

Yunus returns home after 20-day tour of US, Europe

Bss, Dhaka

Nobel laureate Professor Muhammad Yunus returned home on Sunday, ending a 20-day tour of the United States, and five European countries--Italy, France, the United Kingdom, Portugal and Norway.

During his US visit, Prof Yunus received the prestigious "Global Trailblazer Award" in Washington DC. Senator Hillary Clinton handed over the award to the Nobel Peace laureate. He also received the "Association of Bi-national Chambers of Commerce Award for Leadership in Global Trade" in Miami.

Yunus also addressed a convocation ceremony of the Georgetown University and held meetings with the management of the John Hopkins University and Hospital in Baltimore.

In Italy, the Nobel laureate addressed the Italian Senate and held meetings with the Italian president, the speaker and other dignitaries. He attended a dinner hosted in his honour by the Italian prime minister.

Then, Prof Yunus travelled to France where he had meetings with the governor of the Central Bank of

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Regional cooperation meet for simplified border rules

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The seventh Forum for Regional Cooperation among Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) urged the governments to simplify border formalities to ease movement of goods, vehicles and people.

After a two-day meeting that ended on Sunday in Dhaka, the participants of the forum signed "Dhaka Statement 2007" where they recommended that BCIM governments provide zero-tariff access for products to increase trade in the region.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) organised the meeting of the forum that focused on further strengthening regional economic cooperation especially in three major areas--trade, transport and tourism.

Signed by the four heads of delegations of the BCIM countries, the Dhaka Statement 2007 said only a few inter-state connectivity infrastructures exist and alternative connectivity infrastructures need to be built to increase communications

among these nations.

With a view to highlighting the importance of regional transport facilities, the representatives agreed to hold the "BCIM Car Rally 2007" in November this year. The forum also decided the eighth meeting of BCIM forum will be held in 2008.

On trade, the delegates in the forum recommended that officials of the forum member countries be posted in the major cities of partner countries to foster trade.

The gathering also identified certain ports in the region and proposed that they be used for inter-port trade.

A total of 2.5 billion, 40 percent of the world population, live in the BCIM countries, therefore, the enormous potential of BCIM can easily be fathomed, Major General (retd) Abdul Matin, adviser to the ministries of communication, shipping, civil aviation and tourism and Liberation War affairs, said while speaking as chief guest at the concluding session of the forum on Sunday.

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The adviser said the BCIM countries are close neighbours with traditions of economic and cultural interactions from time immemorial and that exist at present. However, he expressed his concerns over the heavy trade imbalance of Bangladesh in favour of India and China. He said trade among these countries has been increasing and it went up to \$23.92 billion in 2005.

About the improvement of seaport he said, "A properly functioning seaport with excellent rail and road connectivity across the region can significantly influence Bangladesh's economic growth."

"To realise this, the present caretaker government has initiated some short- and long-term measures for improvements of port facilities," the adviser said.

Speaking at the forum, CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan, who headed the Bangladesh delegation, sought the government's support for the BCIM initiatives to

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BIRD FLU

9,000 more chickens culled in Savar, N'ganj

STAR REPORT

Around nine thousand chickens were culled on Sunday night at two more farms in Narayanganj Sadar and Siddhiganj upazila of Narayanganj district and at a farm in Savar following detection of avian influenza virus infection.

The administration has sealed off all the poultry farms in Narayanganj Sadar and Bandar upazilas.

Earlier flu virus was detected at a farm in Bandar upazila of Narayanganj and two other farms in Savar.

Meanwhile, Health Adviser Maj Gen (retd) Dr ASM Matur Rahman said bird flu is found only at some places in the country and it is under total control of the government.

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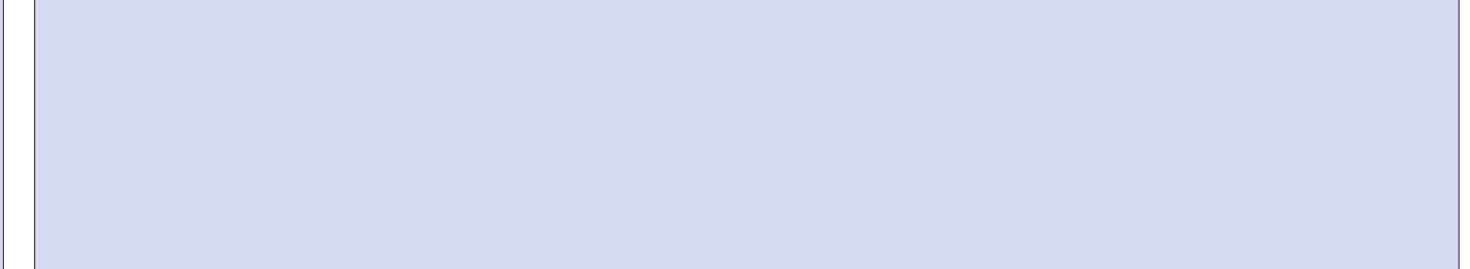


PHOTO: STAR

Filling station owners stick new price tags for different petroleum products after the government raised fuel prices again. The photo was taken from Green Road in the capital yesterday.



A large portion of the ground including a part of a street subsided at a construction site at Paltan in the capital yesterday.



9 more JMB militants held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police arrested nine more militants and Bangla Bhai aides early morning yesterday in Rajshahi and Natore.

Following two cases filed on Sunday by torture victims accusing the arrestees, several police teams led by Mirza Golam Sarwar, officer-in-charge of Bagmara Police Station (PS), arrested seven militants from their houses at Palashi village.

They are Abdul Jalil Amin, 56, father of notorious militant leader "Killer Mostak", Abdur Rahim, 26, Abdul Hamid Mondol, 30, Abdul Mondol, 28, Abul Kalam, 28, Nazrul Dorji, 40, and Moksed Ali, 52.

Two other militants -- Abdul Kuddus and Hafizul Islam -- were held from former deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu's village home Ramsha Kazipur.

With this, a total of 24 militants were arrested in three cases filed since Friday.

On Sunday, torture victim Ayub Ali Pramanik filed a case accusing

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Bus bomb kills 16 in Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

At least 16 people, including three children, were killed and 25 wounded when a bomb ripped through a crowded bus in eastern Sri Lanka yesterday, officials said.

The defence ministry immediately accused Tamil Tiger rebels of setting off the parcel bomb attack, which coincided with a key Buddhist holiday, while the guerrillas denied they were responsible for the attack.

Passengers were getting off the vehicle to be checked by troops manning a road block when the blast occurred outside the town of Ampara, 350km east of the capital Colombo, a local police officer said.

"The bomb went off just at the Kondawattuwon check point," the police officer said. "We now believe that the blast was aboard the bus. It was most likely a parcel bomb."

The head of the main hospital there, Lankathilaka Jayasinghe, said three people were already dead when they were brought in on a day when many people were taking advantage of the week-long holiday.

"Three people were dead on admission and 13 others died in hospital," Jayasinghe said, adding that 25 more people were being treated for injuries. Three children and 11 women, including a woman soldier, were among the dead.

Two off-duty constables travel-

ling home for the traditional New Year next week, were also among those killed, police said.

The Tigers denied involvement in the attack, the second against civilian transport since the rebels were accused of setting off bombs inside buses and killing 17 and wounding 117 on two consecutive days in January.

"We have nothing to do with this blast," spokeswoman for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) Navaruban Selvi said by telephone from the rebel head office in Kilinochchi, in the island's north.

Her remarks came after the defence ministry said the attack was the work of Tiger rebels, who have been held responsible for similar blasts in the past.

"The security forces suspect that the bomb would have been placed inside the bus by the LTTE to deliberately target civilians," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The blast came as President Mahinda Rajapakse visited neighbouring India to attend a two-day South Asian summit opening in New Delhi Tuesday. Officials said he wanted to discuss the threat of terrorism at the summit.

The latest bloodshed also came as security forces tightened their grip on areas held by the LTTE, with elite police commandos making

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Miladunnabi observed

UNB, Dhaka

The holy Eid-e-Miladunnabi, marking the birth and death anniversary of Prophet Hazrat Mohammed (PBUH), was observed across the country on Sunday.

The government as well as socio-cultural and religious organisations observed the day by holding doa and milad mahfil, seminar and discussion meetings.

A milad mahfil was held at

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Sundarbans fire under control

Probe body formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The devastating fire that broke out at Chandpali range of the Sundarbans on March 19 was brought under control on Sunday.

A five-member committee, headed by Assistant Conservator of Forest Saleh Mohammad Shoir Khan, has been formed to probe the cause of the fire that destroyed a large number of trees in the world's largest mangrove forest.

The committee has been asked to submit its report on April 4. Another committee was formed on Saturday to determine the extent of damage caused by the fire.

Chief Conservator of Forest Osman Gani, who came to Bagerhat on Saturday, visited the Chandpali range of the Sundarbans of Sunday. He was staying at Morelganj upazila where a camp has been set up to monitor the situation round-the-clock.

Several incidents of fire took place in the Sundarbans in 2004, 2005 and 2006.

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