

2 journalists
hurt in bomb
attack

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Kushtha*

Unknown miscreants hurled bombs injuring two journalists in Palashpara of Chuadanga town while a gang hurled three bombs at Pirpurgoraghata of Chuadanga Sadar upazila yesterday.

Police sources said the unidentified miscreants hurled two bombs at the journalists, Bakul Ahmed, 30, and Mahfuz Mamun, 33, of local Daily Mathabangha, as they were returning to their office on a rickshaw around 10:30pm.

Locals rushed the spot and sent the injured journalists to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital. The newspaper sources said the

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Railway cancels
16 train services
as it lacks fund
to buy diesel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Ctg*

Bangladesh Railway (BR) yesterday cancelled 16 train services through different routes in the eastern zone for indefinite period as it faces an acute fund crisis to buy high-priced diesel for its locomotives.

BR officials said the move would not affect services seriously as the unprofitable and insignificant routes have been cancelled.

The 16 train routes that have been cancelled are Chittagong-Akhaura (4 trains), Laksham-Noakhali (2 trains), Mymensingh-Bahadurabad (2 trains),

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Raj Punnah
festival from
today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bandarban*

The folk fair that accompany the traditional Raj Punnah festival will not be held this year due to the prevailing law and order situation of the country, sources said.

The Raj Punnah, an annual revenue collection programme of the Bomang king from the Bomang tribe, begins today.

Confirming the matter, a Rajbari source said "Through an informal and non-magnificent arrangement the Bomang King Aung Shew Prue Chowdhury would collect taxes from headmen, karbars (businessmen) and people of 109 mouzas under the

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Joseph
Crowley
due Feb 21

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

US Congressman Joseph F Crowley, co-chair of congressional Bangladeshi Caucus, will arrive in the city on February 21 on a three-day unofficial visit.

During his visit, Crowley will lay a wreath at the Central Shaheed Minar, visit the Dhakeswari Temple and Ahmadiya Complex at Bakshibazar. He will also call on Archbishop Paulinus.

Crowley will address a press conference at the American Centre on February 22.

Sources said Crowley's visit may have links with the next Congress election as there are a number of voters in Bangladesh.

RMG export thrives on knitwear boost

11pc growth in the first post-MFA year despite fear of setback

MONJUR MAHMUD

Knitwear's impressive performance helped overall apparel export grow about 11 percent in the very first year of quota phaseout despite fears at home and abroad that Bangladesh might face a major setback in the post-MFA era.

"Our readymade garment export saw a major boost in 2005 in spite of fears that we might be left out in the global market," said a highly placed source in the commerce ministry.

According to Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), the total income from apparel export was \$6,889.3 million in 2005 and \$6,219.7 million in 2004, the closing year of the MFA regime.

The growth was possible due to a \$673.29-million increase in knitwear export in 2005 when woven

garment export marked a slight fall of \$3.69 million.

International agencies and trade experts ahead of the open trade regime predicted a drastic plummet in Bangladesh that heavily depends on RMG with 75 percent share in its total export income.

"Fears loomed large that Bangladesh export would face major setback in the changed global situation. But the performance has been beyond our

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APPAREL EXPORT GROWTH IN POST-MFA

	2004	2005	Growth
Woven	3686.23	3682.54	-3.69
Knitwear	2533.47	3208.76	673.29
Total export	6219.70	6889.30	669.60

STAR GRAPHICS



PHOTO: STAR

Economists, civil society members, business leaders and development partners speak at a roundtable on 'Tackling Poverty: The Role of Development Partnerships' organised by The Daily Star and DFID at Cirdap Auditorium in Dhaka yesterday.

The Daily Star-DFID ROUNDTABLE

Better ties with donors stressed to cut poverty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economists, civil society

members, business leaders and development partners at a roundtable in the city yesterday stressed a broader and deeper partnership between Bangladesh and its development partners for poverty alleviation and sustainable growth.

They suggested giving the poor access to resources through equity share and ownership, removal of trade barriers, free movement of workers and duty free access of goods from developing countries to developed ones.

The government should adopt a visionary approach for removing poverty and steering the nation forward. And development partners should increase the flow of assis-

tance to Bangladesh, the speakers said.

The Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK and The Daily Star jointly organised the roundtable in preparation for a high level conference in London on March 6-7.

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam moderated the roundtable held at CIRDAP auditorium, and Dr Qazi Khaliquzzaman Ahmad presented the keynote paper on "Tackling poverty: The role of development partnerships."

Participating in discussion, eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan placed some specific suggestions for tackling poverty in the country. Poverty could not be alleviated through mere rhetoric, he observed.

The provision could be included in the existing EU rules regarding generalised system of preference (GSP) to the least developed

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9 killed, 29 hurt in Sylhet lightning

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Sylhet*

Nine labourers of a stone quarry were killed and 29 others injured as they were struck by lightning at Companyganj Upazila in Sunamganj early yesterday.

The group of 38 labourers, who were collecting stones from the Bholaganj quarry near the Indo-Bangladesh border, took shelter in a nearby makeshift cottage when it started raining.

Lightning struck the cottage at around 9:00am leaving the labourers senseless.

Other fellow labourers and shopkeepers from the adjacent structures rushed the victims to the Companyganj Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared nine dead.

The dead were identified as Moazzam, 22, Al Amin, 28, Surot Ali, 35, Mohammad Ali Noor, 37, Billal Hossain, 35, Nripendra Das, 22, Shashim Das, 28, Rono Das, 27, and Barun Das, 35. They hailed from Jamalganj and Sunamganj Sadar upazilas.

Among the 29 injured, one with

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BARAPUKURIA PLANT Second power unit goes into trial production

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinajpur*

The Barapukuria 250 MW power plant went into trial production last Wednesday with its second unit contributing 110 MW of electricity to the national power grid.

Bangladesh Power Development Board officials expects the 125 MW unit of the plant to go into full production within the next two or three days.

The unit will be on mechanical test for two more days as the other unit of the first ever coal-based power plant in the country is expected to be commissioned in February, sources said.

The second unit has been running on trial since last Wednesday 1:30pm. It burnt 39 tonnes of coal every hour and supplied 125MW electricity for three hours to national grid, the sources added.

The 125 MW first unit of the highly over-priced two-unit power plant went out of operation soon after its trial run last month.



PHOTO: PID

Commonwealth Secretary General Donald C McKinnon pays a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

PETROLEUM IMPORT

BPC to borrow \$250m from private sector

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday approved a proposal of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to import fuel by borrowing \$250 million from Standard Chartered Bank at a cost of 14.73 percent.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman gave the approval extempore while presiding over a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, where the proposal was tabled.

This is for the first time the state-owned petroleum agency is going to borrow from a foreign commercial bank to procure fuel from the international market due mainly to an acute foreign exchange crisis, an energy ministry source said.

But, talking to reporters after the meeting Saifur claimed, "Whether we borrow or not, we have enough foreign exchange reserve for importing petroleum. We also have

no shortfall of petroleum products in the country."

The energy ministry sent the BPC proposal to the cabinet committee for approval. But, as the meeting observed that the finance ministry, not the committee, was the proper authority to endorse the proposal, Saifur gave the permission instantly.

According to the proposal, the BPC previously had to pay interest and other charges amounting to 14.48 percent on the loans taken from the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). The cost, including interests and charges, of the proposed loan from StanChart would be 0.25 percentage point more than the IDB ones.

An energy ministry source said in fiscal year 2003-04 the BPC spent \$1 billion to import 3.5 million metric ton petroleum products. Last year the expenditure rose to

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Farmers forced to pay extra money for diesel Dinajpur highway barricaded for adequate fuel supply

STAR REPORT

Misery of the boro farmers due to the unavailability and high price of diesel continues in the northern districts even after the government withdrew its decision to increase diesel price on Wednesday.

Farmers at many places of the northern region yesterday had to buy diesel at a rate higher by around Tk 5-15 than the government-fixed price of Tk 30.13.

The farmers of Dinajpur yesterday barricaded the Dhaka-Dinajpur Highway, demanding adequate supply of diesel and electricity while the farmers of Sathkira yesterday held two persons for allegedly trying to smuggle out diesel to India.

At least four thousand farmers of Chirirbandar upazila in Dinajpur took to the street and marched towards the Amtali Bazar near the

Dhaka-Dinajpur Highway, reported our correspondent in the district. The angry farmers also barricaded the highway for two hours.

Later, Superintendent of Police Delwar Hossain Miah and Chirirbandar Upazila Nirbahi Office ASA Moinur rushed to the scene and convinced the farmers to withdraw the barricade.

Our Sathkira correspondent reports: Farmers caught two smugglers yesterday evening from Kaliganj bazar area and recovered 900 litre diesel from their possession.

Quoting local people police said several hundred farmers went to the Kaliganj Filling Station to buy diesel but the dealer denied having any diesel. Later, it was learnt that the smugglers obtained the fuel for smuggling from the same station.

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Water woes at Gabtoli colony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of families are now living under severe crisis of water at Gabtoli Faruk Colony near the city protection embankment as water of the 26 shallow tube-wells in the area emits foul odour.

The 416 families, recently evicted from Gulshan Park and rehabilitated here, are living under extremely unhygienic conditions as Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) delivers only two truckloads of water everyday. Families are required to stand in

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Pakistan ratifies Safta deal

REUTERS, *Islamabad*

The Pakistani cabinet Wednesday approved a regional pact to promote free trade and economic ties in South Asia, home to nearly one-fifth of the world's population.

Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed hailed the ratification of the South Asia Free Trade Area (Safta) agreement as "a very important decision" but did not say when Pakistan would begin implementing it.

Under the pact, Saarc's developing states - Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka - will cut tariffs to

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Prayer Timing		
February 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-25	6-00
Juma	12-30	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Magrib	5-57	6-01
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

US House votes to withhold aid

Israel gets ready to slap sanctions on Hamas govt

AFP, *Washington/ Jerusalem*

dollars in tax duties from the Palestinian Authority.

The Israeli government has insisted the Jewish state will have no dealings with the radical Islamist faction responsible for scores of suicide attacks unless it renounces violence and recognises Israel's right to exist.

Top officials have since proposed that Israel stop transferring all funds to the Palestinian

Authority, albeit allowing international humanitarian organisations to continue to assist the impoverished population.

The plans were being drawn up as Hamas's exiled political supreme Khaled Meshal arrived in Turkey, one of Israel's most important allies in the Muslim world, to hold talks with foreign ministry