

Bangladesh-Malaysia joint venture company on cards

Hajj pilgrims to get various facilities

REJAU KARIM BYRON

A Bangladesh-Malaysia joint venture company will be formed soon to provide various facilities, including financial assistance, to Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrims.

The pilgrims can also avail themselves of the facilities during their stay in Saudi Arabia.

The Ahsania Hajj Investment and Finance Company Limited will be formed by the government, Ahsania Mission and Malaysia Global Hajj and Global Corporation (MGHGC), according to a finance ministry source.

The government will have a five percent of the total share, while 51 percent will go to the Ahsania Mission

and 49 percent to the Malaysian company. According to the Ahsania Mission, the company will make an investment of 20 million dollars.

The Prime Minister's Office, the finance ministry and the Bangladesh Bank have already given a green signal for the establishment of the company. Once the finance ministry gives its final consent, the Bangladesh Bank will initiate the process to issue a licence for the company.

Every year, about 50,000 Bangladeshis go to Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj. The pilgrimage involves around Tk 1.5 lakh, which many devotees, particularly middle and lower middle groups, cannot afford.

The company will initially target such people and launch a special

eight-year saving scheme.

Presently, several private companies are engaged in arranging transportation of pilgrims and accommodation facilities for them in Saudi Arabia, but there are allegations of serious mismanagement and even fraud against these companies, said a religious affairs ministry source.

The new company will now arrange all facilities such as accommodation, transport, food and healthcare in the cities of Makkah, Madina, Mina, Arafat and Muzdalifa.

Although there are restrictions on permission for any new financial institution, imposed by the finance ministry, the company may get the permission under special consideration.

PM returns after a week

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia returned yesterday concluding her week-long pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia for performing umrah.

A special Bangladesh Biman flight, carrying the Prime Minister, landed at Zia International Airport at 12:20 pm.

On her arrival, Ministers, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor, chiefs of three services, senior civil and military official and diplomats were present at the airport to greet her.

She left Dhaka on October 24 for Saudi Arabia to perform umrah.

Body of Rezaul Karim arrives today

UNB, Dhaka

The body of Ambassador MM Rezaul Karim, who passed away in Cairo, will be flown to Dhaka today from Dubai by a flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

Late Karim, Bangladesh Ambassador to Egypt, passed away due to a massive heart attack in Cairo on October 29.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan will receive the body at ZIA at 9:00am today.

His namaz-e-janaza will be held after Zohr prayers at the Gulshan Azad Mosque. He will be buried at the Banani graveyard.

Buet convocation on Jan 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ninth convocation of Bangladesh University of Science and Technology (Buet) will be held on January 3, 2006.

Students graduated from different institutes/departments of Buet from January 1 to November 15 this year have been invited to participate in the convocation. Graduates who have already received their original certificate can also participate.

Interested candidates can collect convocation form from Examination Controller's office at Buet or from Buet website http://www.buet.ac.bd. The deadline of submitting the form is November 30.

In the convocation each graduate can host only a guest, duly named in the convocation form.

DOLLAR EMBEZZLEMENT Former Airport OC sued

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Salaudinn Shuib Chowdhury, sacked managing director of Inqilab TV, yesterday filed a criminal case against Abdul Hanif, the then officer-in-charge (OC) of Airport Police Station, accusing him of embezzling 3,000 US dollars on November 29, 2003.

The case was filed against the OC with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

After hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate Mizanur Rahman took the complaint into cognisance and directed the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to take necessary action against the OC on an investigation into the matter.



Appeal for help

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Md Jahidul Islam, a visually impaired student of MA in Islamic studies at Tejgaon College, has sought financial assistance for his educational expenses.

Born of a poor family in Keraniganj, Jahid passed the SSC and HSC examinations with first divisions from humanities group and BA in Islamic studies with second class.

He has recently got an opportunity to enrol at the University of East London for higher studies. But he is unable to pay the tuition fee of about Tk nine lakh. He sells prayer caps and attar to earn a living as well as educational costs, while his mother works as a domestic help in Dhaka.

Jahid is the first blind student to take part in the IELTS exam held at the British Council in Dhaka last month.

He appeals to the generous people to extend a helping hand so that he can pursue higher studies.

Donations can be sent to the following account: Md Jahidul Islam, Savings Account No. 34104414, Janata Bank, Corporate Branch, Farmgate, Dhaka.



Cabinet members receive Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at Zia International Airport in the city yesterday on her return from Saudi Arabia where she performed Umrah.

Call for Indo-Bangla efforts to fight fundamentalism

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political leaders and civil society members yesterday called for strengthening Bangladesh-India relations and launching joint efforts to resist fundamentalist forces.

It would have been difficult for the nation to achieve independence within the shortest time, if Indira Gandhi, then prime minister of India, had not extended cooperation during the War of Liberation, they said at a discussion marking the 22nd death anniversary of Indira Gandhi.

The Indian High Commission and the Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora Foundation jointly organised the memorial meeting at the Liberation War Museum in the city.

The speakers paid tribute to Indira Gandhi for her contribution to the liberation war, saying that she played an important role during the critical period.

"Like Bangladesh, India is also a victim of fundamentalism and communalism, as evident from the recent bomb blasts in Delhi. The real tribute would be paid to her when we would be able to fight militancy internationally," said Rashed Khan Menon, president of the Workers Party.

Sarbajit Chakrabarti, acting high commissioner of India, said implementing the ideal of a non-communal world cherished by Indira Gandhi could enrich both Bangladesh and India.

Awami League leader Abdur Razzak called for implementing the initiatives to name a road after Indira Gandhi and set up a memorial to the Indian soldiers martyred during the liberation war.

Prof Abul Barkat, a trustee of the Aurora Foundation, called on the pro-liberation forces to be united to resist the fundamentalists who are now stepping up their activities in the country.

Lt. Gen. (Retd.) KM Shafiqullah, Bangabir Kader Siddiqi, AL leader Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Bangladesh Mujahidul Islam Selim also spoke.

Govt urged not to raise airfare of Hajj passengers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB) yesterday at a press conference in the city demanded of the government not to increase the plane fare for Hajj passengers, which has been fixed by the cabinet at \$950.

They threatened not to send any pilgrims if the government increases airfare by Tk one as the airfare problem for non-ballotee hajj pilgrims has already been resolved at the cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

They also threatened to launch movements including surrendering their agencies licences to the Ministry for Religious Affairs for cancellation.

In a written statement, HAAB President Abdur Shakur said the government at a cabinet meeting has fixed the airfare of non-ballotee Hajis at \$950, but a vested quarter of Biman Bangladesh Airlines for their personal interests is trying to increase the fare by \$410 showing excuses of plane shortage and price hike of jet fuel.

He said after the government decision of airfare at \$950 the Hajj agencies has started taking Hajj money from the intending pilgrims and renting houses at Makka and Modina.

The agencies also talked with the foreign aeroplane operators about the airfare for Hajj pilgrims at \$850 to 900, he added.

HAAB president informed that Saudi Airlines will carry Hajj pilgrims at \$563 from Pakistan and at \$820 from Indonesia and Malaysia, which is \$200 lower than the fair fixed for the Bangladeshi hajj pilgrims. But because of the wrong decisions of Civil Aviation ministry, foreign airlines now do not want to carry Bangladesh Hajj pilgrims at \$950.

HAAB Secretary General Jilur Chowdhury, former president Mohaimin Salekin and other members of the Association were present at the press conference.

1,638 arrested, 14 firearms seized

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 1,638 people on various charges from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours ending at 6:00am yesterday.

During the period, the law-enforcers also seized 14 firearms and 56 bullets, says a police headquarters release.

Hannan remanded again

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Mufti Abdul Hannan, operations commander of the banned Harkatul Jihad's Bangladesh chapter, was placed on a fresh three-day remand yesterday on charges of the August 17 country-wide bomb blasts.

Detective Branch (DB) of police produced Hannan before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka at 3:00pm on completion of the five-day remand in the case filed for the blasts on the Dhaka University campus.

Two Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members took the glum looking Hannan to the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Shaiful Islam. Hannan was wearing a helmet and a bulletproof vest.

The forwarding report placed by police before the court said Hannan gave nicknames of many involved in the bombings. He needs to be further quizzed for the details of those people, the report added, appealing for a further 10-day remand.

Hannan told the court that he is sick and asked for treatment in a hospital. The court, however, told him that the police would provide him treatment if needed during his remand.

After the hearing the court granted a three-day remand for further interrogation and directed the investigating officer (IO) to take necessary steps for his treatment.

Hannan was arrested at Madhya Badda in Dhaka on October 1 after several years of remaining in hiding. He was later shown arrested in three bomb blast cases filed with Tejgaon and Ramna Police Stations and taken on a 27-day remand in four phases.

OC Rafiq sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail petition of suspended officer-in-charge (OC) of Motijheel Police Station, AKM Rafiqul Islam, also the prime accused in Kamrul Islam Momin murder case.

Metropolitan Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas passed the order when Criminal Investigation Department (CID) produced the suspended OC before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) Court on completion of his two-day remand.

Rejecting his bail petition by the defence lawyers, the court ordered to send him to Dhaka Central Jail as there was no petition for further remand prayer.

The forwarding report placed before the court said information derived from the OC during the remand period was being verified and he needs to be confined until its investigation completes, the OC said.

Rafiq was taken on a six-day remand in phases.

He was sent to jail on October 16 after he had surrendered to a court seeking ad interim bail.

Kamrul Islam Momin, 22, a student of Dhaka Commerce College, was shot dead near his Ibrahimpur house on September 13.

Momin's father Abdur Razzak filed a murder case with Kafil Police Station accusing Rafiq and 27 others. Police so far arrested 13 of the accused.

Hasibul Haq Johnny, one of the accused, made a confessional statement before a magistrate on September 22.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police closed the accused OC on September 15 and suspended him on October 2 for not reporting to Rajarbagh Police Lines.

Obituary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Eminent Rajshahi journalist and litterateur Abdul Samad Mian passed away due to old age complications at his house in Rajshahi on Sunday at the age of 97.

After a namaz-e-janaza at the Lal Mohammad Eidgah field, he was buried at his family graveyard.

He left behind his wife, four sons and six daughters and a host of relatives and admirers.

He was the founding editor of Rajshahi Barta and his radio programme on education titled 'Boro Mian' was very popular during Pakistan era.

Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP, Workers Party Politburo member Fazle Hossain Badsha, Awami League leader Sardar Amjad Hossain, AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, BNP leader Nadim Mostafa MP and various organisations including Metropolitan Press Club and Rajshahi Press Club authorities expressed condolence over his death in separate statements.

Azizur Rahman

BSS, Dhaka

Azizur Rahman, a reputed social worker of Sherpur and former official of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) passed away due to old age complication yesterday at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at the age of 80.

He left behind his four sons, including Anwar Hossain Manju, deputy chief news editor of BSS and one daughter.

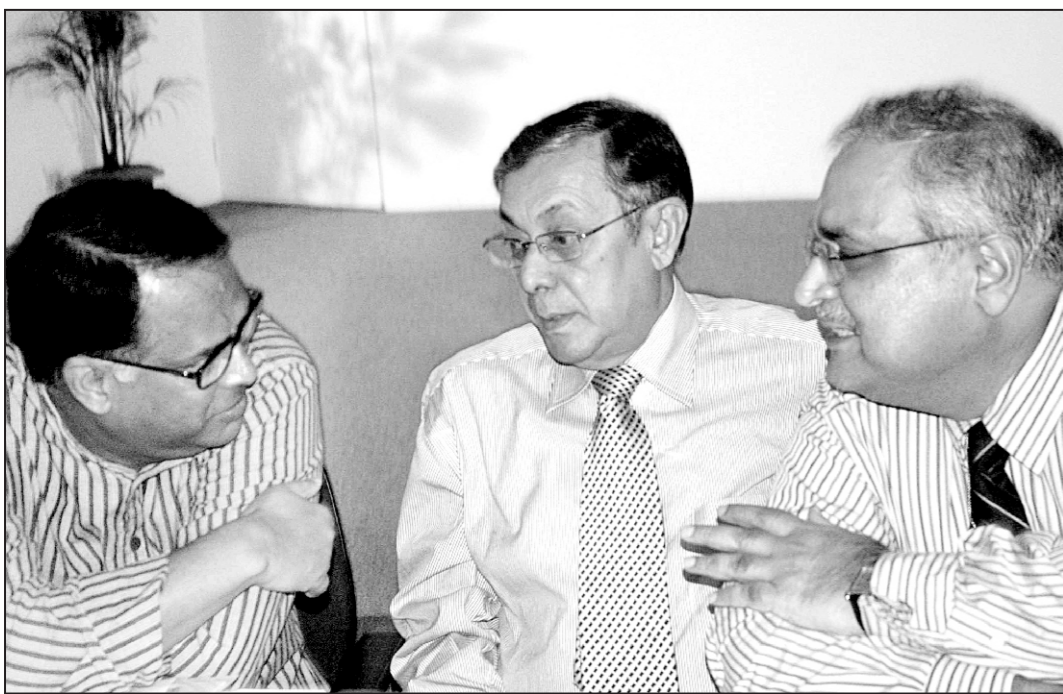


PHOTO: STAR

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud and CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya discuss a point at a dialogue on 'Current Crisis in the Power Sector: Nature of the Problem and the Way Forward' at the Brac centre in the city yesterday while former army chief Lt General (Retd) Nuruddin looks on.

14 opposition parties call for electoral reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of 14 opposition parties yesterday reiterated their earlier stance, saying that they would not take part in the next general elections unless the proposed reforms are brought to the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC).

The BNP-Jamaat alliance government has designed a blueprint to rig parliamentary elections, they said at a discussion marking the 33rd founding anniversary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) at its central office in the city.

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil said the 14-party opposition alliance has been formed to restore the spirit of the liberation war by toppling the 'anti-liberation' alliance govern-

ment. The electoral reforms must be carried out before any general election, he asserted.

The AL leader alleged that the BNP has destroyed the spirit of liberation war by joining hands with the anti-liberation elements.

Jalil said the opposition alliance is working to formulate a common national programme for a qualitative change in state functioning. Suggestions from different sections of the society, including the professional groups, will be incorporated into the programme, he added.

The programme will be announced from a grand rally at Paltan Maidan on November 22, Jalil said.

Workers Party president Rashed Khan Menon said price hike of essentials, electricity and gas crises and extrajudicial killings by law enforcement agencies have made the country unliveable.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu said the coalition government has politicised all the appointments, particularly in the election commission and police administration, as part of its conspiracy to manipulate the results of the next general election.

He also urged all to be united to resist the communal and anti-liberation forces.

JSD General Secretary Syed Jafar

Sazzad, Gano Forum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua, Jatiya Party (Manju) General Secretary Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Gonotantri Party President Nurul Islam and JSD leaders Moyeenuddin Khan Badal, Sharif Nurul Ambia and Shirin Akhtar also spoke.

Brac, Proshika aid for Monga-hit people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two leading NGOs have provided financial assistance to Monga-hit people in northwestern districts of the country.

Brac has disbursed Tk 63 lakh as soft loans to 'ultra poor families' in 17 worst Monga-affected upazilas of Nilphamary, Kurigram and Lalmonirhat districts, says a press release.

Brac authorities say the fund is meant only for subsistence and the recipients are supposed to make repayments whenever they can afford.

Meanwhile, Proshika has formed a Special Assistance Fund of Tk 3.50 lakh for monga-hit people, says a press release.



Broderick takes over as WFP representative

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Douglass Broderick took over as the representative of World Food Programme (WFP) in Bangladesh on Sunday.

Prior to his new assignment, Broderick was the WFP representative in China and acted as the chair of United Nations Disaster Management Team there, says a press release.

Earlier, he served as the country director of WFP in North Korea from 1998 to 2000 where he managed one of the WFP's critical humanitarian operations.

"Bangladesh is one of the key partners for WFP. I will be concentrating here to support the government and development partners in reducing the hunger amongst ultra-poor people and improving their quality of life," said Broderick.

The WFP assists nearly 40 lakh people in the country through a number of food-based interventions.

Weather Today Thundershowers likely UNB, Dhaka. Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at one or two places over Chittagong division till 6:00pm today. Weather may remain mainly dry elsewhere over the country. Met Office said, predicting nearly unchanged Day and Night temperature during the period. Highest temperature 32.7 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Sylhet and lowest 19.2 degree Celsius at Rangpur. The sun sets in the capital at 5:19pm today and rises at 6:05am tomorrow. Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

Table with 5 columns: City/Town, Temperature in Celsius (Max, Min), Humidity in percentage (Morning, Evening). Rows include Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar.