

Dhaka, Paris agree to boost trade

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh and France have agreed to work in partnership for increasing trade, investment and cultural cooperation between the two countries.

The accord came during a meeting between Bangladesh Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan and his French counterpart Philippe Douste-Blazy at his office at Quai d'Orsay in Paris yesterday.

Morshed, who is now on a four-nation European tour, went to France on a two-day official visit. This is the first official bilateral visit by the Bangladesh foreign minister during the tenure of the coalition government.

The two foreign ministers discussed the bilateral relations and exchanged views on regional and international issues of common concern.

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SOARING SUGAR PRICE Nizami says his ministry has nothing to do

UNB, Dhaka

Industries Minister Matru Rahman Nizami yesterday said sugar price has shot up in the country due to its soaring price in the international market and his ministry has nothing to do with it.

"Although it's not the duty of the industries ministry to control price hike, we're trying our best to solve the sugar price problem," he told reporters at a press conference at his office.

The minister said the government has already withdrawn 20 per cent supplementary duty on sugar to keep its price stable and supply normal in the domestic market.

Nizami said: "Our total sugar production can only meet 10-12 per cent of the domestic demand. We have to import 8-10 lakh metric tons of sugar to meet the demand."

He said the Ministry of Industries is going to supply 20,000 metric tons of sugar to TCB soon.

Asked why the government took time in raising the sugar price although it started going up in the international market in February, Nizami said they informed the government about it in November last year.

2nd ODI against Australia today Ashraf dropped

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will play the second one-day international against Australia today without ace batsman Mohammad Ashraf.

The Tigers team think-tank decided to rest the young batsman, whose heroic effort powered Bangladesh to pull off a memorable victory against the world champions at Cardiff last year, because of his poor form in the series.

Bangladesh are already 1-0 down in the three-match series following a four-wicket loss in the first one-dayer at Chittagong on Sunday.

The second match starts at 9:30am at the Fatullah Cricket

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CEC vents venom on media, vested group

They're out to undermine democracy, he says claiming EC can't manipulate poll results

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The chief election commissioner MA Aziz yesterday launched a broadside on certain 'vested quarters' and the media for, what he dubbed, undermining democratic practices and destroying 'true reflection' of people's aspirations.

In a written speech at a luncheon meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh (AmCham) at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel, he likened the Election Commission's task of publishing election results with the function of a 'post box'. So, he argued, the EC in no way can manipulate the poll results.

He also brushed off the raging criticisms and escalating misgivings about the commission's ability to hold the upcoming general elections in a free and fair manner.

"I have no reason to doubt my ability to conduct a free and fair election, acceptable to all," the CEC declared in response to a query, adding, "I can assure that a level-playing field will be ensured for all political parties [contesting the polls]."

The EC would make all-out efforts to ensure a free, fair and transparent ballot by deploying law enforcement agencies, he said in his speech on the meeting's theme -- Forthcoming parliamentary

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Bomb making materials seized from JMB men

Two militants arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday arrested two members of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) and seized a huge cache of explosives and bomb-making materials at Rugganj in Narayanganj.

The recovered materials include 1 kg each of nitrogen benzene and potassium chlorate, 100 grams of lead azide, 500 grams each of sodium nitrate and sodium azide, 45 detonators, 11 integrated circuit (IC), 24 electric connectors and an explosive measuring scale, said a Rab press release.

The arrestees are Mohammad Wasim, 25, and Ali Hossain, 25, of Rugganj.

The Rab members were raiding the area, taking the two with them as of filing this report at 8:30pm.

Following up a tip-off that JMB activists might come to dump some explosives, a joint team of Rab Intelligence Wing and Rab-3 was keeping a close watch on the area.

At around 2:00pm, they saw two

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PHOTO: STAR

The explosives and bomb-making materials seized from two JMB men at Rugganj in Narayanganj yesterday.

Shop owners to agitate for uninterrupted power supply

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) magistracy yesterday bulldozed over 200 structures and recovered land worth around Tk 15 crore in New Mooring area of the city.

The recovered 14.30 acres of land is a portion of 64 acres of land the CPA acquired for the construction of New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT), port sources said.

In presence of a magistrate, the police, ansar and CPA eviction staff demolished over 200 different types of structures, including a large colony and a two-storey market.

The landowners have received Tk 62 crore in compensation against the acquisition of the land. Besides, they were rehabilitated at CPA's own land at city's Boropole area, said Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, the first class magistrate who conducted the daylong eviction drive.

Although most of the inhabitants left their lands after receiving the compensation money, a few hundred people had been residing there ignoring the CPA notice, he added.

Port sources said the acquired land would soon be formally handed over to the M/S China Harbour Engineering Company, which is to carry out the NCT project.

The completion of the acquisition of the required land for the NCT would now help pave way towards its timely implementation, they said.

2 more killed in 'crossfire'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Two criminals were killed in separate 'encounters' with police and their accomplices in Kushtia and Sirajganj early yesterday.

At least five policemen were also injured in the 'shootouts' between the law enforcers and the members of the criminal gangs, police said.

The dead are Toakkel Ali, 36, of Khoksa upazila in Kushtia and Zel Haq, 40, of Kathalbaria village in Salanga upazila in Sirajganj.

Khoksa police said they had arrested Toakkel, leader of Toakkel Bahini, at his hideout Madhablakimpur in Pangsha upazila in Rajbari on Tuesday night, our Kushtia correspondent reports.

He was brought to Khoksa Police Station and interrogated. Police claim Toakkel gave information about his others accomplices and hidden firearms in Thanapara.

The police around 4:30am reached Khoksa helipad area along with Toakkel to recover the hidden

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Shop owners in Dhaka demand uninterrupted power supply

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Dhaka Metropolitan Shop Owners' Association yesterday demanded ensuring uninterrupted power supply with good voltage for a minimum period daily for smooth running of their business.

At a press conference held at the National Press Club in the city to press home their six-point demand, they also announced two-month long programme including strike in business organisations.

Terming the present electricity

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FUEL PRICES DOMINATE PRE-BUDGET DIALOGUE Economists for tolerable hike, subsidy for poor

Saifur skips power issue, shifting it on ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economists at a pre-budget discussion with the finance minister yesterday suggested that if the government has to increase oil prices, it should go for subsidising oil for the poor.

They also suggested that the price hike may tilt towards petrol and octane, which are purchased by the better off section of the society.

At the retail level, the hike should be tolerable. And to ensure this, the government should reduce import tariff so that Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) does not con-

tinue to incur huge losses, they said. The economists were highly critical of the government's failures in power sector. Asked why the government failed to make 'any increase' in power generation, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman avoided a direct reply, saying this question should be answered by the state minister for power.

Saifur did not also respond to criticism of the government for not setting up any fertiliser plant in the last 15 years.

Oil prices dominated the meeting held at the Secretariat. Former finance ministers, renowned economists and former high officials of

the finance ministry took part in the discussion.

Sources said the finance minister is under tremendous pressure from his cabinet colleagues not to raise oil prices. Against this backdrop, he sought suggestions from the economists to find a way out.

Talking to newsmen later, Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said the government should have no hesitation in increasing oil prices. But, if the prices are not adjusted, it will create immense pressure on the national economy, which will put the next government in a precarious situation.

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2 choppers purchased at Tk 71cr for PM's use

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) has purchased two choppers worth Tk 70.93 crore mainly for the use of the prime minister in tours within the country, sources said.

Procured from Russia through local agent M/S Avn Sp Ltd, the VIP helicopters, Mi-8MTV-1 (Mi-17-1V), were transported to Dhaka by plane on March 4, said a BAF headquarters report placed before the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry on April 16.

"The choppers are expected to be commissioned by April," said the report. But officials at the BAF headquarters said the aircraft were

already commissioned on April 2.

Earlier the airforce had purchased three Mi-171 choppers for Tk 78.19 crore and commissioned those in January last year. Besides, the airforce has made an acquisition of 16 F-7 fighters from China at a cost of \$117.9 million.

The BAF headquarters had plans to purchase more aircraft, but they had to backtrack, as the government did not approve, sources said.

Research Director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) Zaid Bakht on Tuesday said the government should avoid wasteful expenditure on defence

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2 more TV channels before polls

BNP lawmakers own both

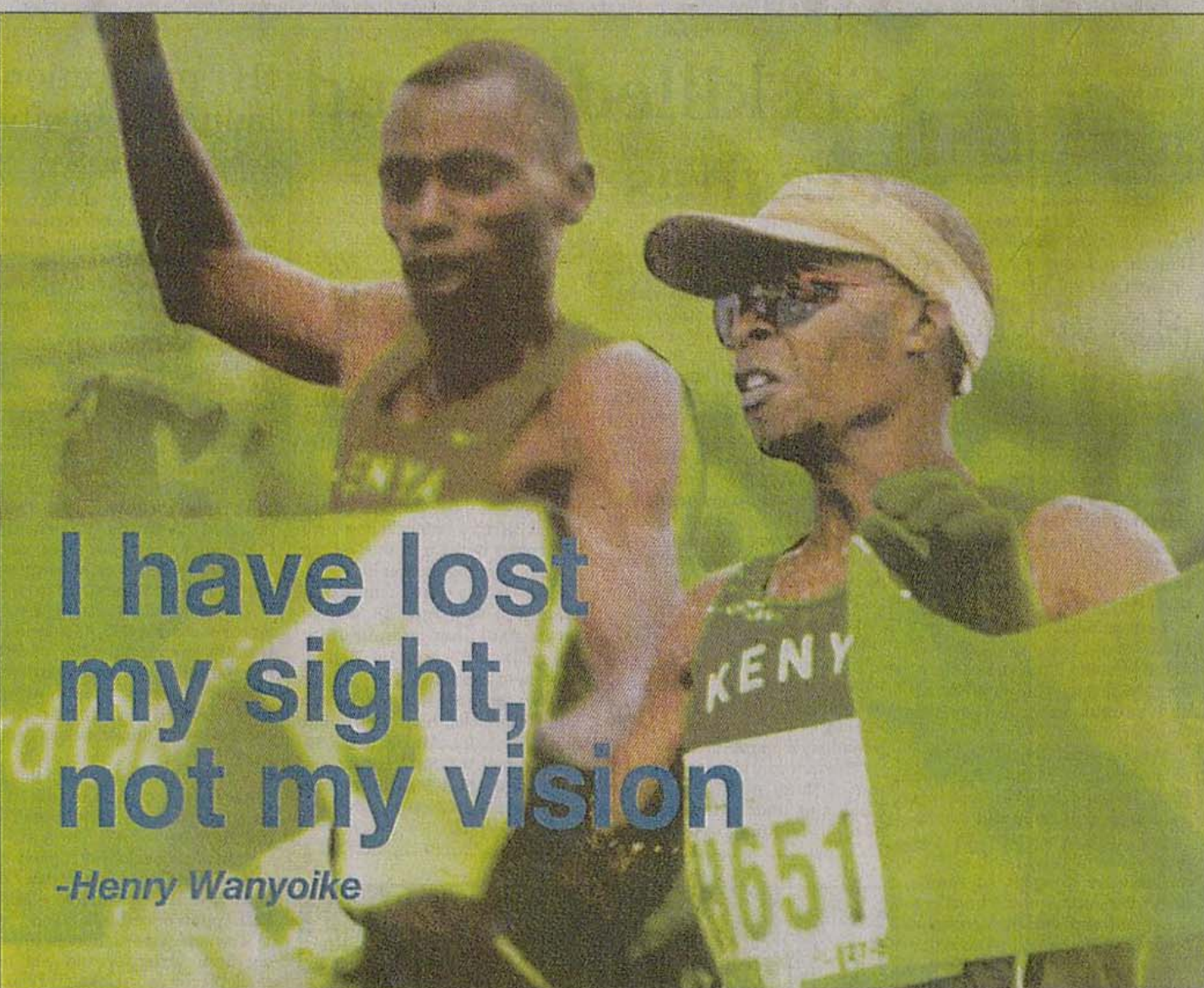
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling alliance men are going to launch two more private satellite television channels in a few months just before the handover of power in October this year.

The two upcoming TV channels -- Satellite National Television (SNTV) and Islami Television (ITV) -- have already received government approval.

Salahuddin Ahmed and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu, BNP lawmakers elected from Demra and Lalbagh constituencies, are

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Give someone the power of sight

Despite losing sight in 1995, Henry Wanyoike - the Goodwill Ambassador of Standard Chartered's "Seeing is Believing" campaign braved his physical challenges and won gold in Sydney & Athens Paralympics held in the year of 2000 and 2004 respectively.

Henry is now visiting Dhaka to support fund raising for "Seeing is Believing" - a global campaign that aims to raise fund for one million eyesight restorations. So, give someone the power of sight and contribute to "Seeing is Believing" programme today. Your contribution will go towards cataract surgeries, training doctors and building facilities in partnership with Sightsavers International and Vision 2020.

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