

Arrested Star reporter hospitalised

Newsmen demand his release before Independence Day

STAR REPORT

The Daily Star's Nilphamari correspondent Asaduzzaman Tipu was rushed to jail hospital yesterday as he fell ill in captivity.

He has long been suffering from chronic asthma, family sources said.

Jailer Ismail Hossain admitted that Tipu has been hospitalised.

Brother of Liberation War martyr Captain Bashar, Tipu was picked up from his house Wednesday in connection with a 'fabricated' report on fertiliser crisis in Nilphamari district.

Meanwhile, the local journalists continued boycotting news of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

BDR to run four wholesale kitchen markets near capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four wholesale kitchen markets will be set up on the outskirts of the capital under the supervision of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

Meanwhile, BDR yesterday opened 25 'open markets' at different places of the capital where general sellers started selling their goods at cheaper prices than in other markets.

"We will try our best so that the prices of essentials are reduced to a considerable level," Col Mojibul Haque, in-charge of 'Operation daal-bhat 2007' said at a press conference at the BDR

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

| Prayer Timing | | |
|----------------------------|-------|--------|
| March 24 | | |
| | 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 | | |



PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

A survived passenger beside the bailey bridge that collapsed under pressure as a cement-laden truck, a passenger bus and two three-wheelers simultaneously got on it yesterday morning. The accident near Anowara upazila headquarters on Chittagong-Anowara road left 22 people injured.

US teams to search 3 spots for WWII ruins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two US organisations named US Pacific Command and World War Two Families for the Return of the Missing (WWRM) are reported to have identified three spots in the southwestern region of the country to carry out search for ruins of C-47 fighter planes that crashed during the Second World War.

Of the identified spots, two are at Tala upazila of Satkhira district and the other at Pakigacha upazila of Khulna district. The search operation will begin soon.

Lisa Phillip, chief of WWRM, will lead the search operation. His uncle was among the victims of a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

India gas plans will help Tehran's nuke aims: US

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's plans to purchase gas and oil from Iran will help fund Tehran's development of nuclear weapons, US Energy Secretary Sam Bodman said on Thursday.

"There have been conversations ... and if that is allowed to go forward, in our judgement, this will contribute to development of nuclear weapons," he told reporters in Mumbai at the end of a three-day visit to India.

The United States and its allies say Iran is secretly developing nuclear weapons, and major world powers agreed last week on new UN sanctions for the Islamic nation because of its atomic programme.

Tehran has resisted global

pressure to suspend uranium enrichment work, which can be used for bomb making as well as peaceful purposes, saying its programme is solely for peaceful electricity.

Bodman had said in New Delhi on Tuesday that US relations with India would not be hurt by plans to build a \$7 billion gas pipeline from Iran via neighbouring Pakistan.

But on Thursday he expressed Washington's displeasure with the dealings of nuclear-armed India with Tehran, a traditional friend of New Delhi.

"Of course," Bodman told reporters when asked if the pipeline would help to fund Iran's nuclear programme.

"I think it's against the interest of

the United States. I think that supporting nuclear weapons is against the interest of the world," he said.

New Delhi hopes to sign the pipeline deal with Tehran by June. It is also negotiating for 5 million tonnes of liquefied natural gas a year over a 25-year period from 2009.

India's biggest communist party, whose outside support is crucial to the federal government's survival, called on New Delhi to go ahead with the pipeline project.

"The gas pipeline project from Iran is of vital interest to India and its energy security," the Communist Party of India (Marxist) said in a statement.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Car sales drop by half for fear of hassles

MD HASAN

Auto sales dropped by half thanks to the ongoing anti-corruption drive, reconditioned and new car sellers have said.

They said customers currently fear to visit showrooms and buy cars due to government queries about buyers' sources of income launched after proclamation of the state of emergency.

"Overall sale of reconditioned vehicles dropped by more than 50 percent since last month," Abdul Haque, president of Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association (Barvida), told The Daily Star. "Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet car markets presents the same spectacle."

M Salahuddin, president of Bangladesh Automobiles Distributors Association (Bada), an association of new car importers, echoed Haque saying, "New car sales witnessed drastic fall since January."

This correspondent visited different car showrooms in the city a few days ago and found salesmen wearing a glum look on their faces.

Describing the current market trend as 'traumatic' the sellers said they were expecting a boom in business as they thought all problems will be solved after declaration of the emergency.

Barvida president said the law enforcers could collect customers' sources of income and other information from Bangladesh Road

Transport Authority (BRTA) as the sellers send buyers' purchase details to the BRTA daily.

"We are not sellers of confiscated cars," he said adding, "The government should adopt business friendly measures so that customers can purchase autos without any fear."

He said foreign exporters of reconditioned vehicles are also worried about drastic business fall in Bangladesh.

Barvida president said his company, Haq'a Bay Automobiles Ltd, sold 27 reconditioned cars in February from its Naya Paltan showroom whereas the number was 60 per month on an average earlier.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Badruddoza, Ershad refute retirement rumour

UNB, Dhaka

Former presidents HM Ershad and Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury have dismissed as 'baseless' the speculation that they are going to retire from active politics.

"I have no reason to retire," Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad told UNB yesterday evening when asked for comments about the press reports that two former presidents would resign from politics.

Referring to Anwar Hossain

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Robbers loot four flats in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A band of armed robbers looted four flats of a building at Kawla Beparipara of Dakkhin Khan in the capital and looted Tk 4.25 lakh in cash and kind early yesterday.

Some 20 robbers entered the ground floor of the three-storey building cutting window grill of the kitchen at around 2:30am, victims said.

The criminals tied hands and legs of all on the ground floor excepting landlord Shafiqul Islam with rope and started looting.

They then took Shafiqul to three other flats on the first and second floors where his parents and brothers live.

"Two of the robbers pointed revolvers at my head and asked me to remain silent and obey them. They also threatened to kill my wife and others if I tried to play smart," Shafiqul told reporters yesterday morning.

The robbers asked him to call his parents and brothers and thus had the doors opened.

The gang members, mostly

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Mozambique arms depot explosion kills 80

AFP, Maputo

An explosion at an arms depot near the international airport in Mozambique's capital has left around 80 people dead and more than 100 injured, many of them children, government and emergency services said yesterday.

Exploding bombs, mines and rounds of ammunition ignited those around them in the country's largest arms depot late Thursday, in a series of blasts that could be heard

around the city.

Explosives rocketed from the armoury, near the impoverished neighbourhood of Magoanine, and landed on nearby houses which went up in flames, causing residents to flee in panic.

"We have more than 80 dead and at least 165 injured. Many are still in the field. There are so many people still to be rescued, as well as many bodies," said Bonifacio Antonio, spokesman for the country's disaster management services.

A health ministry spokesman put the death toll at 72, with 360 injured.

Red Cross programme director Unice Mucaphe said people were still being evacuated from the affected areas.

"There are eight neighbourhoods where people live which are affected," she said.

"People are still being evacuated, there are houses destroyed.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3