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Jamdani for Manmohan's wife, Sonia

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will carry specially designed Jamdani silk saris as gifts for Gursharan Kaur, wife of her Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh and also for the ruling Indian Congress chief Sonia Gandhi.

As the prime minister leaves Dhaka tomorrow for New Delhi on a three-day visit to India, for the first time since she assumed office in 2001, her gift box would be full of two dozen Jamdani saris and a good number of art works by famous Bangladeshi painters, officials in Dhaka said.

Sources at the foreign ministry confirmed that as both Bangladesh and India attached utmost importance on taking up various confidence building measures (CBM) during the Khaleda-Manmohan summit-level bilateral talks on March 21, the Bangladeshi prime minister will carry some gifts for all the dignitaries she is going to meet in New Delhi.

There will be gifts for the Indian president, premier, opposition leaders, and Congress leaders and SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

PM'S VISIT TO INDIA

Dhaka to seek full market access

Morshed Khan tells The Daily Star

REAZ AHMAD

Bangladesh will seek greater market access for its goods in India to minimise the massive trade gap of \$2 billion in Bangladesh's disfavour, Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday, a day prior to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's tour to India.

"We expect a unilateral decision from India for 100 percent market access for Bangladesh products and lifting of all kinds of para-tariff and non-tariff barriers in reciprocity of Bangladesh's market opening policy to Indian goods and services," Morshed told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview.

Describing the importance of Khaleda-Manmohan summit as confidence building measures (CBM), he hoped that Khaleda's

maiden tour to India during her current stint in power will be a "milestone visit--maybe, one of the last calls for the train of opportunities in this region."

Khaleda leaves Dhaka tomorrow for Delhi. Finance and



Morshed Khan

Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman and Morshed Khan will accompany her on the tour during March 20-22. Besides, a 40-strong business delegation is also in the entourage.

Khaleda will inaugurate Bangladesh High Commission complex in Delhi on March 20 night. She will have a tête-à-tête with her Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House on March 21 followed by a bilateral official talks expected to yield in at least three accords on trade, investment and narcotics control.

On the last leg of her three-day India visit, the Bangladesh PM will address a joint group business gathering of AssoCham (association of all-Indian chambers) and SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

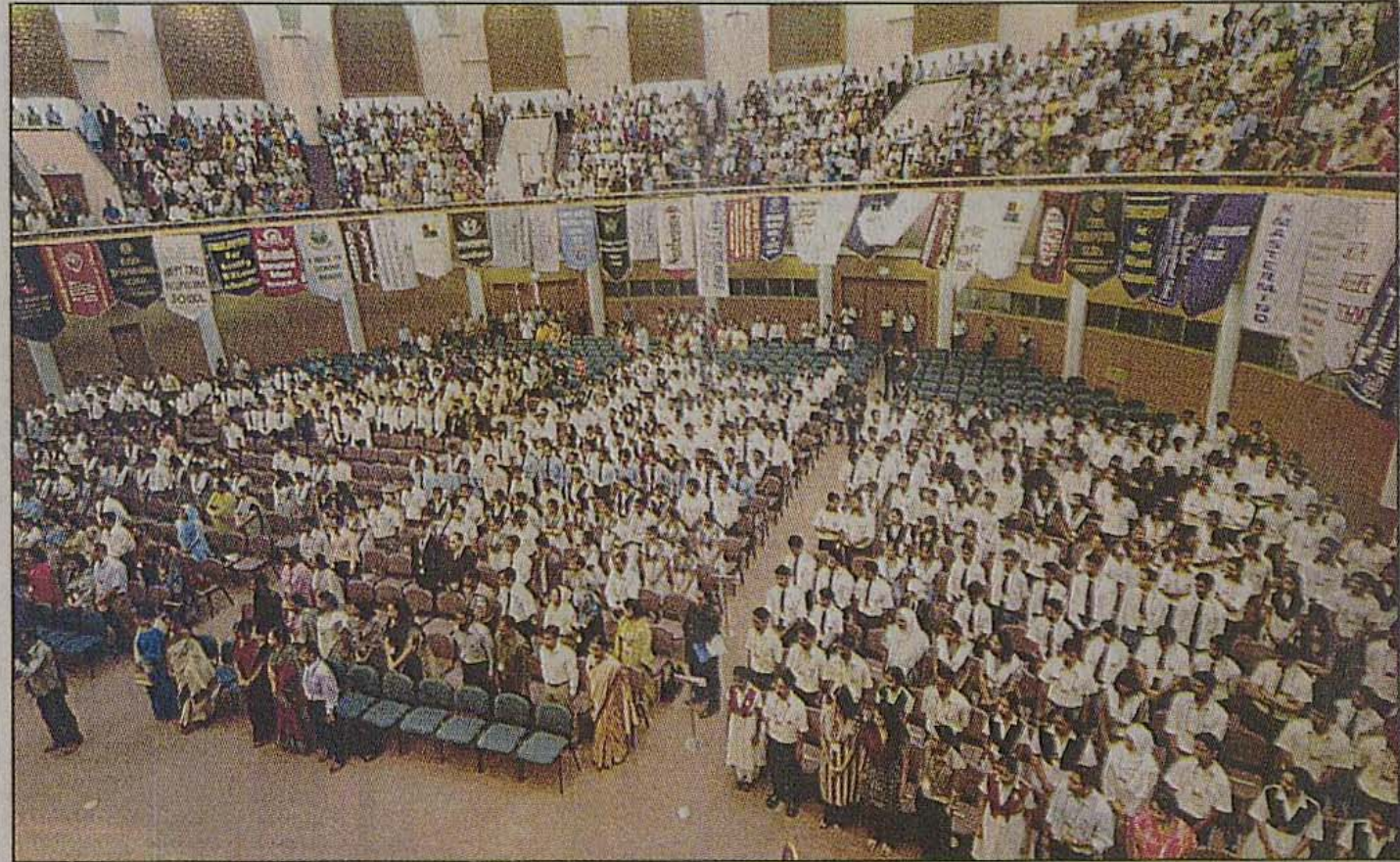


PHOTO: STAR

The audience rises as the national anthem is played at the Seventh Award Giving Ceremony of Outstanding Students of O and A Levels at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday. The Daily Star gave the awards to 610 students. [Report on page 15]

Security blanket on hotel for PM's visit

REZAUL KARIM, from New Delhi

With two days left before the arrival of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the Indian capital, a multi-layer security is in place in and around Maurya Sheraton where she will stay during her three-day state visit.

For the past few months, the hotel has bristled with intelligence and security personnel due to the visit of US President George W Bush.

Khaleda, who will be on her first visit to India since assuming power in October 2001, is scheduled to arrive in New Delhi on Monday afternoon.

She will be staying at the same suite where the US President had stayed during his trip earlier this month.

Generally reserved for high security VIP, the Chandra Gupta Maurya suite is considered the best from the security standpoint.

Former US President Bill Clinton too had stayed here during his visit to New Delhi in 2000.

Officials of Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi told The Daily Star yesterday that they have booked around 100 rooms for the visiting ministers, officials, businessmen and media personnel.

One and a half floors have been taken for the members of PM's entourage.

They said two special security teams from Bangladesh have already been in the Indian capital for the last few days.

Apart from the commands of Delhi police, Indian elite National Security Guard (NSG) and Bangladesh's Special Security Force (SSF) will be deployed in and outside the Maurya Sheraton Hotel.

Delhi police will be around the hotel while SSF and NSG will be in charge of security of the hotel floors.

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Draft voter list won't complete on schedule

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The task for preparing the draft of a fresh voter list will not finish by tomorrow, as per schedule, since the Election Commission (EC) Secretariat could not provide the district level registration officers with necessary forms and money.

A number of registration officers, who are also district election officers, told The Daily Star yesterday that they had repeatedly asked the EC Secretariat to supply the forms, but the secretariat did not respond.

The EC Secretariat directed the registration officers to complete the work of preparing the draft voter list by March 20. It supplied forms for preparing one set of the draft and asked the officials concerned to make four more sets by photocopying it.

The secretariat, however, did not provide any fund for the job, said a district election officer. "It is

impossible to complete the task by March 20," he said.

The EC Secretariat is also yet to say anything about the remuneration of the enumerators, supervisors and assistant registration officers working on the project across the country since January 1 this year.

"We are under tremendous pressure as we know nothing about the remuneration," said another district election officer.

In accordance with the schedule declared on December 6, the deadline for completion of fieldwork of the fresh voter list was January 31. The draft voter list was scheduled for publishing on February 28 and the final list on June 1.

The EC, however, failed to finish the enumeration in time and extended the deadline twice--first up to February 20 and then up to March 20.

The EC is yet to fix the dates of SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

FUNDING BPC FOR PETROLEUM IMPORT

Energy ministry, Sonali claims put finance in trouble

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The energy ministry and Sonali Bank's claim for over Tk 12,000 crore to settle Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation's (BPC) liabilities has put the finance ministry in deep trouble.

Sonali Bank wrote a letter to the ministry last month asking for cash or bond that can be invested, depicting its wretched financial state due to lending money to the BPC. It said the BPC owes Tk 5,230 crore to it, which is 23 percent of its total loan.

Meanwhile, the energy ministry also sent a proposal to the cabinet committee on economic affairs for a subsidy of Tk 6,795 crore for the BPC to meet the increased import price of fuel.

The issue was raised at the cabinet meeting early this month but it was not discussed since the adviser to the energy ministry was not present.

SONALI BANK LETTER

The letter mentioned that the BPC stopped repaying its loans from the bank last year. As a result, the bank is forced to take loan from the call money market at high interest rate. Besides, due to liquidity crisis, the bank is unable to maintain its Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR), forcing it to pay penalty to the central bank.

Sonali Bank sources said the bank incurred a loss of Tk 86 crore in terms of interest and penalty.

From January 18 to March 5, the bank spent Tk 44.27 crore to pay off interest in the call money market.

For the bank's failure to maintain the SLR, it had to cough up a penalty of Tk 41.55 lakh from October 1 last year to March 7.

In its letter, the bank said if the loan given to the BPC is not repaid, it will become classified after March 31. In that case, the bank's default loan will double and it will be in great crisis.

Sources in the bank said though they have repeatedly asked for repayment of their loans, the BPC said it has got instructions from the energy ministry not to pay off any dues.

ENERGY MINISTRY'S PROPOSAL
The BPC made profit from 1982-83 to 1998-99, except in 1996-97. But in 1999-00 it began to incur losses and by October last year, its losses amounted to Tk 7,559 crore. Again, it is due to suffer a loss of another

Tk 2,593 crore this year for not adjusting the local fuel price with the global market price.

It however continues its import, taking loan from Islamic Development Bank and local nationalised commercial banks (NCBs). It owed Tk 7,729 crore in capital and interest to the four NCBs until November last year.

The BPC also owes Tk 1,613 crore to different government bodies. In this circumstance, the energy ministry in its proposal suggested five financial management steps. The suggestions include paying the BPC money from the annual development fund of the organisations to whom it owes. Another suggestion is granting the BPC Tk 6,795 crore so that it SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Tarique wants to run in next polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman yesterday expressed his willingness to contest the next general elections if the party nominates him.

Tarique, eldest son of BNP founder and late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, said he would like to contest the election from his home district Bogra.

Speaking at a discussion with journalists at a city hotel, he also hoped that the BNP will go to power again winning majority in the parliament.

"We are hopeful about winning in the next elections and forming government as we have

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



PHOTO: JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

Fishmongers buy and sell jatka (hilsa fry) in the open at Shoarighat wholesale market in the city ignoring the country-wide ban on netting, buying and selling the fry.

Illegal Jatka trade thrives openly

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The much-hyped government drive against illegal fishing of hilsa fry locally termed as jatka and other species of fry proves futile as unscrupulous traders and fishermen continue selling tonnes of small fish in the open market.

About 1 to 1.5 tonnes of fry are sold every day at Shoarighat, the country's one of the largest wholesale fish market, making bleak the future of Bangladesh's pride -- hilsa and other riverine fish.

The volume of fish netted from the country's densely populated

fisheries has been rapidly decreasing over the years due to over-fishing. Hilsa landing rate in Barisal in 1998 was about 13,300 tonnes, which came down to 2,682 tonnes in 2002, according to a study by the Directorate of Fisheries.

But during a visit to Shoarighat bazaar, anyone will get the impression that there is nothing to worry about the future of the country's fish resources.

Fishmongers of the bazaar were seen holding auctions of jatka and other fry kept in large five-mound baskets at 6:00am yesterday. The customers were also enthusiastically

buying the fry with the chant "Jatka! Jatka!" repeatedly shouted by a group of vendors.

The fish arrive in the market around 4:00am by launches and boats and all of the supply are sold out by 9:30am.

"What can we do? In general, the fishermen are netting lesser quantity of regular size fish," said Rashid, a fish wholesaler. "They are fishing a lot of jatkas nowadays. People also want to eat the small fish and we are selling whatever is in demand."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

PBCP leader killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

A regional leader of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) was killed during a 'shootout' between his accomplices and police in Jhenidah early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Shamsul Islam alias Sumon, 40, of village Chorkole in Jhenidah sadar upazila.

Police arrested him at Chandpara village in Chowgachhi upazila of Jessore on Friday noon and took him to the Jhenidah Sadar Police Station for interrogation.

Following leads extracted from him, police took Shamsul to his village at about 1:45am to recover illegal arms. As they reached the village, Janajuddho operatives opened fire on them prompting the law enforcers to retaliate, police said.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

JMB leader Salahuddin's father, brother detained

STAR REPORT

The father and elder brother of Salahuddin, the member of JMB Majlish-e-Shura, have been detained in Narayanganj while Habiganj police yesterday held two youths, one for bearing resemblance to the fleeing militant leader.

Narayanganj Bandar police picked up Salahuddin's father Rafiqul Islam, a clerk of a bank, and brother Samsuddin Shahin from Faradikandi and HS Sen Lane area at about 11:30pm Friday.

"They were held for quizzing," Officer-in-Charge of Bandar Police Station Ehsan Uddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star last evening.

The two said their family has not SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

US, EU have little more to offer to LDCs

Suggest broadening Doha Round deal

INAM AHMED

As a general anxiety persists about the future of the Doha Round trade talks, and as 2006 represents a crucial year for a number of critical negotiations on duty and quota free market access for LDCs, Aid for Trade taskforce and opening up of services sector, both the US and Europe feel they have little more to offer to the LDCs disheartened at the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference.

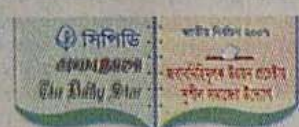
Officials of the two biggest trading partners of the world now suggest that the LDCs should

hammer on the developing countries -- specially the BRIC (Brazil, India and China) -- to open up their non-agriculture and service sectors to make the agenda for the Doha Round deal broader. Only then they may find some scopes to punch in more concessions for the least developed countries.

In the Hong Kong Declaration, the LDCs had a heartburn as they did not get full and immediate duty free and quota free market access, rather a three percent Exclusion List was reserved whereby a country can keep certain products outside the duty free list.

With clouds gathering over the future talks, the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the German Marshall Fund in association with the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) and the Royal Institute of International Affairs have initiated a Track 2 process involving six high-calibre policymakers and experts to sensitise the northern leaders about the "Development Package" of the Doha trade talks' development issues including those pertinent to the LDCs.

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Dialogue on civil society move for dev tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A dialogue titled 'National election 2007: The civil society initiative in accountable development efforts' will be held tomorrow, seeking to create space for the citizens to express views on various national issues.

Organised jointly by Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), the Prothom Alo and The Daily Star, the dialogue will start off a

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One Time Paint for Many Seasons

BERGER Weather Coat SMOOTH 100% ACRYLIC

- Anti-fungal
- Anti-fading
- Anti-flaking

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