the president will act on the advice of the chief adviser and defence ministry has to be put under the caretaker government, instead of the president.

It says the caretaker government will remain accountable to the constitution, and not to the president. The interim government will discharge only routine functions and shall not take any policy decision.

THE EC AND ELECTORAL LAWS

The draft has 17 suggestions to make the EC an independent and active entity and 25 other suggestions regarding electoral laws and regulations.

Regarding the proposed reforms in the EC, the joint draft proposal says the 'appointments of the Chief

Election Commissioner and other members of the Election Commission have to be made in consultation with all the active political parties.'

It also suggests that the EC must remain free from control of the executive and have rights to formulate its own budget and recruit its staff.

Besides, the draft suggests a number of measures to check false voting, violation of electoral laws, using religion as a tool to seek votes, and influence of black money.

Verdict

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prosecution witnesses was yet to be complete.

The court heard arguments from the prosecution and the defence for 51 days from January 9 this year, said a lawyer.

Hundreds of people carrying different posters and demanding capital punishment to the killers gathered in the court area to hear the judgement. They left apparently disappointed.

Security was stepped up on the court premises to avert any untoward incidents.

All the accused including Alam's two sons-in-law Motiur Rahman alias Matin and Mohammad Ali Babul Hasan alias Babu Jamai, now in custody, were brought to court yesterday under a tight security. Three others, now on bail, were also present in court.

Alam, 64, and the domestic helps - Rahima, Sakhina and Kamala - were murdered at his New Jurain residence in the city's Shyampur area on the night of January 2, 2002.

Matin filed a murder case with Shyampur Police Station the following day.

But the probe into the killing took a new twist and the CID submitted a final report on July 18, 2003.

The CID also filed a murder and burglary case accusing Matin, Babu Jamai and 24 others the same day. It pressed charges against 19 people on August 9 the same year.

Earlier, the case was shifted to the Speedy Trial Tribunal but after 135 workdays, it was sent back to the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court.

Costly dollar makes

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threat to the demand-supply situation especially of the import-dependent products." Sujit Saha, manager of Jamjang Traders at Shyambazar told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said import cost of garlic rose by Tk 10 to 12 a kg during the period. Chinese garlic now sells at Tk 56 a kg which was Tk 40 a week ago. The price of local garlic has also risen to Tk 40 from Tk 32.

Local onion is sold at Tk 18 a kg, which was Tk 15 two weeks ago. Onion imported from India now sells at Tk 16 which was Tk 12 two weeks ago.

The price of lentil has risen sharply to Tk 50 a kg against the previous rate of Tk 44.

Market sources said production of lentil in India, the major source of the item, has declined this year, which has pushed up the import price.

Although the wholesale price of sugar is decreasing, the retail price is on the rise. Sugar is sold at Tk 1,260 per maund (about 38kg) in the wholesale markets against last week's price of Tk 1,280. But its retail price rose to Tk 2.36 a kg against the previous price of Tk 34.

Prices of different categories of edible oil have increased by Tk 4 to Tk 5 a kg due to the demand-supply gap, the market sources said.

Importers said the import cost per 40-kg soya bean oil has increased to \$350 this year from previous year's \$190. Soya bean oil is now at Tk 1,700 per 40-kg in the wholesale market.

Prices of all varieties of rice have recorded slight increase in both retail and wholesale markets. The average increase is Tk 1 a kg.

Prices of potato, salt and flour have also increased slightly in the kitchen markets. Vegetables have become dearer by Tk 2 to Tk 5 a

kg in last one week. Retailers blamed torrential rain across the country and illegal toll collection from trucks for the price hike of vegetables.

Meanwhile, left leaning 11-party alliance and the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday protested the prime minister's comment on the price hike of essentials.

Although the prices of essentials are going beyond the capacity of common people, the prime minister thinks the prices have not increased much, 11-party leaders said at a party meeting at the Workers Party office in the capital.

They asked the prime minister to withdraw her 'irresponsible' comments on the price hike.

The CPB leaders at a rally in Dhaka yesterday said the PM's comment will inspire the dishonest traders and profiteers to continue their malpractice.

1-hour work

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announced the programme at a press conference in the Khulna Press Club where city BNP Secretary Nazrul Islam Manju, city Awami League Secretary Alhaj Mizanur Rahman Mizan and Secretary General of GKDAC Shaikh Ashrafuzzaman, among others, attended.

They are planning a tougher programme that includes an ultimatum to the government for necessary allocation of fund for implementation of development projects in greater Khulna, said Nazrul Islam Manju.

In support of the GKDAC movement, a sit-in strike will also be observed from 4:00pm to 5:00pm today at Muktagong in Dhaka where Ali Azgar Lobi, MP from Khulna-2, will address a rally as the chief guest.

NOAB, BSP

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various problems of newspaper industry and said duty on newsprint and VAT should be reduced and government advertisement rate raised to Tk 500 per column inch for balanced development of the industry.

They called for cancellation of the Statutory Regulatory Order and ensuring that the proposed wage board award be implemented in at least 95 per cent newspapers.

They suggested that a monitoring cell should monitor the implementation process of the wage board award.

The information minister gave the BSP and NOAB leaders a patient hearing and said the government is very keen to see that the country's newspaper industry grows in a free and fair atmosphere.

The government believes in free flow of information and its healthy development, he said.

NOAB President and Editor of the Independent Mahbubul Alam, BSP President and Chairman of the Editorial Board of the Ittefaq Mainul Hosen, Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, President of the Jatiya Press Club and Editor of the News Today Reazuddin Ahmed and Editor of the Prothom Alo Motiur Rahman, Information Secretary Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman and Principal Information Officer Abu Jafar Md Iqbal were also present on the occasion.

9 Bangladeshi

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south of the capital Kuala Lumpur.

Deputy Works Minister Mohamed Khaled Nordin said the ministry had met with all the relevant parties and the flyover's developer, SP Setia.

"The cause of the incident is still being investigated. This is because the technical report from SP Setia is expected within the next 24 hours," Mohamed Khaled said in a statement.

Seventeen construction workers were on top of one of the sections that collapsed. Nine of the workers, all from Bangladesh, were rushed to hospital, and three suffered severe head injuries, reports said.

"We were dragging a reinforcing cable across the flyover with 15 other workers when I heard a loud cracking sound," 30-year-old worker Nuruzzaman Monzin told the Star newspaper.

"The section suddenly collapsed. I managed to break my fall by jumping off the falling panel just before it crashed onto the road," said Nuruzzaman, whose brother Shafiqul Mozahar was injured.

"Shafiqul could not escape as he was trapped by the cable he was holding," he said.

A car passing underneath the flyover seconds before the collapse narrowly missed being crushed but there were no injuries reported, said the New Straits Times.

SP Setia, which is building the road link to one of its housing projects, issued an apology Sunday.

"We are sorry over the unfortunate incident and will spare no effort to investigate thoroughly and get to the root of the cause," the group's managing director Liew Kee Sin was quoted as saying by the Star.

Fresh exams

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MA in Arabic.

The syndicate decision, however, contradicted the Chairman of the Arabic Department's claim that the outgoing batch would have to sit for the last exam. The decision of holding all seven exams all over again has put the students in great worry.

Gazi Mohammad Obaidul Haque, a frustrated student of the department, told The Daily Star that they have been demanding punishment of the culprits responsible for the leakage but nothing has been done so far. The MA students alleged that the examination committee chairman Prof Abubakar Siddique was responsible for the question paper leakage.

The Syndicate expelled Prof Siddique from the chairmanship of the examination committee and directed him to refrain from all the academic and examination-related activities after the probe found his involvement in the leakage.

Talking to The Daily Star, Prof Siddique denied the allegations and termed them totally false and fabricated. "The Jamaat-Shibir and the teachers belonging to White Panel have been conspiring against me in this regard," he claimed. He then went on to put blame on two teachers who were members of the four-member examination committee of 2004.

The Department Chairman Prof Mohammad Nurul Haque told The Daily Star that they would take fresh exams as early as possible. He, however, could not give any specific date, saying it is the duty of the controller of exams.

Meanwhile, Ahmed Saimum, an MA examinee, complained of receiving threats from anonymous callers for giving a statement on the question paper leakage to the probe committee on February 4. "I have sought security from the university authorities as anonymous callers have been issuing death threats to me over my cell phone as I gave a statement at the probe committee," he said.

He also showed The Daily Star a letter threatening him with dire consequences for his submission to the probe committee. The letter was sent to his Salimullah Hall room no 49 on June 4, 2005.

Borrowing

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Of the net borrowing in FY05, around Tk 3,627 crore came from the Bangladesh bank (BB) and the rest from commercial banks. It is generally held that excessive borrowing from the central bank heightens the inflationary pressure.

According to BB statistics, the government's outstanding bank borrowing stood at Tk 24,106 crore in FY05, which was Tk 20,475 crore on the same date in FY04.

Empty promises take

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punished for the faulty designs of their launches--the main reason for such disasters unanimously blamed by shipping experts.

Interestingly, after each of the accidents since 2001, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain has made huge promises regarding improvement of the sector. All his promises have, however, proved elusive.

After the latest launch disaster near Aricha on May 16, in which at least 200 people died, the shipping minister said his ministry will initiate a month-long drive to identify unfit vessels and take stern actions against them, which was supposed to start from May.

However, there are allegations that because of powerful launch owners - like the prime minister's sons, Tarique and Arafat Rahman, and their friend Giasuddin Mamun - the shipping authority is rather serving the launch owners' interest instead of protecting public interest.

Also, overlooking the passenger launches, the government has recently raided cargo vessels and the marine court officials apprehended over 60 such vessels so far during the four-day block raid on the rivers Buriganga and Sitalakha.

Asked why the faulty and defective passenger launches were not brought under the block raid, Akbar said, "It is very difficult to seize passenger vessels as they have survey certificates and licenses." The government decided to examine the condition of all the vessels and identify the ones with defective and faulty designs, Akbar added.

According to sources, Akbar took such a severe line but could not implement them because of pressure from the influential quarters. The maximum financial compensation the owners pay to the families of victims is also only Tk 5 lakh, irrespective of the number of people killed.

The government also failed to rescue all the victims of launch disasters and recover the sunken vessels due to lack of powerful salvage vessels, the collection of which has been delayed over the years.

The government's initiative to introduce life jackets for marine passengers has also failed following opposition from the launch owners. Instead, a passenger welfare fund was introduced offering a negligible amount of compensation to the victims' families.

UNFULFILLED PROMISES
Immediately after taking office, on February 10, 2002, Akbar Hossain made a series of commitments to improve the condition of the ailing shipping sector but none of the commitments has yet to be implemented, alleged Badiuzzaman.

The promises included buying two high-speed salvage vessels, collecting adequate salvagers, introducing insurance for marine passengers, setting up radar stations, installing echo sound system and solid ballasts on passenger launches, checking over-load, preventing travelling on the roof and carrying goods on the deck, introducing a local classification society for checking design and construction of the vessels, regular survey of the vessels, banning all unregistered vessels and construction of vessels at unregistered dock yards.

According to government sources, all the above decisions are at various stages of implementation.

Three years into its tenure, the government is still hoping to issue an order by next November to buy two powerful rescue vessels from South Korea, which is unlikely to be collected in next one year due to its unavailability in the market.

"We have to issue an order [for such vessel] and then they will build the vessel," Akbar said.

As for introducing a local classification society, it took the government three years of official procedures to select three companies recently for awarding the job, but nobody yet knows when the private companies would be able to start functioning.

Setting up of 10 radar stations is also being delayed, pending clearance from the Ministry of Defence. The installation of the echo

sound system and solid ballasts on the existing launches is also unlikely to be implemented in the face of opposition from the launch owners.

FAILURE IN SALVAGING
Due to lack of powerful salvage vessels many launches were not recovered at all. According to unofficial figures, with the latest *MV Nasreen-1* and *MV Raipura* over 90 big launches could not be salvaged since independence.

The salvage capacity of the *MV Hamza* and *MV Rustom* is only 60 tons each against the average weight of 150-250 tons for a double-deck launch.

DEMAND FOR RESIGNATION
Facing public demand for his resignation for failing in his handling of matters, Akbar Hossain said, "Why should I resign? I will resign only after bringing discipline in the sector."

Earlier, after the *MV Nasreen-1* disaster that killed over 500 people, Akbar had committed to The Daily Star that he will resign if any major launch disaster takes place again during his tenure.

Sweden

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"It is absolutely necessary to seriously increase the efforts to improve health in Bangladesh. It is important to create the conditions that allow poor people to improve their living situation," said Anna-Kari Bill, a case worker at the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, Sida.

The agency said the aid contribution was the largest it had ever decided on.

"The goal is for this large-scale initiative to reach groups in Bangladesh that today have the least access to healthcare: poor people and village residents," Sida said in a statement.

Helping women and young girls receive adequate healthcare would also be a particular focus of the initiative, the agency said, adding that women's health in Bangladesh "is clearly worse than men's".

"Now, we will work on equality strategies, healthcare workers will be educated and there will be a focus on initiatives for reproductive health. This will lead to a significant improvement in the possibilities women have of gaining access to relevant healthcare," Bill said.

Team raids

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licence for production of export-oriented items but they produce banned polythene bags, and one of them supplies such bags to hotels in Dhaka, official sources said.

One of the six industries was found operating without environmental clearance from the Department of Environment (DoE).

State Minister for Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury and NBR Chairman Khairuzzaman Chowdhury were present during the raids.

The NBR chairman instantly ordered filing cases against the industries for misusing the bond licence. Besides, several cases relating to VAT and taxes were lodged on the spot.

The DoE lodged cases against the industries for producing banned polythene items and for destroying environment. Police also filed cases against them for illegal activities.

The environment ministry is now carrying out a drive to enforce the ban on production of polythene bags. Its taskforce recently detected several industries in Old Dhaka with huge quantities of finished polythene items and raw materials.

Environment Minister Tariqul Islam said the taskforce comprising magistrate, DoE officials, paramilitary BDR and police is regularly raiding industries in different parts of the capital, and has sealed several of them for operating illegally.

Steps have also been taken to enhance production of alternatives to polythene bags, he mentioned.

Framing for money

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designer at The Daily Janakantha. Khan went on to say that his family was finally forced to pay a bribe to prevent Wasim from being tortured. "Ultimately we had to pay a bribe to stop him from being tortured in remand," Khan said, adding, "Let alone any case, there is not even a general diary (GD) against Wasim in any police station."

Wasim later corroborated the assertion. "Taking me on a one-day remand, SI Rahim forced me to call my family to bring the money or face torture," Wasim told The Daily Star.

"The very first hour into the remand, the IO struck me twice in the back and gave me a cellphone asking me to call my relatives to come with Tk 15,000 by 9:00 the next morning if I wanted to avert getting beaten up on remand," he said.

Wasim's brother-in-law Rafiqul said, "After getting Wasim's call, I went to the police station and gave Tk 4,000 in a yellow envelope to SI Karim through his case writer Millat." He added also gave Tk 1,000 to Millat for "mediation".

SI Abdur Rahim, however, denied the allegation. "I do not even know Rafiqul Islam Khan well. I did not take any money from him," Rahim said.

Told that many others levelled the same allegation against him, SI Rahim said, "After the robbery incident I arrested many and produced them before court. You know people bring allegations of the police taking bribes whenever they are arrested."

Another blanket-arrest victim, Arafat, a secondary school certificate (SSC) exams candidate from Tejgaon Vocational Institute, said the police picked him up along with

3 'outlaws'

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Betbaria at about 3:30am to recover the firearms. The policemen raided different areas of the village but to no effect. After the raid, as they were returning to police station, a band of GMF cadres lying in wait at Betbaria graveyard ambushed them at about 4:30am.

Police returned fire, triggering an hour-long gunfight. According to police, the arrestees while trying to escape from the police van got caught in the 'crossfire'. Mohammad and Adil died on the spot while Yusuf on the way to Kushtia General Hospital.

Police said Mohammad, 35, and Yusuf were accused in six cases including three for murder, and Adil in seven cases including two for murder.

Govt to bring

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seven Bangladeshis' death in Taef was suffocation following a sudden fire spread from a nearby building, government sources said the victims could not exit from the godown-like house where they were sleeping as the only door was blocked by fire and smoke.

"The Bangladesh consulate in Jeddah has been instructed to communicate with the Saudi authorities and realise the compensation money and take steps to send the bodies home as early as possible," said A K M Shamsuddin, secretary in charge of the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment.

He said reaching the bodies home after completion of lengthy and complex official procedures of the kingdom may take at least two weeks.

The owner should give compensation as he provided accommodation to the workers in the place without ensuring their safety, the secretary said.

If the victims' families do not get compensation according to Saudi law, every victim's family will be given Tk 1 lakh as compensation from the Wage Earners Welfare Fund of Bangladesh government, he said.

The ministry also asked the district manpower officials concerned to officially inform the victims' families of the accident and offer condolences.

The ill-fated Bangladeshis worked in a mattress manufacturing shop.

College quota

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worsen in the face of a substantial rise in pass rate in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations.

Meetings between the ministry officials and heads of different colleges will be held soon to find ways to enrol students at class XI for the academic year 2005.

In total, 2,425 government and non-government colleges have some 3.60 lakh seats to accommodate students at class XI while the number of students passed in this year's SSC examinations stood at 3,94,993.

Last year, colleges enrolled students in class XI on the basis of GPA, without requiring any written tests. But because of a higher number of GPA-5 this year, they might adopt some testing measures like viva voce or take students on first-come, first-serve basis, board officials said.

A record number of 15,631 students scored GPA-5 in this year's SSC examinations. The pass percentage rose to 52.57 percent from 48.03 percent in 2004.

UK customs

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But the DCCI will not carry out the investigation, its Director General (DG) Shah Alam Khan has told The Daily Star. "The incidents were detected by the British customs and the responsibility of further investigations lies on them," he explained. However, "if they request us for assistance, we will provide that," he added.

Khan said his office has verbally informed its position to the UK mission in Mumbai.

According to the letter signed by Simon Sutcliffe, an official of the British mission, Green Heaven Enterprise of 64, BK Dash Road, Sutrapore, Emdad Trading of 195/1, Fakirapool and Jamil International of 190, Fakirapool, Dhaka sent the drug by three manifested shipments of floor tiles, beauty products and foodstuff. The shipments reached Britain on April 17, March 3 and February 14 last.

But The Daily Star did not find any business house of those names to exist now or ever at those addresses.

Abdur Rahman, owner of Rahman Mansion at 195/1, Fakirapool, said he never rented his house to any such business concern.

In the letter the British customs said the consignees were Assad Ahmed of Granite Enterprise at 2, Harrington Road, Leytonstone, Shuhel Ahmed of Ocean Line Foods at Rivington House, 82, Great Eastern Street, and Shah Alam of Bengal Bay at 377, Edgware Road, London.

The UK customs said the first freight consisted of 330 brown cardboard boxes labelled Trazoro Floor Tiles. Each box was marked to weigh 22/23 kg and to contain four pieces of ceramic and stone tiles. But inspection revealed 108 of the boxes contained approximately half a kilo heroin each. The drug was kept hidden inside the hollow tiles. Around 54kg heroin was smuggled by that shipment.

The Mumbai mission of the UK requested the DCCI to verify the authenticity and gather the background of the Bangladeshi firms, sought lists of their normal merchandise and also asked to find if they have any previous crime record.

100 dead or missing

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separate coal mine accident in southern China's Jiangxi province.

The accident happened on July 7 when the Yongsheng coal mine near Chishan township unexpectedly flooded, the state work safety agency said.

China's mines are considered the most deadly in the world, as safety is often sacrificed in the pursuit for the fossil fuel to drive the country's rapid industrialisation and economic growth.

The country relies on coal for two thirds of its energy needs and is not expected to shift significantly to other fuel sources for years to come.

Official figures show more than 6,000 miners died in accidents in China last year, although independent estimates say the real figure could be as high as 20,000. Many fatalities occur at illegal mines.

Reforms to the industry have often been promised, but enforcing the changes have proved the big