

# Space race heats up in Asia

AP, Tokyo

Japan is set to launch its first lunar orbiter this summer, but exploring the moon is just part of the mission. The other goal is to catch up with China, the new leader in Asia's space race.

Japan's space agency JAXA announced last week that the much-delayed SELENE probe will be launched in August aboard an H-2A rocket, the mainstay of Japan's space program.

JAXA says the SELENE project is the largest lunar mission since the U.S. Apollo program. It involves placing a main satellite in orbit at an altitude of about 60 miles and deploying two smaller satellites in polar orbits. Researchers will use data gathered by the probes to study the moon's origin and evolution.

"This mission will involve observation of the whole moon, not just parts of it," said JAXA spokesman Satoki Kurokawa. "It is a very ambitious project."

The mission is a stepping stone in Japan's plan to more aggressively pursue space objectives including a lunar landing and, possibly, manned missions in space. To raise public awareness, JAXA is conducting a "Wish Upon the Moon" campaign that allows people to send brief messages up with the orbiter.

Japan leaped ahead of Asia by launching the region's first satellite in 1972. Now it is struggling to keep up in the most heated space race since the Cold War competition between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.

China launched its first manned space flight in 2003. A second mission in 2005 put two astronauts into orbit for a week, and a third manned launch is planned for next year. This year, China also plans to launch a probe that will orbit the moon.

Earlier this month, the country launched a Long March 3-A rocket that sent a navigation satellite into orbit as part of its effort to build a global positioning system. The satellite is the fourth China has launched as part of the Compass navigation system, which is expected to be operational in 2008.

Japan, meanwhile, has met with

## Hasina flies

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of the reasons for the government measures.

The foreign, civil aviation and tourism ministries and the inspector general of police have been asked to take necessary steps in line with the decision.

Law enforcement agencies and immigration at air and land ports have been alerted to that end while different airlines have been asked not to carry her.

In reaction to the developments, Hasina told different international media that she would get back to the country on schedule.

Meanwhile at home, the arrest of presidium member Kazi Zafullah came as a blow to most of the presidium members, said a senior AL leader preferring not to be named.

"We have to tread very carefully though we are sure good days are ahead for the party that polls the highest votes individually," the leader added.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of leaders said they believe the situation will change for the better shortly as the home ministry press note itself says the measures against the AL president are temporary. They hope the government will not prolong the way things are now for the sake of democracy and the people.

In the meantime, the AL will closely monitor the activities of the government.

## Titas gas field

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Brahmanbaria had been noticed for the last three to five years. The phenomenon reached an alarming state since the last dry season.

After identifying excessive gas pressure, the authorities assigned local petroleum exploration company Bapex last month to fix the uncontrolled leakage. It tried to control the pressure by injecting chemicals and mud into the well and finally by burning the gas.

"But the situation turned so serious that it was beyond Bapex's reach. That's why it [Bapex] stopped injecting liquids [chemicals] in the third well fearing a major blowout," said MA Baki, general manager (geology) of Bapex.

As there is no expert on blow-outs in Bangladesh, the authorities through discussions decided to hire a foreign expert, he added.

Asked if the government is responsible for taking too long to decide on hiring a foreign expert, he justified by saying that Bapex had handled such cases before.

"The issue did not reach the breakeven point when we should

## Hasina returns

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after a meeting with Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam at the Secretariat.

Matin, also the chairman of national co-ordination committee for combating crime, declined to make any comment on the press note issued by the government on Wednesday, terming it 'sensitive'. "The press note was issued by the home ministry and I should not say anything beyond what is mentioned in it," he added.

Asked whether actions would be taken against any other political leaders, he said, "I do not know."

Matin also expressed his ignorance about the activities centring Khaleda Zia's leaving home.

When his attention was drawn towards the clarification sought by British High Commission on the press note, he said that the government would do it.

Meanwhile, Law, Justice and Information Adviser Mainul Hossain said yesterday that he did not know who had telephoned the newspaper offices on Wednesday to stop publication of the statement of Hasina, after a ban was imposed on her returning home.

The PID (Press Information Department) did not do that, he told the journalists at his secretariat office, claiming that the media is enjoying freedom.

He, however, observed that since there is a state of emergency in the country, it is not negative if PID gives any suggestions. "The fundamental rights of the people do not work at present," he added.

## Khaleda family

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Tarique's brother Arafat Rahman Coco have got a special permission to meet Tarique today before leaving the country, the relative said.

"We are yet to know when they will meet Tarique, but it is a special permission," he added.

The Special Branch initially refused to allow Khaleda and her family members to meet Tarique as Zobiaidah and her mother had just met him on April 18. However, they later got the permission from the home ministry under special consideration.

"Khaleda along with her younger son, two daughters-in-law and three grand children might fly for Saudi Arabia tomorrow [today] after meeting Tarique Rahman," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, another source said due to security reasons Tarique might be brought out of jail under parole for some time to arrange the meeting at a certain venue.

When asked, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) prisons Major Shamsul Haider Siddique however told The Daily Star that he did not know anything about the permission.

"If they got the permission, they would bring it to us and we will come to know about it. We do not have any scope to know about such permission before a visitor comes at the jail gate," he said last night.

He also said the jail authorities have no plan to take Tarique out of jail for the family meeting.

A source close to Khaleda's family said the former prime minister was unwilling to fly by Biman Bangladesh Airlines.

"So, the actual time of their departure depends on the availability of tickets of any other Saudi-bound plane," said the source.

## Five alleged

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Our Rangpur correspondent reports: police arrested a JMB activist Anwarul Islam, 48, raiding his house at Baro Rupai at Monea union in Gangachara early yesterday.

Anwarul was absconding since he took away a JMB activist from police custody last year.

## 7 Bangladeshis

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BSF at around 7:30pm on Wednesday from zero point near Bhomra land port on their way home with purchased cattle, BDR sources said.

The BSF, from Ghojodanga camp under Basirhat thana of 24 Parganas district in West Bengal, India, tortured the seven Bangladeshis severely and later dumped them in a ditch near the zero point.

Local Bangladeshis rescued them in a critical condition and sent them to sadar hospital for treatment.

BDR has sent a letter to BSF authorities protesting the incident yesterday. Adjutant of 41 Rifles Battalion Nurul Momin Chowdhury confirmed the incident.

Earlier on Tuesday, the BSF from Panitar and Soladana camps under Basirhat thana of 24 Parganas entered Bangladesh territory crossing the Haroddah border through the River Ichhamati by speed boats.

The BSF then abducted four Bangladeshis cattle traders, Wahidul Islam, 21, Hafizul Islam, 22, and Safiquil Islam, 26, from Haroddah village in Sadar upazila. Identity of the fourth Bangladeshis was not available.

The Indian border guards tortured the four Bangladeshis so severely that the four had to be admitted to Basirhat Hospital in India, relatives of the victims said.

Lt Col Asif Abdur Rouf, commanding officer of 41 Rifles Battalion, confirmed the incident.

# UNSC team to hold Kosovo talks next week

AFP, United Nations

A Security Council mission will visit Belgrade and Pristina next week to discuss the UN plan for the supervised independence of the breakaway Serbian province of Kosovo, Britain's UN envoy said yesterday.

"I expect the fact-finding mission of the Security Council to be in Belgrade on Thursday (April 26) and in Pristina on Friday," Emyr Jones Parry told reporters.

Jones Parry, who chairs the 15-member council for this month, said the mission, which was requested by Russia, would stop over in Brussels for briefings by the European Union and NATO on his way to Belgrade.

UN officials said Belgian Ambassador Johan Verbeke would lead the council mission.

Last week, Russia's UN envoy Vitaly Churkin said the mission would take stock of the situation on the ground and conduct a "comprehensive review of implementation" of Council Resolution 1244 on Kosovo's future status.

Security Council 1244, adopted in 1999, authorizes the United Nations to

## Russia, India to hold joint naval exercise in Sea of Japan

AFP, Moscow

Russia and India are to hold a four-day counter-terrorism exercise in the Sea of Japan, the ITAR-TASS news agency reported yesterday.

Starting Tuesday, more than 10 vessels from the two countries will practise techniques for repelling terrorist attacks on ships and liberating ships seized by terrorists, the agency quoted a Russian Pacific fleet spokesman as saying.

The vessels will operate out of Russia's southeastern port of Vladivostok, and attack helicopters and a submarine will also take part.

The exercise reflects the close ties between the two countries' military forces, although it is unusual for taking place close to Japanese coastal waters.

Russia supplies India with about 70 percent of its military hardware.

## Anti-hoarding drive

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obstacle to growth.

He said the authorities are to be applauded for the recent hikes in electricity tariffs and fuel prices, which go some way in cutting the state-owned enterprises' losses. The main beneficiaries of subsidised oil prices are the relatively well-off while the poor would be much better served by additional transfers from the budget.

"To prevent large and persistent deviations between domestic and international oil prices in the future, the IMF recommends the introduction of an automatic pricing formula," he said.

In the power sector, further electricity tariff adjustments will be needed, Rumbaugh said, adding that the price of natural gas should also be gradually brought in line with world prices to reduce the existing market distortions and supplement government revenue.

Asked if increased prices of power and gas may affect inflation further, he said, "As a temporary matter, it would have impact on

facilitate a political process to determine the future status of Kosovo, a Serbian province with a predominantly ethnic Albanian population.

In Belgrade, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned Thursday that any attempts to unilaterally recognize the independence of Kosovo could destabilize Serbia and the Balkan region.

"Any solution related to the problem of Kosovo must be acceptable for Belgrade and Pristina. Any attempt at a unilateral solution that would be imposed is absolutely unacceptable," he added.

Lavrov, who was in Belgrade ahead of a Security Council debate on UN envoy Marti Ahtisaari's recommendation to grant Kosovo internationally supervised independence also said: "Mr Ahtisaari's plan has failed."

## HC asks

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not to go out of it.

The petition said, "The government is putting huge pressure on the detainee (Khaleda) to leave the country as soon as possible. She is being threatened of getting arrested and harassed if she does not leave the country shortly, which is apparent from some newspaper reports published in the past few days.

"The measures of arresting and torturing both her sons and filing consecutive cases against them are also part of putting pressure on her to leave the country. The government has created such a circumstance in which her staying in the country has become almost impossible."

The petition further said, "Still she is not willing to leave the country, leaving her son Tarique Rahman in jail custody, and as a result, the opposite parties are putting more and more restrictions on her and increasing the pressure on her.

"If there is any suspicion that the detainee had committed any criminal offence, then action under normal law could be taken against her, but her detention in the present manner is no substitute for such purpose and is fully illegal and without any lawful authority."

Barrister Rafique Islam Mia and Advocate Azizul Haq moved for the petitioner.

Later, they told newsmen that even the state of emergency cannot restrain right of movement of a citizen.

inflation for two months. But it would be moderate very quickly by designed macroeconomic policies."

On Bangladesh's economic performance, he said economic activity remains strong despite the election related disruption and the political transition in January. A slowdown in agriculture is being more than offset by strong manufacturing and exports, and domestic demand remains buoyant as evidenced by a rebound in imports and high credit growth.

The growth for the fiscal year 2007 is estimated at 6.7 percent and the growth momentum is expected to be sustained in fiscal 2008.

Rumbaugh said, "We have talked to many people in last two weeks, including government body, civil society and private sector. Everybody termed the situation over the last two months 'temporary'. And I also think the overall economic situation is temporary and the growth would be quite strong."

## EC proposes

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The draft proposals said the party or the candidate would have to get the permission from the concerned district magistrates or officials authorised by the district magistrates and police commissioners in metropolitan areas.

The draft also recommended imposing a ban on holding rallies and processions that create obstacles to movement of people.

Asked whether such restrictions will hamper the festive mood of parliamentary elections, as it proposes to impose restrictions on even holding rallies and processions at ward levels, Humayun Kabir, secretary to the EC Secretariat, said he would raise the issue before the commission.

The draft proposals also envisage severe restrictions on pasting posters on walls and establishments in the city corporation and municipality areas. None would be allowed to paste posters, leaflets on buses, trucks, steamer and any other vehicles, according to the proposals.

Asked where the political parties and candidates would paste their posters, the EC secretary said they would innovate some ideas. He, however, said any city corporation or municipality might specify places

## 4 jute mills

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funds for the payment of arrear wages.

Meanwhile, thousands of workers in Khalishpur industrial belt brought out processions yesterday evening protesting the layoff of jute mills in Khulna.

Bangladesh Trade Union Centre (BTUC) and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal expressed concern over the clash between the jute mill workers and law enforcers at Khulna yesterday.

BTUC president Nurul Islam and its general secretary Wajedul Islam Khan in a statement urged the authorities to pay the arrears of the workers and to restart the factories immediately.

The workers and employees of the state-owned jute mills had been starving since they did not receive their salaries for the last couple of months. The tension in the Khalishpur area was just a manifestation of the situation, they said.

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal in its statement expressed concern over the clash and urged the government to take necessary steps to resolve the problem and to pay the arrears of the workers. It also urged the government to provide treatment to the workers injured by the police.

## Kazi Zafarullah

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report also said he is involved in activities which the state of emergency forbids.

To prevent him from indulging in such activities the government has proposed a one-month detention order under the Special Powers Act, which is now under process, the forwarding report added.

Dhanmondi police in their forwarding report mentioned that police detectives arrested Ashim in connection with his alleged involvement in activities that go against the interest of the people.

The report mentioned that for the last few days Ashim has been holding meetings in his house and other places with local and foreign people to make plans for "anti-state and terrorist activities".

The report went on to say that he was conspiring to free some of his party leaders who are already in jail for their alleged involvement in corruption and criminal activities. The government also proposed a one-month detention order for him under the Special Powers Act to prevent him from indulging in such activities.

Defence lawyers pleaded to the court to provide the AL leaders with division facilities. The court directed the jail authorities to provide them all facilities as per provisions of the Jail Code.

## UK assures

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Thomas lauded Bangladesh's role in the UN reform process as a key facilitator and expressed Britain's deep appreciation for Bangladesh's support to the UK in advancing the UN reforms in the area of development.

The UK minister hoped that Bangladesh and Britain would continue to work closely at the UN on important issues of common interest including UN reforms, peace and security, climate change, women empowerment and development.

Chowdhury said Bangladesh considers Britain to be a most dependable and longstanding development partner and the two countries would continue to cooperate closely to realise their shared aspirations for development in bilateral and international forums.

The adviser sought all-out support from the DFID to the Election Commission for ensuring a modern and accurate electoral process.

## Development

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forward with offer of help in the country's various development and reform programme.

The chief of the caretaker government said in his recent address to the nation he had mentioned about the reform of the PSC.

About assistance in electoral process, the CA mentioned about UNDP's move to help the Election Commission and urged for coordinated cooperation by the development partners.

Regarding electricity, he mentioned his government's various short-term steps, including energy saving measures, to meet the demand through load management.

"The power problem cannot be solved overnight as it needs long-term measures," he said and sought cooperation from the development partners in the government's current efforts to reduce the electricity crisis.

The CA said the present government has attached priority to timely implementation of development projects.

Responding to the development partners' appreciation in dealing with avian influenza (bird flu), he said immediate measures by the government and cooperation extended by all have helped tackle the situation.

ERD Secretary M Aminul Islam Bhuiyan and Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were also present during the meeting.

# EU nations agree to new racism rules

AP, Luxembourg

European Union nations agreed yesterday on new rules to combat racism and hate crimes across the 27-nation bloc, including setting jail sentences against those who deny or trivialize the Holocaust.

A compromise deal on the rules was reached by EU justice and interior ministers after nearly six years of negotiations, officials said.

The proposed rules, which still have to be vetted by national parliaments, calls for up to three-year prison sentences for those con-

## 100 shanties gutted in slum fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A devastating fire gutted around 100 shanties of a slum at Kachukhet in the capital yesterday.

Besides, Abdul Latif, 60, a slum dweller, suffered burns during the incident, fire fighters said. He is undergoing treatment at Adhunik Hospital in Pallabi.

The flame originated from an oven of a house in the slum at about 11:30am and soon spread to other houses. Several hundred people were rendered homeless in the blaze that was doused after more than two hours of efforts by the fire fighters.

Seven fire fighting units from Mirpur, Kurmitola, Mohammadpur and headquarters took part in the operation.

The victims of the fire could hardly save any of their household goods and other valuables. Many of them were found searching for goods under the debris later.

## Tigers keep

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with the ball and was caught in front of the stumps having made only one.

Rasel was unlucky not to get his second scalp as an edge from Marlon Samuels was dropped by Razzakk in the slips.

Shakib helped Bangladesh keep their noses in front by getting rid of Samuels for 31 in his first over. The batsman failed to get to the pitch of a tossed up delivery and a gentle nudge was held by the keeper Mushfiqur Rahim.

Bangladesh, playing their last match, brought back Rasel and Javed Omar in place of Shahadat Hossain and Shahriar Nafees.

West Indies, on the other hand, recalled Samuels and Jerome Taylor leaving out Kieron Pollard and Ian Bradshaw.

## Next budget

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ministries are also under consideration, he added.

About the government's drive against corruption, the adviser said, "There might be some short-term losses, but we must accept those for long-term and sustainable gains."

He acknowledged that inflation now is an issue to think about. "But we should not be worrying much if we compare the country's inflation rate to those of India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka," he said.

He said the growth of export earning, remittance inflows and foreign currency reserve are in a good position, but aid disbursements were not satisfactory for the recent political impasse.

During July-February period of fiscal 2006-07, \$532 million was disbursed as financial assistance while it was \$718 million on the corresponding period last year, he said.

He, however, hoped that the amount of disbursed aids will reach \$1 billion mark at the end of current fiscal in June.

Former adviser to a caretaker government Syed Manzur Elahi said confidence of the business commu-

victed of denying massacres defined as genocide by the International Criminal Court, including the Holocaust and the mass killings in Rwanda in the 1990s.

EU justice and interior ministers said the rules call for criminalizing "incitement to hatred and violence and publicly condoning, denying or grossly trivializing crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes."

The mass killing of Jews during World War II was the only genocide specifically mentioned in the rules. Demands from Baltic nations that major Stalinist atrocities be included were rejected.

German Justice Minister Brigitte Zypries, whose country holds the EU presidency, said a compromise was reached to organize a public debate on genocide and other hate crimes not mentioned in the draft rules.

The rules were significantly watered down from an original proposal drafted in 2001. Member states can opt out of criminalizing massacres not defined as genocide by the international court.

Reaching a deal had been difficult amid vastly different legal and cultural traditions. Whether to criminalize genocide denial had been a key sticking point. Several countries, including Britain, Italy and Denmark, had been concerned the new measures would undermine freedom of expression.

## 27 Taliban

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Shindand district on Wednesday, the coalition said in a statement. The patrol returned fire, killing three enemy fighters and wounding another three, it said.

Troops have confiscated over 100 fake police uniforms and more than a dozen false identification documents in Herat province since Tuesday, the coalition said.

On Tuesday, Afghan troops searched a compound and discovered 18 rocket propelled grenades and 27 AK-47 weapons. The compound's guard later confessed that he commanded more than 100 Taliban fighters, the coalition said.

In Kapisa province, 40 miles northeast of Kabul, police and Afghan soldiers were preparing an assault on a group of militants in Tagab district, said provincial police chief Gen. Mohammad Eawaz Muzlim.

Authorities have been battling militants in the area since Monday, leaving 10 suspected militants dead and six policemen wounded, said Kapisa deputy police chief Jalal Khan.

nity was eroding fast during the recent political turmoil. Things are better now as there is no political instability, he said.

"We, the businessmen, always want a stable environment and businesses do not concern themselves much with thinking if there's a democracy or not," he said.

He said no businessman should be involved in politics. "I'm sorry to say that many of us believe that nothing will affect them if they could become a member of parliament," he observed.

He urged the administration to step up its action against those who misuse power and indulge in criminal activities. The ongoing drive however should not be pointed more at private sector businesses, as it risks harming the confidence of the businessmen, he said.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of Power and Participation Research Centre, made a presentation on the seminar topic. Among others, Chief Executive Officer of Dhaka Stock Exchange Salahuddin Ahmed Khan, ERF President Zakaria Kazzal and General Secretary Nazmul Ahsan spoke.

## Mamun confesses

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