

Anniversary of Bangabandhu's birth today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 87th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, father of the nation and architect of the country's independence, will be observed today.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed will go to Tungipara today to visit the grave of Bangabandhu

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Govt moves to block Mohiuddin's asylum in any country

SHARIFUL ISLAM

"He will have to come back to the country if he doesn't get asylum in any other country after being deported from the US. It is almost certain that the US will not allow him to stay there," Law Adviser Mainul Hosein told The Daily Star last evening.

Asked whether the government will try to dissuade a country if Mohiuddin seeks asylum there, Mainul said, "We will request that country not to give him asylum."

When BBC Bangla Service asked Mainul what state level initiatives will be taken when there is no extradition treaty between

Bangladesh and the US, he said bringing Mohiuddin back will not be a problem.

"Now countries are cooperating with each other formally and informally as part of their anti-terrorism measures. So bringing him back will not be a problem, if nothing else arises," Mainul said.

Also sentenced to life in prison for aiding and abetting the killings of four other national leaders on November 3, 1975, Major (ret'd) Mohiuddin Ahmed was arrested by officials of the Bureau of US Immigration and Customs

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5 more JMB men arrested in Bagmara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police in separate drives arrested five more activists of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in Bagmara upazila yesterday.

The arrestees are Afzal Hossain, 33, of Hamirkusa, Zahidul Haq, 45, of Madhya Jhina, Chanchal, 20, of Jhikra, Emaj Uddin, 25, of Jhargram, and Abdur Razzak, 26, of Sripur villages.

On Wednesday, the law enforcers arrested two JMB men - Afzal Hossain and Abdus Salam - in the same upazila.

The officer-in-charge (OC) of Bagmara Police Station said the arrestees are listed JMB cadres.

They were associates of Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai and involved in so-called operations against outlaws in the upazila in 2004, headed.

At least 25 people were killed and several hundred maimed during JMB operations, led by Bangla Bhai, in the upazila.

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GOVT DECIDES, MINISTRY DEFIES

Autonomy of Petrobangla Cos violated all too often

SHARIER KHAN

Though the government had taken a decision in April 2003 on respecting autonomy and financial freedom of all the 11 companies of Petrobangla, the energy ministry continues to violate the rights of these concerns by reshuffling their boards unilaterally.

Top officials of the energy ministry still head the boards of seven of these companies and this has become the main impediment to ensuring any check and balance, senior officials said requesting anonymity.

The remaining four companies are headed by the newly appointed Petrobangla chairman. The energy secretary himself

holds the posts of chairman of four major companies, including the corruption-plagued Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Ltd, Bangladesh Gas Field Ltd, Rupantara Prakritik Gas Company Ltd and Bapex.

Contrary to expectations, the latest shake-up in these companies that took place last month did not cancel all political appointments made by the previous alliance government. Eleven such directors are still on these boards.

Till 1999, the boards of these companies predominantly consisted of Petrobangla board members, managing directors of the respective companies and some high officials of the energy ministry.

Legally, the energy ministry cannot constitute these boards.

These companies pay the government an annual revenue of around Tk 3,000 crore despite cases of corruption in some of those.

NO CHECK AND BALANCE

"The risk of having an energy ministry high official on the board of any of these companies is that when a company procures something, the ministry official is involved right from the beginning. When relevant files go to the ministry, the same official is looking after the matter. So, no one raises any question. If there is corruption, who is going to check that?" said an official who has been involved with Petrobangla for more than 20 years.

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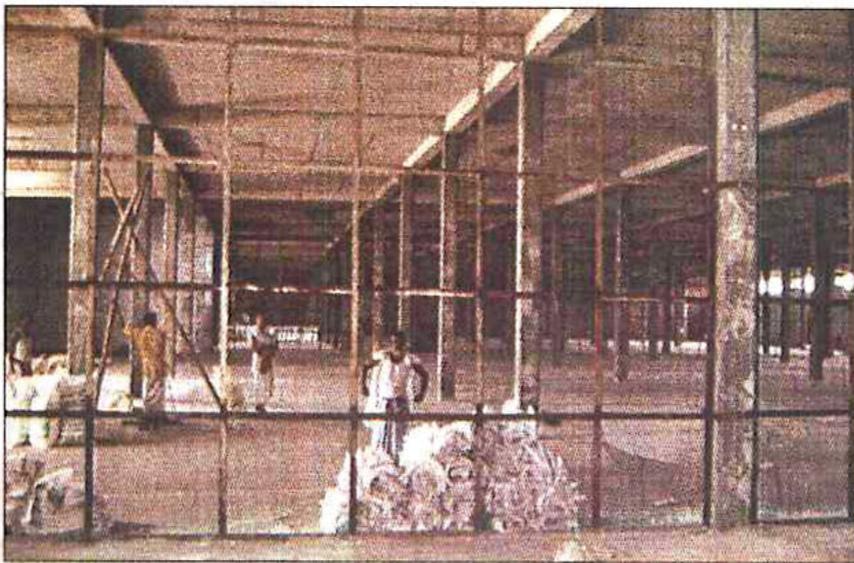


PHOTO: STAR

Driven to despair, farmers charge a dealer (marked) at his shop in Nilphamari for failure to supply fertiliser, left, and the empty buffer godown for urea in Bogra.

EXTORTION CASE Charge sheet against Tarique tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police investigating the extortion case against Tarique Rahman, eldest son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, will submit the charge sheet of the case tomorrow.

"I have almost completed the investigation and will submit the charge sheet to the court on Sunday," said Officer-in-Charge (OC) Obaidul Haque of Gulshan Police Station.

Obaidul Haque, however, did not go into the details of the charge sheet.

Tarique has been charged with extortion of Tk 1 crore from a construction firm, Al-Amin Construction.

Owner of the construction firm, Amin Ahmed, who got BNP ticket for contesting the cancelled January 22 election from a Noakhali constituency, filed the case against Tarique with Gulshan Police Station on March 8.

Meanwhile, the health condition of Tarique Rahman, now in the hospital of Dhaka Central Jail, is getting better, jail sources said.

"Now there is no complexities in his physical condition," said Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Prisons.

"Civil surgeon will examine Tarique again on Monday and then the decision will be taken whether he (Tarique) will stay in jail hospital

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Urea crisis hits north as buffer stocks dry up

Supply vessels stranded for poor navigability

STAR REPORT

Farmers of northern districts are facing an acute fertilizer crisis in the peak season for boro rice cultivation as the warehouses have been remaining almost completely depleted of buffer stocks of fertilizers for several days due to a transportation problem.

Our correspondents from Bogra, Sirajganj and Nilphamari reported that sources said over one lakh tons of urea are now stacked at Daulatdia cargo terminal for the last three days due to poor navigability of the river.

At least nine feet depth of water is required for smooth sailing of loaded vessels on the river route which now has only five to six feet

depth of water at some points. The fertilizer-laden vessels have been stranded for a week, said the reports.

Farmers in some remote areas stand in long queues in front of fertilizer shops because it is high time for fertilizing croplands.

Official sources in Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) said about 85,000 metric tons of urea were supplied to 16 northern districts from buffer stocks while the minimum requirement is 1,05,000 metric tons for the current boro season.

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Reports received from Daulatdia said 11 urea-laden cargo ships have been stranded at Daulatdia cargo terminal for the last three days due to poor navigability of the river. The authorities sent some sacks of fertilizers to Baghabari by engine boats yester-

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Spirited Bangladesh meet India today

SPORTS REPORTER

An unbroken stand of 71 between Paul Nixon and Liam Plunkett gave England's bowlers hope after New Zealand had broken the back of their opponents' innings in the team's opening World Cup Group C match here Friday.

England, who had slumped to 138 for seven, finished on 209 for seven with wicketkeeper Nixon 42 not out and Plunkett unbeaten on 29.

England were 76 for 4 after 16.3 overs, Scott Styris was batting on 32 while Jacob Oram(1).

Nixon faced just 41 balls with five fours, while paceman Plunkett's 34-ball stay featured a straight six off left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori.

However, England may still not have enough runs to play with.

Kevin Pietersen, in his first full international since January after sustaining a rib injury during the Australia one-dayers, top scored with 60 but then got himself out.

From 133 for three, England lost four wickets for five runs with the worst part of the collapse seeing three go down for one run in seven balls as key batsmen Paul Collingwood (31), Pietersen and Andrew Flintoff, out for a first ball nought, all fell in quick succession.

Fast bowler Shane Bond, who finished with two for 19 off his full 10 overs, took two wickets in four balls as Pietersen tamely holed out to James Franklin at long-on before

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