



The Daily Star

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Plus 8-page Rising Stars

www.thedailystar.net

REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVII, NO. 106

DHAKA THURSDAY MAY 3, 2007

BAISHAKHI 20, 1414 BS

RABIUS SANI 15, 1428 HJRI

20 PAGES PLUS RISING STARS PRICE: Tk 10.00



Category: LCD (Full Surround Ambilight)
Model No.: 42PF9831

TRANSCOM Customer Inquiry No. 01712-865463
Corporate Sales No. 01713-041243-8

Serial blasts
spark protests,
condemnation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties, non-governmental organisations (NGO) and socio-cultural bodies have expressed grave concern over the serial bomb blasts in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet rail stations on Tuesday.

Condemning the incidents in separate statements yesterday, they demanded that the authorities take immediate steps to identify the culprits and hand down exemplary punishment to them for stopping recurrence of such incidents in future.

Expressing deep concern, Ahmadiya Muslim Jamaat yesterday said that they feel insecure as

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Govt set to induct advisers beyond 10

Law Commission looks into legal ways; Mainul concerned at politicisation of highest judiciary

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and
PINAKI ROY

Destined for a lengthy stint in office, the caretaker government has turned to the Law Commission for ways to draft in more advisers in a desperate attempt to ease tremendous work pressure on the present 10-member advisory council.

In view of constitutional constraints before pushing the number of advisers beyond 10, the law ministry recently referred the issue to the commission for recommendations.

"The government wants to know the procedure for increasing advisers," Law Commission Chairman and former chief justice Mostafa Kamal told The Daily Star

last night. "As it is a constitutional matter, we don't have any ready solution for it. We just have started to examine the matter and it might take some time to find a proper solution."

With the caretaker government targeting to help the Election Commission to hold polls at the leg

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Hasina may return home on May 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President and former prime minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to return home from London on May 7.

"We have already booked tickets of Emirates Airlines for May 6. The flight is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka at 8:30am on May 7," AL's assistant secretary for international affairs sub-committee Abdus Sobhan Golap, who is accompanying Hasina in London, told The Daily Star last night over telephone.

The former prime minister was scheduled to deliver speech on "Democracy and Human Rights in

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22pc bigger budget planned for FY08

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The budget for fiscal year 2008 is likely to be 22 percent bigger than the current one, largely to service the massive outstanding debt owed by Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) to national commercial banks.

Usually, a budget receives an 8-9 percent increase from the previous year's original budget, but the finance ministry's preliminary estimates this year suggest that the budget for FY2008 might be Tk

85,150 crore from Tk 69,740 crore allocated for the FY2007 budget.

The finance ministry estimates

show the amount of bank borrowing for FY2008 might jump by 196 percent from the FY2007 estimates. The projected bank-borrowing figure for FY2008 is Tk 15,900 crore in comparison to the current budget estimate of Tk 5,400 crore.

Out of the estimated FY08 bank borrowing of Tk 15,900 crore, the government will issue bonds worth Tk 8,400 crore just to service the outstanding BPC loans.

Currently, the BPC owes around Tk 10,000 crore in loans with interest to various local banks.

Sources said the government has resolved to improve BPC's financial situation through various

reforms to at least ensure that the corporation reaches a break-even point in its accounts.

The government has recently increased the prices of petroleum goods as part of this initiative and is also likely to install a pricing formula mechanism to open up local petroleum prices to global market forces.

The initiative to finance BPC's loans and interest by issuing bonds would work simultaneously with these reform programmes to improve the BPC's finances.

Other than servicing the BPC loans, the government plans on

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Blasts in 3 cities alert lawmen to possible rise of militants

STAR REPORT

After three near-simultaneous explosions rocked railway stations in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet on Tuesday, law enforcers now rethink seriously if it was a new phase of the rise of the militants who carried out the countrywide serial blasts on August 17, 2005.

The blasts that left a rickshaw-puller injured in Chittagong triggered a fresh panic among people. Police chief Nur Mohammad said although the incident was small-scale, they are looking into it seriously and all intelligence agencies are directed to find out the attackers.

The bombs were detonated

between 6:45am and 7:10am. The explosions raised security threats leading the law enforcers to set up several hundred check points in the capital and elsewhere.

The law enforcers had been apprehending retaliation from the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) following the execution of its six members including five top leaders on March 29.

However, Tuesday's blasts at the railway terminals created confusion about whether the JMB is behind the incidents or a new militant group has emerged as aluminium plates recovered from the blast sites bore inscriptions of

In the capital, streets were comparatively less crowded yesterday due to increase in temperature in the last three days.

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Heat wave likely to spread in couple of days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Persisting mild to moderate heat wave in several areas may sweep the rest of the country in a couple of days with temperature rising further, weather experts forecast yesterday.

The heat spell now continues in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jessore, Chuadanga and Chittagong areas.

The deputy forecasting officer at Met office attributed the heat wave to westerly wind from Uttar Pradesh in India. If the westerly wind changes its direction or if rain occurs in Uttar Pradesh, temperature will decrease in Bangladesh," he said.

In the capital, streets were comparatively less crowded yesterday due to increase in temperature in the last three days.

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Mirage appears on roads as a heat wave persists in many areas of the country. This photo was taken from Dhaka-Aricha highway yesterday.

Govt may renegotiate agreement with Asia Energy

SHARIER KHAN

The government may renegotiate the existing agreement with Asia Energy and consider new coal exploration proposals in the light of the new coal policy after the cabinet approves it.

A top energy ministry source said the draft policy may be placed before the cabinet sometime next month unless it needs further amendments.

"Asia Energy and Hosaf may have signed agreements earlier, which are now awaiting decisions. Many questions have now come up. We will now have to renegotiate these agreements in the light of the new coal policy," said a top energy

ministry source.

"Without fixing a yard stick, we cannot renegotiate these deals," he added.

A pre-cabinet meet vital discussion on the policy is expected to be held at Petrobangla tomorrow. After this discussion, if the energy adviser is satisfied with the draft, it would then be placed before the cabinet for approval.

Some key issues addressed in this policy is a variable rate of 16 percent royalty on coal exported at \$50 per tonne, the current average international price. The Asia Energy agreement gives Bangladesh a meagre six percent royalty irrespective of coal price

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