

AL to send a letter to UN for probe help

Says Hasina on bomb attacks

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the Awami League would send a letter to the United Nations (UN) seeking assistance to probe bomb terrorism by militants.

Pointing out that "UN probe was conducted in Lebanon", the AL president said the government should take the initiative.

But since the government's role about terrorism is controversial it might not seek the UN help, Hasina

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

UK minister due today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UK Secretary of State for International Development Hilary Benn MP arrives here today on a two-day visit to see the development work being carried out as well as the progress being made to improve the lives of poor people.

Benn, who visited Bangladesh in 2002 last, arrives Dhaka this morning on his way to the Ministerial Meeting of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in Hong Kong from December 13-18.

On the first day of his visit, the British minister will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Finance

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Silk Route team close to Teknaf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chinese delegation that had embarked on a tri-national road trip following the ancient Silk Route revised their tour schedule following non-cooperation from the Myanmar military junta.

The delegation started the journey from Kunming, capital of the Chinese western province Yunnan on December 1 by two cars, but got stuck at the China-Myanmar border on December 6 as the Myanmar authorities deny them entry with their vehicles.

They could not manage the permission from the Myanmar authorities after waiting for five

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

SIRAJGANJ PLANT

Complaints slow down re-tendering process

SHARIER KHAN

Despite a sense of urgency of the government, the second re-tendering of the Sirajganj 450 MW power project is unlikely to see the light before February or March due to a number of complications arising out of allegations of foul play.

Following a report in The Daily Star on relaxation of bid criteria in five areas to accommodate lower quality offers in October, an industry insider lodged a written complaint to the prime minister questioning the transparency of all power projects – especially the Sirajganj scheme.

This letter, followed by notes from the World Bank on the same issue and a directive of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), has put the Power Cell in a defensive position.

Cell sources said the PMO has asked the Power Cell to have the relaxation of the Sirajganj bid criteria approved by the power ministry. The WB on the other hand suggested that the Cell hire a consultant to handle the bid so that no-one can

question the latter's neutrality.

"We will hire a consultant and have the bid criterion approved from the ministry. If everything goes well, the re-tendering of the project may take place around February or March," said a competent Power Cell source.

Earlier on November 19, Brian Lee, posing as an industry operator, wrote a letter to the prime minister saying all the leading independent power producers (IPPs) of the world are staying out of Bangladesh because of lack of transparency, confusing and ambiguous documentation, and delay in taking decisions.

"Since Your Excellency assumed power, not a single IPP project has materialised. This is largely due to the ineptitude of the agencies and their attempts to corrupt and slant the procurement process toward their individual choice of vendors," Lee said, adding that corruption has gripped the process of the Sirajganj project, which is discouraging competent bidders from taking part

in the tender.

He pointed out that the original Sirajganj bid criteria sought for quality bidders, but the proposed relaxation of bid criteria will allow almost anyone to qualify in the tender. The previous criterion sought the qualified bidder to have construction, operation and maintenance experience of at least one combined cycle plant of 300 MW. But the new criterion allows bidder to show two plants of two sites totalling 300 MW plant.

"This is analogous to saying that if you can own and ride 20 motorcycles, you are qualified to drive a truck! This is a trickery of the Power Cell to bring an unqualified party to the table."

"It is widely known that the Westmont Group and Hosaf Group had lobbied earlier for this dilution in the past without success. They

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

Members of Sammilita Sangskritik Jote stage a token hunger strike on the Central Shaheed Minar premises yesterday to protest against the ongoing spate of bomb attacks across the country.



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia inaugurates the month-long 11th Dhaka International Trade Fair 2005 in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the city yesterday.

Diversify goods to boost export under Safta

PM urges at opening of trade fair

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia yesterday urged exporters to diversify export products maintaining international standard to boost the country's exports to neighbouring countries under the agreement of South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta).

She said the South Asian leaders have given their commitments to perform their trade under the Safta agreement from January 1, 2006. The agreement was finalised in last November's South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) Summit in Dhaka.

The PM said, "Under Safta, the export and import volume will increase among the South Asian countries, where immediate export

diversification is needed for us to hold up a balanced trade."

Speaking as the chief guest of the inaugural ceremony of Dhaka International Trade Fair 2005 (DITF-2005), she asked businessmen to be aware of the conspiracy and propaganda against the country. She also urged them to work hard to protect the country from those conspiracies.

Khaleda Zia formally inaugurated the DITF-2005 at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar fair ground following the inaugural ceremony held at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) and commerce ministry organised the eleventh DITF as their annual event to help local entrepreneurs expand their business globally.

Commerce Minister Altaf

Hossain Choudhury, Commerce Ministry Advisor Barkat Ullah Bulu, Commerce Secretary Faruk Ahmed Siddiqui and EPB Vice-chairman Mir Shahabuddin Mohammad were also present.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, the commerce minister said export diversification is the key to enhance export volume as well as strengthening our economy.

He said export from Bangladesh grew to \$8.65 billion in the 2004-05 fiscal year which is 13.83 percent increase in comparison to the previous fiscal year.

The minister said, "As the government gave facilities like cash incentive and low interest bank loan to the exporters, I am confident

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Tendulkar top century-maker in Test cricket

REUTERS, New Delhi

Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar set a world record for most Test hundreds on Saturday, stroking his 35th century to surpass compatriot Sunil Gavaskar.

The 32-year-old Mumbai batsman reached the milestone on the opening day of the second Test

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Kanchan strikes twice to take Bangladesh to Saff semifinals

AL MUSABIR SADI, from Karachi

Rokonuzaman Kanchan struck either side of the break as Bangladesh stormed into the semifinals of the Fourth SAFF Championship with an authoritative 2-0 win over Nepal in a Group B match at the People's Complex Stadium here yesterday.

India also moved to the last four from the same group after beating Bhutan 3-0 earlier in the day.

Level on six points, Bangladesh are ahead of India by virtue of a better goal difference and the two regional rivals meet in the group decider tomorrow.

After a cautious start, Diego Cruciani's charges took control of the midfield and began to slice the rival defence regularly. But Farhad's seventh minute placing shot went wide after the striker got a through pass from Alfaz inside the box. In the next two minutes, two more crosses tested Nepalese goalkeeper Bikash Malla who pulled off a fine save halfway through the first session to thwart a powerful freekick by Arman from 25 yards.

The break came in the 27th

Hamas won't renew truce with Israel

US shrugs off move

AGENCIES, Washington

The head of the Islamist group Hamas's political branch, Khaled Meshaal, said Friday the group would not renew its fragile truce with Israel when it expires at the end of the year.

"We will not enter a new truce while our people are surrounded and are preparing for a new round of conflict," Meshaal told a rally at Damaskus, the capital of the Palestinian community in Syria.

"We have had enough of the truce while our prisoners are still held," he told the meeting marking the 38 years since the creation of the

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

The United States shrugged off the Hamas announcement. "We've always made clear that truces are good only insofar as they go, and that's really not very far," said deputy State Department spokesman Adam Ereli in Washington.

He accused Hamas of pursuing violence against innocent civilians and urged the Palestinian Authority to take action against it and another group, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.

Meshaal's announcement came amid heightened violence in the Gaza Strip and West Bank, with Israel carrying out lethal raids following Monday's suicide bombing

in the northern Israeli city of Netanya in which five people died.

"There's no question of agreeing a new truce and there's no point in negotiating, because the policy of procrastinating over applying agreements pushes us not to renew the truce," he said.

Palestinian groups agreed to the truce at a meeting in Cairo in March, but it has been far from watertight since then, with militants retaliating for targeted assassinations of their leaders carried out by the Israeli military.

"The Palestinian gun will always

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Nigerian plane crash kills 56

AP, Lagos

A Nigerian passenger jet crashed yesterday in the southern city of Port Harcourt, killing at least 56 people, a radio station said.

The Sosoliso Airlines flight from Abuja was carrying 110 people when it "crash landed and burst into flames," radio station Rhythm FM reported. Fifty-six bodies have been recovered, and seven people were taken to the hospital, the report said.

Sam Adurogboye, spokesman for the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, confirmed that a plane had crashed but said he had no further details.

"Yes, there was a crash," he told The Associated Press. "We are

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8



A panicked woman slightly hurt in a bomb blast in Gulshan goes off the scene to safety with her husband yesterday.

First hajj flight leaves today

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The first hajj flight of the Biman Bangladesh Airlines leaves for Jeddah today carrying 272 pilgrims.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is expected to open the first of 86 flights at Zia International Airport.

The national flag-carrier will ferry 2,621 pilgrims and flights will run up to January 4.

The ballottee pilgrims have deposited \$950 and the non-ballottee \$1,050 each. A 576-seater Boeing-747-300 aircraft chartered by Biman is also ready to fly.

Another 387-seater chartered airbus330-300 is expected to arrive Dhaka by Monday.

Jamaat, IOJ, Nabuwat men to be watched

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Intelligence agencies made a list of some local Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) and Islami Khatme Nabuwat Movement Bangladesh (IKNMB) leaders of Khulna to watch their activities.

According to a reliable source of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), the recent arrest of two IOJ leaders with JMB connection at Khulna

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Identify source of terror fund urges Economic Association

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) has expressed deep concern over ongoing militant activities, saying corruption, criminalisation of politics and black money are the roots of this new phenomenon.

"Security of the common people has totally collapsed and the overall situation is now extremely vulnerable," Qazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad, president of BEA, told a press briefing at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Stressing the need for identifying the source of militants' funds, he said it is essential to identify their godfathers are and with whom they have connections.

It is not possible to suppress militants without addressing their roots, he observed. Corruption by helping a few people become richer has aggravated the overall situation, he added.

"The government has failed to prove its sincerity in chalking out a plan of action and addressing the activities.

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SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

"The government has failed to prove its sincerity in chalking out a plan of action and addressing the

issue," Khaliquzzaman said, adding, these are the indications that Bangladesh is moving to be identified as a failed state.

"It is the perception of the outside world. We can change it by our work but unfortunately things are not moving towards that direction," the BEA president added.

Speaking at the briefing, BEA General Secretary Abul Barakat said it is being claimed that the ruling coalition has no links with militants, but some leaders within the alliance are disputing the claim.

"It is very clear that the ruling coalition is divided on the issue of militancy," he said.

He cast doubt over the sincerity of the government in crushing the militancy issue.

Non-government organisations (NGOs) are being forced to close operations, while at the same time a bearer bank cheque of Tk 2 crore

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1