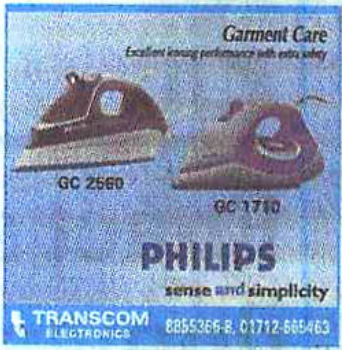




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TECHNICAL FAULT Biman flyers stuck at ZIA for 39 hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 200 Biman passengers faced untold sufferings stranded at the Zia International Airport as the flight scheduled to carry them to the flight scheduled for 39 hours due to technical glitches.

The Abu Dhabi-bound BG 027 flight, which was to take off at 9:30pm on Thursday, finally left for its destination at 11:45am yesterday, immigration sources said.

The passengers awaiting their departure, especially women and children, suffered terribly during the long stay at the airport. The Biman authorities did not make any arrangements for their food and other necessities, the passengers claimed.

The Biman authorities rescheduled the departure time of the flight twice but could not keep those.

"We are here for more than 35 hours," an aggrieved passenger said.

Saifur's son got 100 acres land for Tk 500

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Former finance minister M Saifur Rahman's younger son Shafiq Rahman Babu took lease of 100 acres of government land worth Tk 95 lakh in Srimangal upazila for only Tk 500 to establish a tea estate.

Babu could not take possession of the land but if he had, it would have seen eviction of at least 5,000 landless people of around 300 families from there.

The landless people including rickshaw pullers, auto-rickshaw drivers, day labourers and construction workers filed a writ petition with the High Court in August 2002 and the court asked Babu not to take possession of the land until the case is resolved.

The then Moulvibazar deputy commissioner (DC), Mokhesur

Rahman, allegedly gave Saifur's son the piece of land valued at Tk 95,109 per acre at a "symbolic" price of Tk 5 per acre.

It is alleged that the finance minister of the immediate past BNP-led alliance government had verbally instructed the local administration to assist his son in acquiring the land.

Saifur also allegedly pushed for government-funded projects to develop transport infrastructure in the area by building roads and culverts shortly after the registration of the land in July 2002.

Mokhes recommended allocating a total of 585.45 acres of land to Babu, but Saifur's son got 100 acres in the preliminary phase of the purchase as it is the maximum limit allowed by the land ministry.

Letters between the land ministry and the district administra-

tion obtained by The Daily Star show that Mokhes himself suggested the Tk 5 rate per acre of land as a "symbolic" price.

Talking to The Daily Star, however, Mokhes denied having made the recommendation, saying it was not in his jurisdiction but the land ministry's.

"We spent one year communicating with the land ministry about the matter and the ministry allocated the land," he said, adding that other parties like Bangladesh Tea Board and the district administration were involved in the agreement.

Mokhes, who recently joined the Anti-Corruption Commission as its secretary, also brushed aside allegations of favouring Saifur when he was the DC, citing that Saifur's brother was defeated in a union parishad election during

Govt fails to fulfil people's basic needs

Says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that the government is not being able to meet the basic needs of the countrymen, terming it "unfortunate."

"People's expectations were that the present government will check the continuing price hike of essentials and make sure that the poor people have meals twice a day. But unfortunately, it is true that the government is not being able to fulfil the minimum needs of the people," the former prime minister said in a press statement.

The AL chief also observed that the business syndicates formed during the BNP-Jamaat coalition rule are still active.

Hasina also demanded the government immediately withdraw the cases filed against 5,000 farmers of Nachole. She also urged the interim administration to

TITAS GAS LEAKAGE

Efforts still inadequate

SHARIEF KHAN

The government appears confused and making half-hearted efforts to resolve the gas leakage problem at Titas field where huge gas continues to leak unchecked for many months causing a loss of national resources worth crores of taka.

Bangladesh Gas Field Company Ltd (BGFCL) that owns the gas field woke up to the reality only last week following reports of worsening of the gas leakage, earlier wrongly perceived to have

improved.

Sources said the BGFCCL at a meeting last week finally decided to appoint a consultant for an investigation into the gas field's overall problem, not just to handle it partially.

But due to strict government procurement regulations, the BGFCCL may not be able to deploy a consultant to work in the field before October at the earliest. "Thereby we will continue to witness wastage of huge national resources," said a high official.

After this consultant detects the source or sources of the problem and outlines a plan of action, the authorities will initiate remedial action. This can continue for many months. "When Niko faced Tenggratila blowout in June 2005, it had started a remedial action from August and completed the main remedial task by October that year. But that is not going to happen with us," he added.

"We must have some legal framework to deal with an urgent

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Bhuiyan eyes 80pc support for reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Pro-reform leaders of the BNP believe that the councillors will overwhelmingly support the reform proposals while others say the initiative keeping Chairperson Khaleida Zia on the sidelines runs counter to the party constitution.

Exchanging views with the leaders from Rajshahi division

yesterday, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said they hope 80 percent of the councillors from across the country would side with them, a former lawmaker told The Daily Star after the meet at Bhuiyan's Gulshan residence.

Meanwhile, Standing Committee Member RA Goni yesterday said that only the

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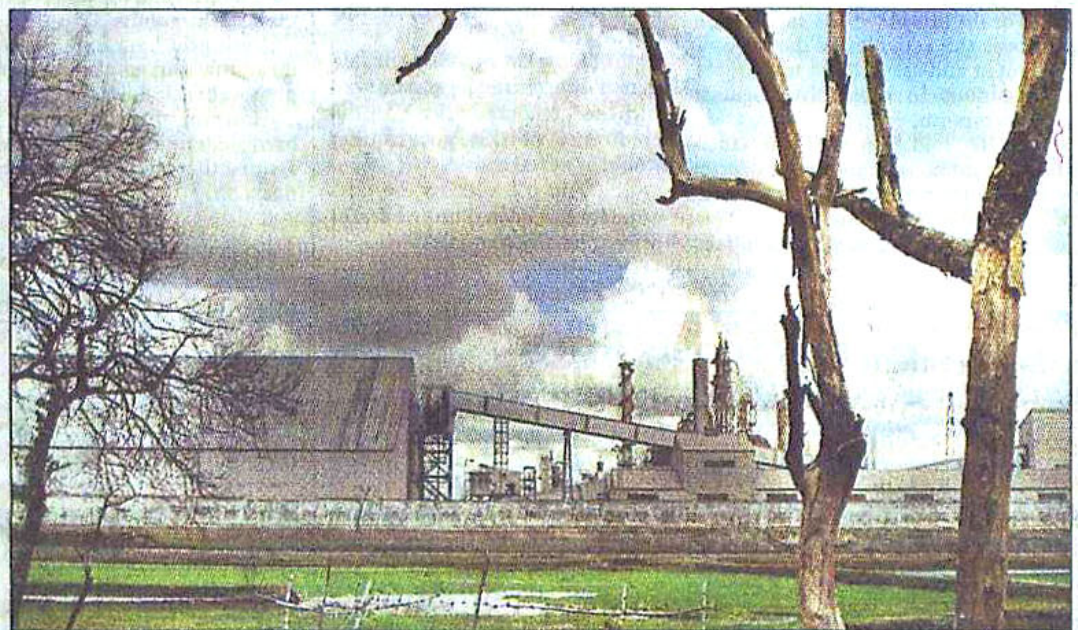
Shopping hours extended up to 8pm

UNB, Dhaka

Shops, shopping malls, markets and business establishments across the country will now remain open until 8:00pm.

The decision was taken yesterday at the weekly meeting of the Council of Advisers with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in the chair.

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Toxic ammonia released from Jamuna Fertiliser Factory in Sarishabari upazila of Jamalpur is leaving many trees in the adjoining areas dead over the years.

Fertiliser plant rains toxin on people

MIRZA SHAKIL, back from Tarakandi, Jamalpur

A large amount of toxic ammonia, highly soluble in water and released from the country's largest urea producing Jamuna Fertiliser Factory (JFF) at Tarakandi under Sarishabari upazila of Jamalpur district, has been wreaking havoc on the local environment causing debilitating illnesses among the residents of the area for the last 16 years.

The gas emitted by JFF has also been destroying the crops, livestock, poultry, and fishes of the area worth crores of taka every year.

The factory produces 1,700 tons of urea a day, for which it also produces ammonia as an input. Factory sources said since the

beginning of operation they have been producing an extra 300 tons of ammonia than required everyday, and that superfluous amount of toxic gas has been being released into the environment through the plant's exhaust system on a daily basis since 1991, when the factory started its operation.

The factory authorities did nothing to stop the environmental disaster despite continued protests from thousands of affected local people over the years.

Crops, trees, poultry, livestock, and fishes in adjacent Kandarpura, Tarakandi, Charpara, and Dhuriarbhita villages have been dying due to the emission of the toxic gas from the factory. Croplands of the area have become

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Suicide bomber kills 105 in Iraqi village

AFP, Kirkuk

A suicide truck bomber ripped the heart out of a northern Iraqi village yesterday, killing at least 105 people and demolishing dozens of homes and shops, police and medics said.

Ambulances and private cars ferried dozens of bloodied corpses and wounded civilians to clinics in the nearby town of Tuz Khurmatu and the provincial capital Kirkuk, where desperate relatives waited for news of the missing.

Officials were stunned by the scale of the blast, which devastated the main market in Emekli, a small rural community of people from Iraq's Shia Turkmen minority living in an area notorious for al-Qaeda militants.

"I heard the cries of my child, then I heard nothing else until I woke in hospital," sobbed middle-aged housewife Sukaina Abdul Razak, whose clay brick home collapsed when the blast ripped through the village.

"I don't know the fate of my husband and my family. They were all in the kitchen, but I was in my room," she told AFP, as she was treated for head injuries in Kirkuk's overcrowded emergency room.

Shrapnel from the blast killed shoppers hundreds of metres (yards) from its epicentre, wounded grocer Hussein Abu Al-Hussein Akbar Aziz said in Kirkuk.

"We have never seen an attack like that in Emekli. The whole village was shrouded in smoke and dust," he said, grimacing from a leg injury. "I was serving a woman and her child in my shop. They were both killed."

Lieutenant Colonel Saman Hamid, commander of the security coordination centre in nearby Tuz Khurmatu, told AFP: "105 Iraqis were killed and five are missing, we have registered their names. There are more than 250 wounded."

The casualty toll was confirmed by Dr Wissam Abdullah, director of the main local hospital, who said

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PROFOUND GRATITUDE

Bangladesh Finance And Investment Company Limited (BFIC) announces with great pleasure that the Public Issue of Shares of the Company, which was closed on 14th June, 2007 received tremendous public support and has been over subscribed by more than 31 times, about Tk. 220 crore against offer of Tk. 7.00 crore. The Board of Directors and the Management of BFIC take this opportunity to express their profound gratitude to the investors for their overwhelming support and confidence reposed on the Company. The Board of Directors and the Management also acknowledge with gratitude the co-operation extended to the Company by the Securities and Exchange Commission, Bangladesh Bank, Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and Firms, Dhaka Stock Exchange Limited, Chittagong Stock Exchange Limited, Manager to the Issue (Prime Finance & Investment Ltd.), Satcom IT Ltd., Underwriters and Bankers to the Issue and host of friends patrons and well wishers.

Suicide bomber kills 105 in Iraqi village

Nine more US soldiers die

AFP, Kirkuk

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