

Madrid N-talks 'step forward'

Says Iran

AFP, Tehran

Iran's top nuclear negotiator Ali Larijani yesterday described his talks in Madrid with EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana on Iran's nuclear programme as a step forward.

"My assessment from the Madrid negotiation is that it was a step forward in solving the nuclear issue," he said in an interview with the state news agency IRNA in Madrid.

"This negotiation was better than the past, and I sense that Solana was trying to reach an understanding, and this is a good method."

He added, however, that "We should leave more judgement of the matter to future."

"Iran is not seeking to buy time in its nuclear case, but it is ready to solve it this very day."

Larijani and Solana met on Thursday, more than a month after their previous meeting in Ankara.

Solana, negotiating on behalf of the United States and five other major powers dealing with the Iranian nuclear issue, is due to meet with Larijani again in the coming weeks.

After two rounds of talks in Madrid, Larijani was quoted as saying Iran was ready to talk with the International Atomic Energy Agency about information access and cooperation.

"Iran is ready to discuss outstanding questions with the agency which are linked to information access and cooperation with the agency," a spokeswoman for Solana said.

Tehran's arch foe Washington said on Friday that is it seeking to impose more sanctions after failure of latest nuclear talks.

Price spiral has created suffocating situation

Speakers tell BBC Sanglap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The countrymen have been going through a suffocating situation as the prices of essentials have continued to spiral, speakers at the BBC Bangladesh Sanglap programme said yesterday.

They also observed that all the good initiatives taken by the caretaker government would fade if it fails to rein in price hike.

BNP leader and former lawmaker M u h a m m a d Shahiduzzaman, Awami League leader and Cox's Bazar Bar

Association President Sirajul Mostafa, educationist Prof Someswar Chakrabarty and woman leader and former lawmaker Aye Thien Rakhaing took part in the programme as panelists. The Sanglap programme was held at Cox's Bazar.

Both the BNP and AL leaders agreed that government should hold elections only after preparing a flawless voter list.

The panelists also observed that it would not be possible to check price hike of essentials unless the government roots out corruption

from all sectors.

They urged the businessmen not to make a huge profit from their businesses.

BBC Bengali Service in cooperation with the BBC World Service Trust organised the Sanglap programme moderated by Masud Hasan Khan.

The panelists urged the government to repatriate the Rohingya refugees, who are staying in camps in Cox's Bazar, saying that the refugees have been resorting to various crimes.

Gazipur road crash kills 5

UNB, Gazipur

Five people died and ten others were injured when a minibus plunged into a ditch in Nimali rail gate area on Tongi-Kaliganj road yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said the Tongi-bound minibus from Pubail suddenly overturned and fell into the roadside ditch at about 8:00am, killing four passengers and the helper of the bus on the spot and injuring 10 others.

Four of the dead were identified as Akbar, 20, Saddam, 18, and Hasan, 30, workers of Tongi National Fan Factory, and bus helper Zahir, 20. Identity of another victim, aged around 32, could not be

known.

The injured were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and Tongi Hospital.

Police recovered the bodies and sent them to the DMCH morgue for autopsy.

One killed in Chandpur

A correspondent from Chandpur adds: One person was killed in a road accident on Kaliapara-Kochua Road under Shahraستی Upazila on Friday evening.

Police and witnesses said the dead was identified as Nurul Islam Bhuiyan, 52, hailing from Baniachow village of Shahraستی upazila.

The accident occurred when a micro-bus knocked him on the road while he was returning home from his

office at Shahraستی upazila in a bike, leaving him dead on the spot.

Angry people put up a barricade on the road for over an hour following the accident.

10 die in Pak tanker accident

AFP, Multan

A speeding oil tanker crashed into a roadside market yesterday after its driver lost control, killing 10 people and injuring 15 others in central Pakistan.

Five schoolchildren were among the dead in the accident which occurred near the central city of Multan, police said.



PHOTO: PID

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed presides over a meeting of National Economic Council (NEC) on the annual development programme at NEC conference room in the city yesterday.

Two armed criminals held in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested two armed criminals from Demra in the city on Friday evening.

The arrestees were identified as Abdul Wahab Faruq and Mohammad Rafiqul Islam.

On information, a team of Rab-3 in plainclothes raided Dogair Natunpara area and arrested them two persons who gathered around the place to sell arms and ammos.

Police seized two revolvers and 9 rounds of bullets from their possession.

Woman crushed under wheels of train

A CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A woman, aged about 85, was killed under the wheels of a train at Roghunathpur rail gate while crossing the rail line at around 3:00pm on Saturday.

The victim was identified as Amena Khatun, 85, wife of Banu Shaha of Roghunathpur village.

Witnesses said a Khulna-bound speeding train ran over Amena when she was crossing the rail line, killing her on the spot.

Railway police reached the spot and recovered the body.

80 houses gutted, 10 injured in Thakurgaon fire

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

About 80 houses were gutted and 10 people were injured in a fire at Rator village in Ranishankol, Thakurgaon, on Friday midnight.

The blaze started at a thatched kitchen room and soon engulfed the whole area, leaving about 100 families homeless and causing an estimated loss of Tk 75 lakh.

Fire fighters from Thakurgaon and Pirganj brought the blaze under control after a struggle for nearly two hours.

The injured people, who received severe burns, are now undergoing treatment at Ranishankol Health Complex and Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

The fire victims are passing their days under the open sky.

Md Abdul Mannan, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Ranishankol, visited the area yesterday and assured the victims of arranging relief for them, official sources said.

Meanwhile, another fire broke out at a

residential hotel at Maldhapatty in Dinajpur on Friday night, creating panic among those staying in the hotel.

An electrical short-circuit sparked off the fire on the second floor of seven-storey Hotel Diamond.

At least six people were injured while evacuating the hotel hurriedly.

Fire fighters brought the blaze under control after a struggle for about two hours.



PHOTO: STAR

Students of Scholastica School pose for photograph after receiving certificates during the Graduation Ceremony of O-Level 2007 at STM hall in the city yesterday. Scholastica Chairperson Yasmeen Murshed, sitting fourth from left, attended the function as chief guest.

Frigate torpedoed by mean politics

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"Above all, the incident had dampened the spirit and energy of the Bangladesh Navy," said a senior defence official.

The caretaker government is now considering re-commissioning the frigate in mid-June.

The procurement of the frigate of model DW 2000H built by South Korean Daewoo Shipyard, triggered controversies prompting the BNP-led alliance government to file an anti-corruption case against ex-prime minister of the last Awami League government, Sheikh Hasina.

The then Bureau of Anti-corruption filed a case in 2003 in connection with the purchase of the frigate from the fourth lowest bidder in the tender Daewoo -- for incurring a loss for the government. The case virtually died after Hasina, Daewoo's local representative Abdul Awal Mintoo, and four defence officers had been granted bail in August 2003.

But while the BNP-led government did not pursue the case, it chose to decommission the frigate in early 2002 on grounds of corruption and sub-standard equipment.

A high powered investigation committee headed by the erstwhile commodore Hasan Ali Khan was formed. The other members of the committee were Commodore Kalimullah, Captain PK Barua and Captain Naser. The committee was assigned to detect substandard equipment installed in the frigate, but it failed to substantiate the allegation.

A defence high official pointed out that the then prime minister Khaleda Zia's personal secretary who is also her nephew, Saiful Islam Duke, and some enthusiastic naval officers, seeking the political clout of BNP, spearheaded the move to decommission the frigate. Duke resigned from the navy soon after the Awami League government took over power in 1996. "He did so, because he had piles of negative reports on him from the past. He was a disgruntled officer with discipline problems," said the defence official. Duke himself was also involved in various naval purchases between 2002 and 2006, many of which are very controver-

sial.

THE FRIGATE

With the mandate to provide security and surveillance in a maritime area of 40,000 square kilometres, the Bangladesh Navy has been in dire need of a modern frigate since the early nineties as its existing vessels and weaponry became antiquated. The decision to purchase a frigate was taken in 1996 to upgrade the naval operation capacity from a mere surface level to underwater-surface-air level. Daewoo's DW 200H frigate was picked as the best choice because it offered most modern weapons and warfare technology, sources said.

Daewoo completed manufacturing the frigate and handed it over to the navy on May 29, 2001. The then prime minister Sheikh Hasina commissioned it on June 20, 2001 and the frigate was in operation for eight months.

"During the only eight months of operation, the equipment and weapon set-up underwent fine tuning to make the frigate fault free. But after the decommissioning, we could do nothing. Now with the warranty period over, we will have to purchase everything that needs replacement," said a defence official.

A frigate's normal life span is of 25 to 30 years. This one already lost five years of its life without being utilised at all.

"The frigate is equipped with torpedo for underwater, missiles for surface, and anti-aircraft guns and missiles for air warfare. This gives us a three dimensional capability. This is a very high-tech ship which could provide world class training for our men. The engine and equipment are among the world's best that money can buy," he added.

"This frigate was not over priced," he pointed out.

The 340-metre long and 41-metre wide frigate also has a helicopter base on board. "We will need to buy a helicopter to complete equipping the frigate for three dimensional operations," the official noted. Such a helicopter costs around Tk 5 crore.



PHOTO: STAR

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya speaks at a press briefing at Cirdap auditorium in the city yesterday. On his right are CPD Research Director Mustafizur Rahman and research fellow Uttam Kumar Deb and on his left are Anisatul Fatema Yusuf and Fahmida Khatun. (Story on Page 1)