



KM Obaid passes away

BSS, Dhaka

Veteran politician and BNP standing committee member KM Obaidur Rahman died at Apollo Hospital in the city at 11:35am yesterday. He was 68.

A former minister, an organiser of the Liberation War and a member of the eighth parliament, Obaidur Rahman was suffering from diabetes, high blood pressure and other complications, BNP sources said.

He left behind his wife Prof Shaheda Obaid, only daughter

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Shoal-stuck vessels cause fertiliser crisis

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sirajganj

At least 31 river vessels loaded with over 3 lakh sacks of urea grounded on different locations on the river Jamuna for the last ten days have been causing severe urea shortage in the north of the country.

The vessels carrying a total of around 3,10,000 sacks of urea were stranded on the river on way to Baghabari Ghat, Mohonganj, Nagorbari, Pechakola and Nakalia are a few of the locations where the cargo vessels remain grounded on sands of the Jamuna.

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Italian president keen to set up institution like Grameen Bank

UNB, Dhaka

Italian President Giorgio Napolitano is keen to set up Grameen Bank like financial institutions in his country.

He showed his interest in a meeting with Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus on Monday at the presidential palace, Quirinale, in Rome.

Prof Yunus briefed the Italian president of the progress of Grameen Bank that earned him the Nobel Peace Prize.

During the meeting, the Italian president asked a volley of questions about Yunus' micro-credit movement and his Grameen Bank, and showed interest to replicate it in his country, particularly in its southern region.

Addressing the session in Italian parliament, Prof Yunus described his Grameen Bank's experience and globalisation, which was followed by an interactive question-answer session.

Speaker of the House Fausto Bertinotti received the Nobel laureate, saying that it was a great honour to have Prof Yunus in Italy.

Prayer Timing		
March 22		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-55	5-30
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-20
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Govt shrugs off ADB suggestion for more power tariff hike

UNB, Dhaka

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has suggested further adjustment to power tariff to strengthen the financial position of the Power Development Board (PDB).

The advice came when a delegation of the donor agency, led by its visiting Deputy Director General Sultan Hafeez Rahman, met Power and Energy Adviser Tapan Chowdhury at his secretariat office yesterday.

The adviser, however, disagreed with the ADB suggestion, saying the government recently raised the power tariff by five percent for urban consumers. "So, there is little scope for any further adjustment."

He also said the tariff adjustment is

a matter of policy decision, which should be taken by a political government rather than an interim one.

"As an interim government, we're dealing with regular business... but the tariff adjustment is a policy matter," meeting sources quoted Tapan as telling the ADB officials.

The donor agency also discussed various power sector issues, including solution to the nagging power crisis, reforms, financial restructuring of different bodies of the power sector, strengthening the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) and realising outstanding electricity bills from different government organisations.

The ADB officials said urgent measures should be taken to realise the huge outstanding bills from

various government agencies that owe PDB around Tk 7 billion.

The adviser informed the delegation that the government's recent drive has been a great success in realising huge amount of arrears electricity bills from consumers of both the private and public sectors.

The ADB officials urged the government to expedite its process to form the proposed southwest power company and power distribution company for the country's south and western regions.

Tapan Chowdhury hoped that it would be possible to restore financial discipline in the power sector soon with the continuation of the present drive.

ADB Country Director Hua Du was present.



PHOTO: STAR

The joint forces raid the office of Orion Group, owned by Obaidul Karim, a graft suspect on the ACC list, in Tejgaon industrial area in the capital yesterday.

Pak tribesmen, al-Qaeda forces clash: 100 killed

AFP, Wana

Tribesmen loyal to the Pakistani government exchanged mortar and rocket fire with foreign al-Qaeda militants for a third day yesterday, leaving at least 106 people dead, officials said.

Pakistani troops also shelled the Uzbek militants sheltering in the mountainous tribal area of South Waziristan, security officials and residents said, although a military spokesman denied the army was involved.

The fighting started Monday after ex-Taliban commander Mullah Nazir, who backs President Pervez Musharraf's moves to expel foreign fighters from the area, ordered followers of Uzbek militant Tahir Yuldashev to disarm.

Officials said Yuldashev, who leads a group called the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, was formerly a close confidant of Osama bin Laden. He has been sentenced to death in absentia for bombings in the Uzbek capital, Tashkent.

"At least 78 Uzbeks and their

local supporters and 28 supporters of Mullah Nazir have died, including four children killed by a shell," a security official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

More than half of the fatalities have occurred since Tuesday night, when Nazir gave the Uzbeks a deadline to leave Kalusha, the town where the violence has been centered.

Residents and a senior security official said troops launched shells at foreign militants early Wednesday after the insurgents fired on their camp in Wana, the capital of South Waziristan.

Smoke was also seen billowing after army artillery destroyed two bunkers that militants had recently set up on the outskirts of the city to fight the local tribesmen, residents said.

But Pakistani military spokesman Major General Waheed Arshad said that "government forces are not involved in the tribal feud."

Meanwhile, local Taliban militants allied with the tribesmen

attacked and seized control of a private jail being run by Uzbek militants in Azam Warsak, near Kalusha, the officials said.

The local militants freed three local tribesmen and one Afghan who were chained up, they said. An amount of explosives stored at the jail also exploded, causing an unknown number of casualties.

A tribal council, or jirga, led by a mullah from a leading pro-Taliban Islamic party had left for Wana in a bid to negotiate a truce, officials said.

The fighting ended a ceasefire negotiated about two weeks ago after 19 people died in fierce gunbattles between Yuldashev's supporters and tribesmen in Azam Warsak.

Yuldashev and his men were among thousands of militants who fled the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001 and

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DEATH OF CHALESH RISIL Rights bodies demand fresh investigation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different human rights bodies yesterday demanded fresh investigation into the death of indigenous leader Chalesh Risil Sangma.

At a press conference at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity they termed the death of Risil a "killing" and urged the government to bring the persons involved to justice.

Ain O Salish Kendra, Association for Land Reform and Development, Society for Environment and Human Development, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust, Centre for Sustainable Development, Nijera Kori, Odhikar, Bangladesh Environment Lawyers' Association (Bela), and Action Aid Bangladesh jointly organised the press conference.

Indigenous Unnayan Parishad leader Ajay A Mri said army personnel arrested Risil on March 18 and the news of his death came only a few hours later.

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4 vehicles of Orion Group seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Joint forces yesterday seized four vehicles and various documents from an Orion Group office and its factory at Tejgaon industrial area in the capital.

Orion Group chief Obaidul Karim is now on the run. His name is included in the interim government's 2nd list of 50 corruption suspects.

Police sources said the joint forces raided Orion House, one of the offices of Orion Group, and adjoining factory at 10:00am. They seized the four automobiles during their six-hour drive.

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BDR's 25 more sales centres open tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-five more open sales centres by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in the capital will start operating tomorrow.

BDR, which has already set up 20 open sales centres in Dhaka since March 15, in a press release yesterday said that all types of sellers, ranging from manufactures to common farmers, can put up their products for sale in these centres.

In these centres, lentils will be sold at Tk 44 per kilogram while rice will sell at Tk 19, wheat at Tk 18, sugar at Tk 32, super palm oil at Tk 55, flour (packet) at Tk 25, atta (packet) at Tk 23, mustard oil at Tk 85, pulses at Tk 23, potato at Tk 13 and peas at Tk 32 per kg.

Abul Khair Group, PHP Ltd, TK Enterprise, Masud and Brothers, S Alam Group, Meghna Group, Alam and Brothers, Imam Group and Bismillah Group have already started a number of such open sales centres in Chittagong, Comilla and Feni under the supervision of BDR, it read.

The businesses have pledged to start more such sales centres in other regions, which have gained popularity for their reasonable prices of essentials.

As essentials are sold at reasonable prices in these open sales centres, the prices of essentials in the markets have reduced, which has been widely appreciated by various quarters, BDR claimed.



PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) evicted illegal structures in the city's Sabujbag area yesterday.

City air abuzz with mosquitoes after dusk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mosquito menace continues in the capital, defying the efforts of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

At some places in and around the DCC areas, people have to set mosquito nets for study, even having their meals.

"Mosquito menace is so high here, often we have our meal fixing the mosquito nets," said Matir Rahman, a grocery shop owner at Basabo Nandipara.

The situation is similar at some places of Maghbazar where several Secondary School Certificate (SSC) students said they study inside mosquito nets.

Experts attribute the unusual increase of Culex mosquitoes in this season to favorable weather and lack of effective measures.

This year's winter rain has increased the number of the breed-

ing ground of the mosquitoes and the authorities' failure to take integrated mosquito control measures at the right time has led to the situation, said entomologist Syed Manzur A Chowdhury.

Dr Naseem-uj-Seraj, the chief mosquito control officer of the DCC, however, claimed that the number of mosquitoes have decreased during the last two or three days.

"I checked larva at a wetland at North Shahjahanpur and found only a single larva in one spoonful of water whereas it could be more than 25 when numbers of mosquitoes are high," he said.

Claiming that they have already controlled mosquitoes in the DCC areas, he said they have nothing to do with the mosquitoes in areas outside the city corporation.

As the other side of

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2 top aides of Bangla Bhai arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday held two other top aides of Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh (JMB) kingpin Siddikul Islam Bangla Bhai, from Raspur village in Dhamoirhat upazila of Naogaon district.

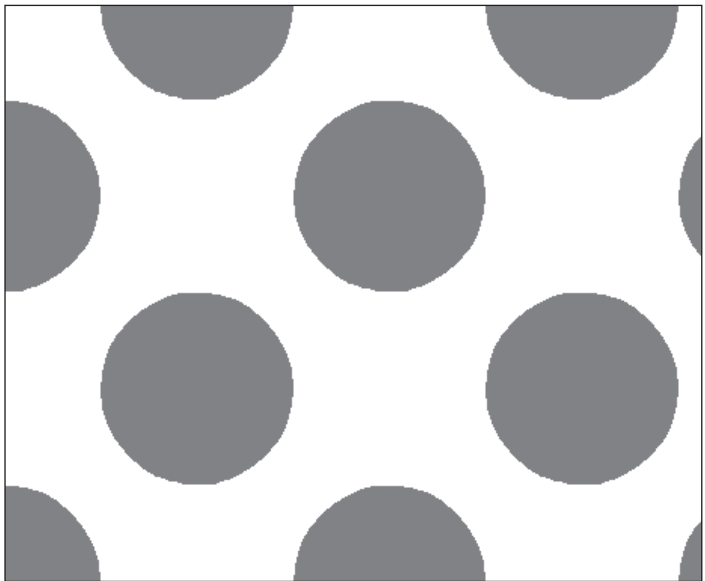
The arrestees -- Mustafizur Rahman, also known as 'Killer Mostaque', 26, of Palashi village and Abdul Kuddus alias Masud, 24, of Kathalbaria in Bagmara upazila -- acted as 'personal aides' of Bangla Bhai during his dreaded operations in Rajshahi region in 2004, a Rab press release said.

The two were arrested twice before, but released later, sources said.

With them, a total of 20 JMB cadres of Bagmara upazila have been held during the ongoing crack-down against criminals.

Mostaque was accused in seven cases, including three for killing Mahbub, Golam Rabbani Mukul and Zahangir, while Kuddus was

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RU teacher gets death threat from pro-Jamaat colleagues

RU CORRESPONDENT

The chairman of Language Department of Rajshahi University (RU) yesterday received death threat from his two Jamaat loyal colleagues.

Hossain Ahmed Kamali, the death recipient, submitted a written complaint to RU Vice-Chancellor Altaf Hossain demanding security of his life and punishment of the accused teachers, sources said. He also informed the

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FRESH PROTESTS OVER SACKING OF TOP JUDGE

Thousands chant 'Go Musharraf, go'

AFP, Islamabad

Thousands of lawyers and Islamists called on President Pervez Musharraf to quit yesterday as fresh protests erupted over his removal of Pakistan's top judge, witnesses and officials said.

The nationwide demonstrations came as the charges against Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry were revealed for the first time, alleging that he strong-armed a series of promotions for his son.

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