

Star reporter freed from jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Daily Star's Nilphamari correspondent EAM Asaduzzaman Tipu was granted interim bail yesterday.

Local journalists greeted Tipu when he was released from the jail in the evening after First Class Magistrate of Nilphamari Anamul Haq granted him the bail.

The Star correspondent was arrested on March 21 after Biswajit Bhumi Bapi, general secretary of Nilphamari Unit of Bangladesh Fertilizer Association, lodged a complaint against him.

Verdict in Ershad's gold smuggling case deferred for fourth time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday again deferred the verdict in the gold smuggling case against former president and Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad to April 16.

The judgement was not delivered as Judge SM Mujibul Rahman of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court was on leave.

Judge (in charge) Mohammad Aman Ullah of the Fourth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court set the date.

The delivery of judgement in the case has been adjourned for the fourth time.

On February 6, the verdict was not given as the judge could not complete preparing the judgement, while the court adjourned it until February 15 following a time petition submitted by Ershad's lawyers.

Moreover, the verdict was not delivered on March 6 as the judge was on leave on that day.

A team of customs officials held four people, including two foreign nationals, at Zia International SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

2 JMB cadres held in Jamalpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two militants belonging to Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) were arrested at Sarishabari upazila in Jamalpur district yesterday.

The arrestees were identified as Mominul Islam Milon, 25, son of Tofajjal Hossain, and Akbar Hossain, 22, son of Mohammad Suruzzaman -- both from Satpoa village of Sarishabari upazila in the district.

Acting on a tip off, a team of Sarishabari Police Station led by SI Mohammad Tamizuddin arrested the two Ehsar members of JMB after raiding their houses at Satpoa village at around 12:30pm, police sources said.

Police also seized a few jihadi books from their possession.

The arrested JMB cadres are being interrogated at Sarishabari Police Station.

21 killed in Iraq as anti-Qaeda Sunni Arabs targeted

REUTERS, Baghdad

Suspected al Qaeda militants in Iraq killed 21 people yesterday in bomb attacks targeting police and Sunni Arab tribes who have formed an alliance against the militant group, officials said.

Up to 35 more people were killed by two truck bombs in Tal Afar, near the Syrian border in northern Iraq, officials said.

The attacks came the day after outgoing US Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad said al Qaeda was trying to undermine efforts by the Iraqi government to court tribal leaders and some insurgent groups to collaborate against al Qaeda.

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Prayer Timing

March 28		
	Azam	Jamaat
Fajr	4:45	5:20
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:20	6:25
Esha	7:45	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Scrap non-tariff barriers to reap Safta benefits

Says foreign affairs adviser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday said non-tariff barriers among South Asian countries have to be removed to make real gains from the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (Safta).

Iftekhar said this at a roundtable titled 'Expectations from the 14th Saarc Summit' organised by South Asian Free Media Association (Safma) at the Press Club yesterday.

Indian Deputy High Commissioner to Dhaka, Sarvajit Chakravarti, said people and transport connectivity would be the main theme for the 14th South Asian

Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) summit to be held in New Delhi next week.

"For the Safta commitments to fully translate into real gains for businessmen, entrepreneurs and ultimately consumers across South Asia, all forms of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers have to be dismantled," Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury said.

He said many goods from Saarc countries cannot reach each other's markets because "of a range of difficulties they meet on account of harmonisation of measurement, standards, [and] testing quality."

"To a considerable measure, our exporters quite often experience such difficulties with our largest

trading partner in South Asia, i.e. India," he said, adding that ensuring equitable distribution of benefits and opportunities is a central prerequisite for integrating South Asian nations.

Iftekhar said connectivity is crucial to facilitate trade among Saarc member states and is required to move on to a deeper cooperation such as a Saarc Customs Union or an Economic Union.

He said a Saarc Regional Multi-modal Transport Study (SRMTS) has already been conducted, but implementation of its recommendations would depend on national

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Workers demolish a four-storey building at Bangla Motor intersection in the capital yesterday without any safety measures for themselves or the people using the street now being widened.

ADB lauds anti-graft steps

Suggests timely decisions on FDI

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) Country Director Hua Du yesterday lauded the caretaker government's measures to contain corruption and improve law and order.

"There might be some isolated incidents of businessmen being harassed but we see an improvement in overall law and order situation," she said, adding, "We are no more frightened of walking on the streets now."

The caretaker government seems to have every intention of taking care of the people, she said speaking at the launch of Asian Development Outlook 2007 at its Dhaka mission.

She, however, believes that FDI will definitely pick up as the conditions for business and investment are improving.

Chief Economic Analyst of Dhaka Mission Rezaul Karim Khan presented the highlights of the ADB's flagship annual economic publication launched simultaneously in all 53 member states.

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ment take timely decisions on issues regarding foreign direct investment (FDI).

Citing the example of Indian conglomerate Tata's investment proposal that has been hanging on for over two years now due to the government's indecision, she said, "Business is business. You would have to decide whether to grab it or not."

She, however, believes that FDI will definitely pick up as the conditions for business and investment are improving.

Chief Economic Analyst of Dhaka Mission Rezaul Karim Khan presented the highlights of the ADB's flagship annual economic publication launched simultaneously in all 53 member states.

Ex-MP Pintu shown held in relief case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Detained former BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu was shown arrested yesterday in a case filed against him for misappropriating corrugated iron (CI) sheets meant for government relief.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Alam passed the order following a petition by the investigation officer of the case, MA Kader.

The joint forces on March 19 seized 375 CI sheets from a government community centre in the capital run by a committee comprising Pintu's close associates.

In the first information report, police mentioned that Pintu in collusion with other accused of the case used the CI sheets to make roof of the community centre without any administrative order.

According to police, a government order is mandatory for using

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Tax evasion should be dealt with seriously

ICC-B tells Fakhruddin to slap hefty penalty and charge taxes on offenders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should provide an 'exit route' for businesses that have evaded taxes, allowing them to settle their offences by paying back taxes with heavy penalties, the International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B) said yesterday.

In a memorandum to the Chief Adviser, the chamber said tax evasion by business should be "dealt with seriously." It could be addressed through the payment of income tax at regular slab, plus a heavy penalty to "deter future recurrence."

It also stressed that in the past it had become "entirely infeasible to

pursue completely legitimate business or even personal activities," without monetary involvement.

However the chamber expressed its concern over the proposed amendment of Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), under which ACC has been given the power to arrest suspects and freeze assets, which is also made non-bailable; without court's order.

"We are afraid, this provision of law in every likelihood may turn into a tool for harassment of any person and may be counter-productive," it said.

Currently section 21 of the ACC Act states that an ACC assigned official needs the court's permission to arrest a person suspected of

holding moveable property in their name or others that is not compatible with their declared sources of income.

The chamber also urged the government to make public only those names against whom there are specific charges.

During the meeting with Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed the ICC-B welcomed what it described as the bold steps initiated by the caretaker government under the leadership of the chief adviser for tackling corruption. It also applauded the reconstitution of the Election Commission in order

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150 shanties gutted in slum fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 150 shanties in a slum were burned down in a devastating fire in Malibagh Chowdhurypara area in the city yesterday.

Fire service sources said the houses were reduced to ashes in the blaze that started at around 8:30am behind Abu Hotel in the area and spread rapidly throughout the slum, mostly populated by garment workers and people from the low-income groups.

As many as 15 fire fighting units rushed to the spot within half an hour and began to douse the blaze with water. The fire was contained at around 9:30am.

Fire sources suspect the source of the fire was an earthen stove at one of the shanties, which soon engulfed the entire area.

The makeshift houses on marshlands were made mostly of tin and bamboo.

No one was injured as most of the garment workers were at work

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A truck falls into a trench that Dhaka Electric Supply Authority had dug to lay power cables on Biswa Road at Merul Badda in the capital. The photo was taken yesterday.

35 Biman staff sent on forced retirement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has axed and given forced retirement to 35 of its employees and officials at different departments yesterday, a Biman Bangladesh Airlines source said.

Fakhrul Alam Bhuiyan, president of Society of Aircraft Engineers of Bangladesh (SAEB), and three other flight engineers, close aides of Shamim Eskandar, brother of former prime minister Khaleda Zia, were among the people given forced retirement, said a high-ranking official of Biman.

"Out of the 35, some officials and staffs are yet to complete their 25 years in service," said the official while talking to The Daily Star, adding, "They lost their jobs on corruption charges."

The present management of Biman is taking tough measures against corrupt Biman employees, sources said.

Anti-graft steps will boost funding: WB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The level of international assistance for Bangladesh will go up in synchronisation with strengthening of the ongoing anti-corruption drive of the government, a visiting World Bank (WB) mission leader said yesterday.

"We are very optimistic [about the ongoing drive]," Sadiq Ahmed, visiting WB sector director said. "One of the key element of WB assistance is anti-corruption. The WB Board has approved an anti-corruption strategy. Bangladesh government's measures are very positive. This would definitely generate a positive impact [from the WB side]," he added.

The WB director was talking with the reporters after a meeting with Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam.

"We have not imposed any new condition. We have discussed implementation of the issues that the government previously agreed to do," he said.

Regarding hike in the prices of energy or power, he noted that the

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Exercise to test Asia's readiness for bird flu

AFP, Manila

The exercise will be run from the WHO Western Pacific office in Manila and would be the first-ever test of the region's capability to "respond rapidly to signs of a pandemic and to snuff it out," the WHO said in a statement.

The drill will be a test of rapid containment involving risk assessment, communications, and decision-making. No supplies will actually be moved, it added.

The WHO says there have been 281 cases of bird flu infection

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8 killed in suicide attack on Lanka army camp

AFP, Colombo

Tamil Tiger rebels drove a tractor-trailer on Tuesday loaded with explosives and bombed an army camp in Sri Lanka's east, killing eight people, a day after their spectacular first-ever air raid.

Ten people were wounded in the suicide attack against the Chenchaladi army camp, a military official said, as the defence ministry reported another violence, which left a soldier and three rebels dead.

The suicide bombing by the

driver and his assistant came a day after the Tigers flew single-engined planes over the main military air base adjacent to Sri Lanka's only international airport and dropped bombs, killing three airmen and wounding 16 others.

Two separate teams are investigating the air strike -- an embarrassing blow to the country's defence establishment -- and President Mahinda Rajapakse also held an emergency meeting with political party leaders here on Monday night.

"The air power of a frenzied and

desperate organisation as the LTTE is a grave threat aimed not only to Sri Lanka but also to the entire South Asian region," the president's office said in a joint statement.

It said political parties in Sri Lanka urged the international community to "make a proper assessment of this very real danger."

The Tigers said the military carried out retaliatory air strikes

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