

Govt plans VGF programme for 29 dists

UNB, Dhaka

The government has planned to extend vulnerable group feeding (VGF) programme to another 29 districts soon in addition to 12 districts already under the scheme.

Under the programme, 10 kg of rice will be distributed free of cost to 29,81,500 VGF card holders every month till aman crop is harvested in December.

Food and Disaster Management Adviser Tapan Chowdhury and Agriculture Adviser CS Karim revealed the government plan at a joint press conference at the secretariat today.

The advisers gave a resumé of post-flood situation in the country and the measures taken to alleviate the miseries of the affected people.

They said a total of 1,33,720 tonnes of rice have been allocated to carry out the VGF programme.

According to the health

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200 Bangladeshi workers stranded at KL airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 200 Bangladeshi workers have been stranded, without money or food, in Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) -- some for a week, others for nearly three weeks.

After spending around Tk 2 to 2.5 lakh each for a job in Malaysia, the workers are now uncertain about their future.

Dr Mohammad Noor Ahmed, a public health specialist, during his six-hour transit stop-over at KLIA en route to Dhaka, came across the stranded Bangladeshis on August 31 evening in the KLIA arrival lounge.

"I could not quite understand why they [workers] were stranded. They said their local agents did not

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Wasa demolishes illegal structures on Hazaribagh canal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) demolished illegal structures on the Hazaribagh canal yesterday.

Over hundred workers conducted the demolition work following a drive led by magistrate Kazi Wasiuddin from 10:00am to 6:00pm.

"Wasa has demolished illegal structures from Palic Paint point to Ranga battery point covering an area of over one kilometre," said an inhabitant of Hazaribagh.

Some makeshift houses, parts of several five-storied buildings and boundary walls were demolished during the drive. Executive Engineer MA Abdul Hamid, among others, was present there.

Meanwhile, Rab member Anwar got involved in a scuffle with 15 workers over a trivial issue during lunchtime.

Later, Rab members came to the spot and picked up the workers.

Iran reaches uranium centrifuge goal

AP, AFP, Tehran/ Berlin

Iran has reached its long-sought goal of running 3,000 centrifuges to enrich uranium for its nuclear programme, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced yesterday, in a report on state media.

The UN Security Council had threatened a third round of sanctions against the country if it did not freeze the uranium enrichment programme which Iran maintains is for peaceful energy purposes, but the US says is to hide a weapons program.

"The West thought the Iranian nation would give in after just a resolution, but now we have taken another step in the nuclear progress and launched more than 3,000 centrifuge machines, installing a new cascade every week," the state television Web site quoted Ahmadinejad as saying.

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Divided opinions delay coal policy finalisation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The task of the new committee on finalising the coal policy is being delayed due to wide difference of opinions among its members over various issues, including the method of mining.

The committee headed by former vice chancellor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology Prof Abdul Matin Patwari sits today for a fresh meeting. But it is not yet clear when the committee would be able to complete its job, sources said.

The eight-member committee was formed as the sixth draft of a national coal policy drew a lot of criticism as being anti-investment and self-contradictory.

Formation of this committee was announced on June 21 through a circular with a one-month deadline

to complete its task. But its first meeting was held more than a month later because Patwari was on a tour abroad. The committee later inducted two more members.

Till date some of the dominant views that came up at the committee meetings are that a national coal exploration and mining body named "Coal Bangla" should be formed to spearhead mining, export of coal should be fully discouraged and coal policy should be a part of the national energy policy.

On Asia Energy's proposed Phulbari coal mine project, some speakers firmly opposed allowing open pit mining in the country. Some others however opposed the idea.

"Actually this committee should not have focussed on the method of mining. Its task is to address coal policy matters, and not the method

of mining. If that is a serious national issue, that should be left to a technical committee," said a member of the committee.

"Unfortunately some members and some invited persons who gave their opinions to the committee are viewing this policy as a tool to stop the Asia Energy deal. This is why the whole policy is suffering," he added.

"This policy is supposed to be a document that would guide the nation's activities in coal mining, and not just deal with one contract with Asia Energy," he pointed out.

Participants at the committee meetings also held the view that the draft coal policy was full of contradictions. In describing the country's coal resources, the policy even did not take into account Jamalganj that holds the biggest

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladeshi workers, stranded at Kuala Lumpur International Airport for weeks, are still waiting to enter the Malaysian capital.

Benazir return vow deepens Pak crisis

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's political crisis deepened yesterday after exiled former prime minister Benazir Bhutto vowed to return home having failed to reach a power-sharing deal with President Pervez Musharraf.

Key US ally Musharraf now faces the spectre of two ex-premiers flying home to challenge his shaky eight-year military regime, with Nawaz Sharif, the man he ousted in a 1999 coup, also pledging to come back.

The nuclear-armed Islamic republic has been wracked by instability ahead of an election due in September or October, in which Musharraf plans to make a hotly-opposed bid to win another five-year term as president-in-uniform.

Two-time premier Benazir said on Saturday that she was determined to end her self-imposed exile over corruption charges and would

announce the date of her return on September 14, four days after Sharif is set to fly home.

"No understanding has been arrived at and we are making our plans to return," Benazir told a press conference in London when asked about the week-long back-room negotiations with Musharraf.

"I plan to return to Pakistan in the next few weeks to work for a moderate, a democratic Pakistan," said Benazir, who has come under fire in her own Pakistan People's Party for dealing with a military ruler.

On Sunday, Benazir told the BBC the talks had stalled over the issue of parliamentary powers. She had demanded that Musharraf relinquish his power to dissolve parliament.

"I'm trying to get a parliament that is sovereign, that can tackle the issues of militancy and poverty that are at the moment the main trouble spots for Pakistan," she said.

"I don't want to see chaos and anarchy and bloodshed," she added.

"I want to help the people of Pakistan have a peaceful, transitive way towards democracy, and that's why we had this dialogue."

Musharraf has sent his aides back to London in a frantic bid to rescue the deal with Benazir, who served as prime minister from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1993 to 1996, sources here said.

The United States and Britain have reportedly been pushing behind the scenes for the pact, seeing the Oxford-educated Benazir as a natural ally for the relatively moderate Musharraf.

The talks ran into trouble after the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Party opposed her demands that Musharraf shed his uniform before reelection, cede his powers to

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PHOTO: STAR

Jute plants are being dried for use as fuel in Sariakandi upazila of Bogra. The recent floods badly damaged jute and other crops in the district.



PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority demolishes the part of the building that had illegally extended to a dried up canal at Hazaribagh in the capital yesterday.

Polls to be held as per schedule

Says Naval chief

BSS, Bhola

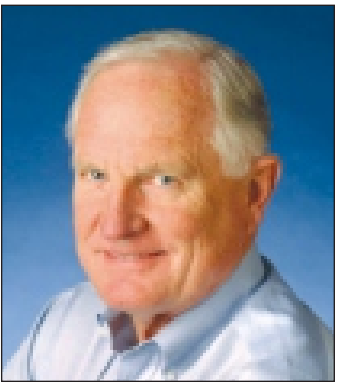
Chief of Naval Staff Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam yesterday said the next national election would be held as per the announced schedule.

"The work of preparing the voter list is going on in full swing," he told journalists while visiting a dam, repaired by the members of the Navy and local people.

Referring to the joint effort of navy and local people in repairing the damaged dam, he said integrated and collective efforts would bring success in every sphere.

The Naval chief said 16 contingents of Bangladesh Navy are working at 16 coastal upazilas to stamp out terrorism and smuggling. Members of the Navy arrested

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Intel chief due today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chairman of US-based computer firm Intel Corporation Craig R Barrett will arrive in Dhaka tomorrow in his first visit to Bangladesh.

Barrett will meet the government officials, academics and industry people during the visit.

Barrett, a Fulbright fellow, is also the chairman of the United Nation's Global Alliance for Information and Communication Technologies.

He is also an appointee to the US President's Advisory Committee on Trade Policy and Negotiations and the American Health Information Community, according to a press release.

Barrett was made Intel's chief executive officer in 1998 and the chairman in May 2005.

He studied at Stanford University and joined Intel Corporation as a technology development manager in 1974.

Intel is the world leader in silicon innovation and develops technologies and products related to computing.

Iraq PM hits back at his critics

AP, Tehran

Iraq's beleaguered prime minister accused his American critics yesterday of underestimating how hard it is to rebuild his country and failing to appreciate his government's achievements "such as stopping the civil and sectarian war."

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said told reporters that some of the criticism from Washington sends "signals to terrorists luring them into thinking that the security

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Barkatullah Bulu, wife sued for Tk 1.15cr extortion

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The owner of a construction firm yesterday filed a criminal case against them with the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Dhaka, for committing the offences.

Two others are Kamal Hossain Barkat and Mohammad Mohsin.

Upon hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahel Baqui directed the officer-in-charge of Mirpur Police Station to take necessary action against the accused on an investigation into the matter.

In his complaint, Mojibar mentioned that he entered into a contract with the accused for constructing two basements of Capital Tower Private Ltd on Darus Salam

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Lebanese army kills 28 militants

AP, Beirut

Lebanese troops killed 28 al-Qaeda-inspired militants and captured 15 others in a massive gunfight yesterday after they broke out of a northern Palestinian refugee camp devastated by over three months of fighting, a senior security official said.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because no official casualty figure was released.

Heavy gunbattles that began during the dawn breakout contin-

ued through early afternoon, with troops engaging Fatah Islam fighters in buildings, fields and roads around Nahr el-Bared camp, residents and television stations reported.

In a statement, the military said troops were attacking the remaining militant strongholds inside Nahr el-Bared and "chasing the fugitives outside the camp" who had staged "a desperate attempt to flee."

It called on Lebanese citizens to

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EC to provide €2.5m as flood aid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The European Commission will provide €2.5 million in emergency aid for the flood-affected people in Bangladesh.

The emergency relief targets 4.69 lakh people in 15 districts focusing on the distribution of food items, providing drinking water, emergency shelter and healthcare to prevent water-borne diseases, says an EC press release.

The fund, channelled through the European Commission's humanitarian aid department ECHO, will also help the flood-affected people in the recovery of livelihood, water supply, housing, and sanitation facilities.

The ECHO has finalised contractual agreements with six partners -- ActionAid, CARE International, Concern Worldwide, Handicap International, IFRC and Islamic Relief. The projects, launched last month, will run for six months.

Stefan Frowein, head of the EC delegation in Bangladesh, said, "This humanitarian aid serves as a vital complement to the €8 million which the European Commission has furnished for the UNDP-coordinated Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme, which is designed to strengthen disaster preparedness in Bangladesh."

BNP won't sit for talks if ban exists

Says Hannan Shah

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Brig Gen (ret'd) Hannan Shah, adviser to BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, yesterday reiterated that his party would not participate in dialogue on electoral reforms with the election commission (EC) if the ban on indoor politics is not lifted.

"It is unfortunate that party chief Khaleda Zia could not take part in the programmes marking the 29th founding anniversary of the party," he said while talking to the journalists at Gazipur press club.

He said no indication of implementing the roadmap, announced by the EC to hold the election by December 2008, could be seen through the government activities.

He urged the pro-reform party leaders to change themselves and then take forward the party under the leadership of Khaleda Zia.

Prayer Timing		
September 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-05
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-23	6-26
Esha	7-45	8-15
Source: Islamic Foundation		