

Dhaka sits with S'pore

FROM PAGE 1
The two countries signed an Investment Guarantee Agreement and decided to hold yearly consultations between their foreign ministries during the visit of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to Bangladesh on June 21-24 last year.

From Singapore, Hemayetuddin will go to Islamabad to attend the 31st session of the Standing Committee of Saarc Foreign Secretaries slated for August 17-18 and then will sit in annual consultation with Pakistan on August 19-20.

DHAKA-SINGAPORE CONSULTATION
All bilateral issues will be discussed in the Bangladesh-Singapore consultation, "when we will try to impress them about the quality of our products and to pursue them to buy more goods, fresh vegetables and fruits from Bangladesh," Hemayetuddin told the press yesterday.

In 2004-05 Singapore imported fresh vegetables and fruits to the tune of \$10 million. The foreign secretary said, "Singapore usually buys these products from its neighbours. We cannot compete because of the high air fair, which we will request them to reduce."

He said Bangladesh will focus on exporting skilled and semi-skilled manpower, signing of trade agreement and seeking more Singaporean investment, particularly relocation of their sunset industries, in the talks. "We will discuss the export of manpower intensively and pursue them to recruit more Bangladeshis," he added.

The present Dhaka- Singapore trade is insignificant, with the balance of trade in favour of Singapore,

Hemayetuddin said. Dhaka also will seek technical co-operation in various sectors, scholarships for Bangladeshi students, co-operation in horticulture, training to Bangladesh port officials by Singapore Port Training Authority and visa liberalisation for Bangladeshis.

DHAKA-ISLAMABAD CONSULTATION
In Islamabad Hemayetuddin will first attend the 31st session of the Standing Committee of Saarc Foreign Secretaries to review the progress of various Saarc activities since the 12th Saarc Summit held in Islamabad in January last year.

Hemayet said the finance and planning ministers of the Saarc countries would meet possibly in Colombo in mid-October to discuss establishment of a South Asian Development Fund (SADF), Saarc Infrastructure Fund, Saarc Poverty Alleviation Fund and South Asian Economic Union.

Besides, he said, the Saarc commerce ministers would meet in October in Islamabad to give a final shape to the Safta. Hemayetuddin next will attend the Bangladesh-Pakistan foreign secretary level annual consultation on August 19-20 to review the entire range of bilateral issues, particularly trade and economic co-operation.

He said the two sides in their talks will put special emphasis on increased people-to-people contact for further strengthening the existing excellent relations.

At the consultation with Pakistan Foreign Secretary Riaz Mohammad Khan, he said, Bangladesh which has been pursuing duty-free access of 102

products to Pakistan will push the matter again. He said Pakistan has already given duty-free access of raw jute and tea and "we are now trying to push ceramics, pharmaceuticals, leather goods and garments among other products."

Bangladesh now enjoy duty-free access of 10,000 tons of tea to Pakistani market. Dhaka wants to increase this volume and other exports, as it suffered a \$149.44 million trade gap with Pakistan in 2003-04.

Besides, Pakistan's investment might be sought for setting composite textile mills in Bangladesh.

Trade, energy

FROM PAGE 1
Khaleda's visit to China within four months of Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao's Dhaka visit itself gives the message of "closeness, understanding and cooperation" between the two countries, he said.

The economic relations between the two countries are growing, and both sides have "deepening" cultural and educational relations as well as an "expanding" science and technology relations, the foreign secretary said.

On the first day of her visit on August 17, Khaleda Zia will be given a colourful reception at the Great Hall in Beijing marking the 30th anniversary of Bangladesh-China diplomatic relations. Chinese People's Association of Foreign Countries will host the grand reception.

On August 18, Khaleda Zia and Wen Jiabao will hold talks covering the entire range of bilateral relations at the Great Hall.

Prior to the official talks, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will pay a courtesy call on Chinese President Hu Jintao at the Great Hall.

Bangladesh will reaffirm its stance of always sticking to the "One-China" Policy, officials said.

During the visit, the PM will address a high-profile business seminar and meet top business leaders and executives on August 19.

She will also meet Chairman of the Chinese National Congress U Bangqiu.

From Beijing, the Bangladesh prime minister will go to Guilin and Guangzu provinces to visit some industrial sites there and exchange views with the governors and chiefs of the industries.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, Energy Ministry Advisor and Chairman of Board of Investment Mahmudur Rahman, senior officials and a business delegation will accompany Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during her China visit.

She will return home on August 21.

Move on to arrange

FROM PAGE 20
BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia on Wednesday picked Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar as the ruling alliance candidate to contest the Faridpur-1 by-election, cancelling the nomination of Kazi Sirajul Islam.

With the withdrawal of candidature by Sirajul, who was nominated as the four-party alliance candidate on August 4, there is hardly any powerful candidate left to compete therace.

The main opposition Awami League has already announced to boycott the election to the constituency comprising three upazilas, Boalmari, Alfadanga and Madhykhali.

Local observers say none of the rest four contenders has the ability to offer any competition. They do not have the least base of support among the people in the area. If the election is held with this line-up, except Zafar, none is likely to poll more than 5,000 votes, they observed.

"If the election is held at last, it would be exceedingly dull and flat," said Mirza Akhteruzzaman, a local shopowner.

Of the four contenders, Mufi Sharafat Hossain was nominated by a faction of Islami Oikya Jote and Krishak Mohammad Sadek by Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolon. The rest two—Moulana Mujibur Rahman and Nurul Abedin are independent candidates.

The last date for withdrawing candidature was July 14.

Locals said Sirajul's withdrawal from the race leaves the field clear for Zafar, who was defeated by Kazi

Sirajul Islam in the last election by a margin of over six thousand votes. The seat fell vacant when Siraj joined ruling BNP, deserting the main opposition Awami League.

The supporters of ruling BNP in the area have become jubilant while those of Siraj depressed over the Wednesday's decision of BNP chairperson. Sirajul's decision of withdrawal without consulting anyone from the locality has enraged his supporters.

"We are happy as we know already that our candidate is going to win the election," said Haider Ali Mollah, organising secretary of Madhukhali Upazila BNP.

He said the internal feud within the party has been resolved and 95 percent of people now supports Shah Abu Zafar.

"There is no sign of electioneering in the area as the charm of the election has already been lost with the latest developments," observed Mohammad Masudul Islam, acting principal of a local women's college. The election is bound to be one-sided with major political parties opting out of it, he noted.

Faridpur-1 constituency, which has always been an AL stronghold, is all set to go to ruling BNP for the first time since independence.

Since joining BNP, Sirajul faced stiff resistance from AL leaders and workers in Boalmari and Alfadanga. His motorcade came under attack last month while he was going to Faridpur for the first time after the desertion.

Hygiene drive to spread

FROM PAGE 20
staff and logistic facilities to meet the demand.

Anyway, "It's a continuous process," the state minister said, "and we are committed to continue with the drive putting in the highest possible efforts."

HYGIENE DRIVE ACTIVITY REPORT

Since the June 14 launch of the hygiene drive in Dhaka, four mobile courts so far have awarded imprisonment of various duration to 107 people, brought charges against 2,556 and exacted Tk 49 lakh in fines, Chief Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka Jalal Ahmed told yesterday's meeting.

As Jalal Ahmed regretted inadequate logistics, Babar assured him of addressing the constraint, meeting sources said.

The meeting decided to set up and put mobile courts in operation in division, district and municipality levels soon across the country. The meeting also directed the courts to include eviction of squatting vendors from footpaths, stopping doctoring of weighing devices and adulteration of fuels into their scope of operation.

Many of the city's Chinese restaurants serve spurious and unhygienic foods, taking advantage of their dim lighting, meeting participants observed and suggested making clear visibility at food joints a must.

In the meeting, Inspector General of Police Abdul Quayum said there should be intensified watch during the upcoming month of Ramadan to ensure the quality of Ifar.

In response, State Minister Babar said as many as 35 mobile courts will be engaged in Ramadan. Referring to the hue and cry raised by the business community when the mobile courts take action against unscrupulous traders, Babar ordered to increase the number of police and BDR members assisting the courts.

The courts find it difficult to take action against many adulterators due to the absence of a means to test the quality of perishable items like fish and milk quickly, the meeting noted. It asked Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI) to devise a means to do away with the limitation.

The meeting emphasised the need for better co-ordination between the staffs of the various agencies concerned including the BS, public health department and Dhaka City Corporation. Babar also warned the mobile

court members against any abuse of power.

HARSHER ACTIONS
As imprisonment and fine are not enough to contain food adulterators, the home ministry has decided also to employ other suitable measures including filing cases under the Special Power Act, if necessary.

On this point, the state minister said, "If necessary, I'll go to any length within the scope of law."

When asked whether the government is considering formulating a tougher law to check food adulteration, Babar said the Pure Food Ordinance is being fortified under an initiative of the LGRD ministry towards that end.

On punitive actions against the government employees concerned for failure to ensure food quality, he said, "Steps will be taken against them under the same law. We'll not make any compromise no matter whether he is a government employee or a trader."

MEDIA ROLE HAILED

The state minister thanked the media for their continuous support to the hygiene drive, mentioning that he had ordered mobile courts to swing into action prompted by a report of The Daily Star on adulteration of mangoes.

"During this drive, we've seen how strong a role the media can play to encourage a good work. Despite their [businessmen's] movement, we've succeeded in carrying on with the drive thanks to the encouragement and support lent by the media," he said.

US VISIT
On the outcome of his US visit, Babar said the US government has promised to provide a range of equipment and facilities for the police, Rapid Action Battalion and Coastguard.

"I requested for helicopters, forensic laboratory, vehicles and a lot many other things and they assured me to provide those," he said.

Babar said he requested the US government to relax the rules and visa processing for Bangladeshi students and businessmen. "I repeatedly pointed out that no Bangladeshi citizen has so far been found a terrorist in any foreign country," he recalled, adding, "I also told them that Bangladesh is a partner of the US War on Terror and will not permit any terrorist group operate in its territory."

Chevron Texaco says

FROM PAGE 1
expected to come online from 2007. Bibiyana is estimated to have a reserve of 2.6 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of gas while Unocal believes it has a potential of having up to 5.5 tcf.

The takeover was completed yesterday when majority of the Unocal shareholders voted in favour of the merger, says a press release. The merger also scotched a Chinese company's effort to outbid Chevron and buy Unocal.

"This merger provides current and long-term investment value, and Unocal is an excellent strategic fit with Chevron's assets and corporate culture," said David J O'Reilly, Chevron's chairman and chief executive officer.

The combined company will produce around 2.8 million barrels of oil-equivalent a day.

Unocal's key areas of operations are in the Asia-Pacific and Caspian regions, and the US Gulf of Mexico. In Asia-Pacific, the combined company will generate more than 20 percent of its equivalent daily crude oil and gas production and act as the leading resource holder there.

Unocal started playing a major role in Bangladesh's gas sector from

1996 by taking blocks 12, 13 and 14 in partnership with US oil company Occidental. In 1999, it acquired the entire operation of these blocks.

It is now producing gas from the Moulavibazar Gas Field, which bears the legacy of the Magurchara blowout. The explosion resulted from negligent operation of Occidental in 1997. The compensation for the loss and damage Bangladesh suffered due to the blowout has yet to be resolved.

Chevron Texaco first came to Bangladesh in 1997 to take part in the second round block bidding. Despite the high profile of the company, the government was at first reluctant to award it any block. But three years later, it had signed a production sharing contract (PSC) with the company, making Tullow, an Irish company, its partner for block 9.

An unhappy Chevron Texaco had left Bangladesh after selling out its concerns to Canadian minor company Niko. The Canadian company was found technically and financially disqualified in the second round block bidding.

Oil holds near record

FROM PAGE 1
went at \$64.50 at 1110 GMT after hitting a record-high \$65.30 in earlier trade. London Brent was down 22 cents at \$63.77 after touching \$64.57.

Even with US crude averaging above \$53 a barrel for the year to date, in real terms prices are still meet the \$80 a barrel average of 1980, after the Iranian revolution.

The United States economy is proving resilient and gasoline demand is powering ahead.

"The recent evidence is that the US economy is not merely clinging on in the face of higher energy prices, it is in fact moving forward fairly vigorously," said Barclays Capital in a report.

As oil producers like Norway and Russia fail to live up to expectations, consumers are increasingly reliant on the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to fill the gap. But here too there are

concerns over future supplies.

Oil prices have risen in nine of the past 11 sessions as the market has been edgy over possible disruptions to exports from Saudi Arabia and Iran, OPEC's two-largest oil producers.

Security

FROM PAGE 1
The source said 17 Maoist organisations of South Asia are likely to attend the CCOMPOSA conference which is to be held in the country later this year.

Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Marxist-Leninist), PBCP M-L Red Flag (Lal Potaka), PBCP M-L People's War (Janajuddha), PBCP M-L Sarbohara and Biplobi Communist Party are the five local organisations that are likely to attend the conference.

Maoist operatives selected Bangladesh for CCOMPOSA conference with plans to increase Maoist support in the country for their goal of establishing a Maoist country, "Dandkaranya Desam".

"Dandkaranya Desam", a Maoist El Dorado in South Asia, stretches from Nepal-Bhutan and covers North Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, South Madhya Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.

Washington based web newspaper South Asia Tribune reported last July that the combined strength of Indian and Nepali Maoists were increasing and they had already raised 16,000 Combatants, 32,000 armed forces, 70,000 followers and 600,000 patrons.

Sources said the local underground groups recently developed relations with leftists in India particularly the Naxalites of West Bengal.

Army men in jail

FROM PAGE 1
Talking to The Daily Star, many jail officials expressed their apprehension that the government will gradually fill all the seven DIG (Prisons) posts with army officers although it has primarily decided to make one such appointment.

"It will be no wonder for me if I see one day an army havidier is brought to serve in my position," said a district jailer, seeking anonymity.

"The government has a plan to fill all the top posts of the jail administration with army men depriving the departmental officials of promotion for long," he added.

"Limiting the opportunity of promotion of qualified officials of the Prisons Directorate, the government is now going to appoint an army officer to one of the seven DIG (Prisons) posts," said an aggrieved jail official.

"Although there are lot of officials having qualifications for the top posts, the government continues to make appointment from the army," he said.

"The government has a plan to fill all the top posts of the jail administration with army men depriving the departmental officials of promotion for long," he added.

UK Muslims

FROM PAGE 1
Iraq, Bosnia, Somalia and Albania. The numbers of Muslims of Afro-Caribbean and European origins are also on the rise.

But as the Muslims of South Asian origin, coming from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, comprise the majority, the sermons including the Friday Jumma Khutbas are usually delivered in Arabic, Urdu or Bangla in the mosques run by the Asian communities. This practice bars the non-Arab and non-South Asian Muslims from understanding the speeches.

Besides, more than half of the UK Muslims is born here. They also prefer sermons in English, as in most cases these young people do not understand Arabic and are not fluent in their mother tongues.

Some respondents of the MORI polls also have suggested training Imams here instead of hiring the clergy from the Indian Sub-Continent, as is presently done.

Many young Muslims said some of the Imams from the sub-continent are out of touch with the modern world and the dynamics of life in Britain, unaware of the issues affecting the lives of British Muslims.

There is also a fear that some of the extremist Muslim groups operating in the UK are run by such puritanical and intolerant non-British clergy-men. A large number of respondents said local Imams, well conversant in English and trained in the UK, would counteract the influences of such advocates for violence on the younger people by promoting Islam as a religion of peace and tolerance, which it really is.

Free nation

FROM PAGE 20
it to prevent the Awami League.

She said the Jamaat-e-Islami is deceiving the people in the name of Islam and patronising the extremist militant groups.

She urged the religious leaders to take a firm stance against it. Hasina alleged that the alliance government was killing people without trial, which Islam does not approve. She urged the religious leaders to be vocal against it.

The Awami League chief said August was a month of mourning. She said the killers murdered Bangabandhu along with his family members on August 15, 1975. She lamented that the verdict in Bangabandhu murder case has not yet been executed.

After the meeting, prayers were offered for the departed souls of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the others, who were assassinated on August 15.

Muggers

FROM PAGE 1
thighs, and the criminals fled on a motorbike.

The locals and staff of the factory rushed Jabbar to Combined Military Hospital (CMH) in the city while Ibrahim was admitted to the local Central Hospital.

The police said the victims drew the money from the Malibagh branch of the National Credit and Commerce Bank Limited at about 12:45pm.

They hired a yellow taxicab from Malibagh for Dakkhin Khan, but got off near the airport roundabout due to traffic jam. They later hired a rickshaw to the factory and when they got down at the entrance to the factory, the criminals attacked them from behind.

The police could neither arrest anyone, nor recover the money until 8:30pm last night.

Assistant Commissioner of Uttara Zone of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Ehsanullah yesterday told The Daily Star that a patrol team of police went to the garment factory place to inquire if everything was going right.

Factory owner F. Khasru Chowdhury told the police that they had no problem.

Ehsan said, "We always request people and even send letters to different banks to take police help while transacting big amounts of money, but very few people respond to us."

He said such incident will not happen if police help is taken.

Tk 146cr

FROM PAGE 1
with over 7.48 crore voters on the list.

"The actual amount will be settled in consultation with the finance ministry," EC Secretary SM Zakaria told The Daily Star yesterday.

The EC secretary official however has not yet finalised the schedule of preparing the electoral rolls. Only a work order to print five crore forms for collecting information about eligible voters has been given to the government printing press.

"The schedule will be prepared after receiving the fund," a senior EC Secretary official said.

The task of recruiting enumerators, supervisors and registration assistants however will start soon. The recruited officials will be provided with training for the preparation of electoral rolls, the official added.

BDNews24 adds: The EC's proposed budget for preparing a fresh voter list was banded back by the finance ministry on the grounds of not maintaining proper procedures.

The EC yesterday morning sent the Tk 146.29 crore budget to the finance ministry with the signature of Deputy secretary Mihir Sarwar Morshed without any summary of the file.

The finance ministry, after examining the file, sent it back to the EC saying that EC secretary's sign is a must for seeking such a huge fund.

The ministry also asked the commission to include a summary in the file of the proposed budget.

Warne breaks

FROM PAGE 20
first ball in Test cricket against England, he bowled Mike Gatting with a viciously turning leg-break that pitched outside the batsman's pads and clipped the top of off-stump.

It was the second Test at Edgbaston Warne, who returned figures of 10 for 162, became the first bowler to take 100 Test wickets in a single foreign country.

Before this match, Warne had taken 16 wickets in the first two Tests of the series at an average of 15.31 with a best of six for 46 in the second innings at Edgbaston.

Rebels kill

FROM PAGE 20
forces in Iraq with about 50 soldiers killed across the war-torn country.

Four died and six were wounded when insurgents ambushed their patrol vehicles near the northern oil town of Baiji, the military said, adding that rebels set off a mine and opened fire with guns.

The attack was claimed by Al-Qaeda's frontman in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, according to an unverified internet statement.

A fifth soldier was killed by a suicide car bomber in the capital, while a sixth died by small arms fire during combat operations near Habbaniyah in north-west Iraq.

Meanwhile, top Iraqi leaders met in groups to work out their differences over the constitution.

Jaafari expressed hope that the constitution would be ready by August 15.

"The constitution must be done according to the timetable, just like the way elections and the government were formed," he said.

Groups of Shias, Sunnis and Kurds met separately in Baghdad to debate the unresolved issues dogging the final draft constitution as rebels continued their attacks, killing three people.

"A series of meetings were being held on Thursday by the Shias, the Sunnis and the Kurds to help arrive at a decision," Mahmud Othman, a member of the constitution panel told AFP.

A top US military official meanwhile ruled out early withdrawal of US forces from Iraq, saying the Iraqi military was still unable to cope with the insurgency.

5,050 graft cases

FROM PAGE 1
cases after the defendants' petition for stay order.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan on May 7 sent a letter to the law ministry through the cabinet division to inquire about the commission's responsibility in conducting the cases.

But the government reply failed to give the ACC a guideline to resolve the problem fast, said a source.

The law ministry later sent a letter to the cabinet division on June 26, suggesting that the commission's prosecution unit would be able to deal with the cases.

A month later, the cabinet division wrote to the ACC saying, "After complete organogram of the commission is finalised and approved by the government, the commission's prosecution unit can be formed. Following the formal formation of the prosecution unit, cases can be conducted through the unit."

Although the ACC Act says that lawyers appointed or employed by the commission on temporary basis will be able to run the cases until the prosecution unit is formed, the government did not make any instruction in this regard.

On receiving the letter, ACC Secretary Ataur Rahman wrote a letter to the cabinet division saying that the responsibility of conducting the on-trial cases will not be on the commission but on the government as conducting these cases has been associated with the completion of the commission's organogram and formation of its prosecuting unit.

Expressing worry that absence of the prosecution witnesses during the hearing and other complications are delaying the trial, the secretary

apprehends that the accused might gain "undue advantage" for this.

An ACC source said the government's legal opinion will only linger the crisis rather than resolve the stagnation of the on-trial cases for over nine months.

According to the ACC Act, the government is responsible for the ACC organogram and budget. As the government took no steps, the three-member ACC itself initiated the process of forming the draft organogram of over 1000 staff and sent it to the establishment ministry in April for government approval.

But the ministry sent the draft back to the commission saying it is incomplete and suggested incorporation of the staff's job description in it.

Although the ACC was not willing to take any assistance of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) from the very beginning, while working on the draft, it finally decided in July to take the ADB help upon the government's desire.

Govt won't

FROM PAGE 20
Ambassador in Sweden Sabihuddin Ahmed, who is also on contract after his retirement as secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forest, as the next high commissioner in London.

In a separate letter on Wednesday, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked Bangladesh Ambassador in Italy Anwarul Bar Chowdhury to return to Dhaka by October handing over the charge.

The government is yet to announce the name of the next ambassador in Rome.

Foreign ministry officials hinted that one of its directors general is likely to be appointed in Rome soon.

Back home

FROM PAGE 1
their ordeal.

"I was regularly put on a camel in the race where 60 to 150 camels would run. I had to whip the camel so that I can go first. If failed to be first, second or third, my employer would beat me up," said Abdul Samad, 13, of Noakhali whom his maternal uncle and aunt took to the UAE eight years back.

"I could not cope with the strong and speedy camel, but I had to suffer for that," Samad, slender and thin boy told The Daily Star at the ZIA.