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Janakantha editor cleared of fraud charges

UNB, Dhaka

The editor of the daily Janakantha, Atiqullah Khan Masud, was cleared of fraud charges yesterday after he settled the dispute out of court.

Masud, however, is unlikely to get released from prison as he faces some other criminal cases.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shah Alam Sardar acquitted Masud, also the chairman of Globe Constructions Ltd, after the complainant, Rebecka Mahmud, told

Acid thrown on woman, her 2 kids

OUR CORRESPONDENT, B'baria

A woman and her two children received burn injuries yesterday as miscreants threw acid on them at Dhamandal village of Nasiragar upazila.

The victims are Hamima Khatun, 35, wife of Billal Mia, and her sons Roni, 3, and Bipo.

Their family members said miscreants led by Bakul, Kaosar and Khasru threw acid on them at

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Benazir returns home today

Vows to bring democracy in Pakistan

AFP, Dubai

Former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto vowed yesterday to bring democracy to her country as she prepared to return home after eight years of self-imposed exile.

Despite government pressure to delay her homecoming, Bhutto told reporters in Dubai that she would be flying to her powerbase in the southern port city of Karachi on Thursday as planned.

"Yes, I am going," said the former two-time premier. "As I prepare to leave... I pray to God... to bring democracy to my country... and fulfill the aspirations of the people of my country."

"I am a people's leader... I gave my word to the people of Pakistan. Nothing is more important to me than my word," Bhutto said, explaining why she would not postpone her return.

"Once I gave a date I have to honour it."

Her comments came as Pakistan's top court adjourned hearings on the legality of President Pervez Musharraf's landslide election win earlier this month so the chief justice can consider forming a full bench for the high-profile case.

Bhutto's planned return follows a deal cut with Musharraf that paves the way for power-sharing with the military ruler who seized power in a 1999 coup.

Musharraf, a key US ally in the "war on terror," cannot officially be declared the winner of the October 6 vote in parliament until the increasingly independent court has ruled.

Musharraf has vowed to quit the military by November 15 if he is officially re-elected for another five years.

But he has not ruled out dissolving parliament -- or even imposing martial law -- if he is blocked.

The legal challenges also argue

that Musharraf should have been chosen by a new parliament that is due to be elected in January.

Bhutto's planned return is timed so she can lead her party in that vote.

The 54-year-old sealed an amnesty deal with Musharraf earlier in the month covering the corruption charges that had driven her into exile.

The amnesty is regarded as a prelude to a power-sharing deal with Musharraf, one the United States is especially keen to support as a bulwark against Taliban and al-Qaeda extremism in Pakistan's tribal areas on the Afghan border.

But the government has also warned Bhutto that she could face graft charges again if the court overturns the accord.

An aide to Bhutto had earlier told AFP that she would not delay her homecoming under any circumstances.

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Different areas in Chittagong including Agrabad and Shantibagh are still under water as heavy downpour inundated most parts of the port city recently.

Mahasaptami today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hindu devotees are all set to invoke Goddess Durga, daughter of the majestic Himalayas, with the Mahasaptami puja at some 20,000 puja mandaps across the country today.

Mahasaptami, an important day of Durga Puja, is the celebration of Durga's victory over Mahishashur, the demon. The victory symbolises the triumph of good over evil.

On this day, the devotees recite hymns and offer flowers -- seeking blessings of Durga the Durgatashini, the saviour of humankind from all evils.

According to the lunar schedule, Mahasaptami puja will have to begin by 9:57am today. The five-day-long Durga puja, the largest festivities of Hindus in the country, began yesterday with Mahashashthi puja.

Devotees attended the

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PHOTO: STAR

A devotee prays before the idol of Goddess Durga at Shakhribazar in the capital yesterday as Mahashashthi marked the beginning of Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindus.

GATCO CASE

ACC wants ex-officials' addresses for quizzing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-corruption Commission (ACC) has asked the establishment ministry to provide its investigators with addresses of some retired government officials for questioning in connection with the Gatco graft case.

Meanwhile, the ACC investigators probing the Gatco (Global Agro Trade Pvt Co Ltd) scam yesterday

questioned an official of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA). In Dhaka, its investigators seized various bank documents, records and cheques as evidence of the scam from Sonali Bank's local office located at Motijheel.

The corruption watchdog on Tuesday in a letter to the establishment ministry asked it to provide the ACC investigators with addresses of the retired govern-

ment officials after the investigators were unable to question a number of government officials of the then prime minister's office (PMO) and planning ministry due to unavailability of addresses of the officials.

Former principal secretary to the PMO Kamal Siddiqui, former director of planning ministry Talebor Rahman and a former

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Fast track court to try 'malam party' case

BSS, Dhaka

Cases filed against members of 'malam party' will be shifted to the speedy trial tribunals.

Home Secretary Abdul Karim yesterday gave the directive to the Inspector General of Police.

According to the home secretary, a total of 127 cases have been filed against members of 'malam party', and charge sheets have been submitted in seven cases.

He said the miscreants of the gang have so far killed 10 people since January. Arrest warrants have been issued against many of them and some of them have been arrested already.

Asian journos face coups, wars, military regimes

Survey says

AFP, Hong Kong

A new survey says many journalists playing their craft in Asia must cope with war, coups and repressive regimes to report the news, making the region one of the toughest for reporters to work in.

Out of 169 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, seven Asian nations -- Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Vietnam, China, Myanmar and North Korea -- were in the bottom 20.

Altogether, 20 Asian countries were in the bottom half of the poll compiled by the Paris-based campaigning group, Reporters Without Borders, and eight in the top half.

"We are particularly disturbed by the situation in Burma," the organisation said, using the former name for Myanmar whose junta violently suppressed mass protests last month.

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PHOTO: STAR

Employees of Hitachi Electronics at Bangabandhu Stadium Market in the city browse through the charred equipment after a fire gutted goods worth around Tk 50 lakh yesterday.

Poor response to open sky policy

Airlines blame short-term offer

PORIMOL PALMA and RASHIDUL HASAN

Response to the three-month open sky policy has been poor so far as different airline authorities have said the short-term policy would not be commercially viable for them.

Talking to The Daily Star, officials of Ethad Airways, Emirates, Saudi Arabia Airlines, Air Arabia, Malaysian Airlines and local GMA Airlines preferred a permanent open sky policy saying it is difficult to charter an aircraft for short time.

The officials said they are not able to operate more flights from Bangladesh only for three months as they cannot cancel flights, which are scheduled to operate on different routes during the period.

"Leasing an aircraft is also not possible because of the short period... there is also aircraft crisis globally," country manager of an airline operating on Dhaka-Dubai route, told The Daily Star.

He said his airline might consider adding an aircraft if the government declares a permanent open sky policy.

The policy, which has been

effectuated from October 1, allows the designated airlines to operate more flights from Zia International Airport in Dhaka, Shah Amanat International Airport in Chittagong and Osmani Airport in Sylhet, was declared to reduce passengers' pressures.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh chief Sakeb Khan Majlish said Oman Airlines and Air Arabia have already received permission to operate two more flights a week from Chittagong to Sharjah in the UAE apart from existing five flights.

"We may start operating two more flights from mid-November," said an official of Air Arabia, which are waiting for permission to operate 21 flights per week from Dhaka.

Malaysian private airline Air Asia has also got permission to operate five flights a week from Chittagong to Kuala Lumpur though it has not started its operation yet.

An official of Emirates said they are conducting some extra flights and have upgraded their existing flights to accommodate more passengers.

Kabirul Anam Khan, manager

(sales) of Malaysian Airlines, said they will add five more flights a week with its existing seven flights on Dhaka-Kuala Lumpur route from the end of October. This is however not linked with the open sky policy as the Malaysian airline got the permission before declaration of the policy.

According to Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training, over 1.5 lakh workers are ready to fly to Malaysia, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, and their visas will be expired if they fail to arrive in their workplaces within three months.

Officials of different airlines believe passengers' pressures will increase during Hajj and once the expatriate Bangladeshis start coming back to Bangladesh to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha.

"The government must take pragmatic decisions to ease the pressure and ensure that the workers do not lose their jobs," said an official of Emirates preferring anonymity.

Sheikh Altaf Ali, acting secretary of the civil aviation and tourism ministry, said the open sky policy

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CAMPUS VIOLENCE Witness against RU teachers declared hostile

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A prosecution witness (PW) of the case against six Rajshahi University (RU) teachers for violating Emergency Power Rules (EPR) was declared "hostile" at a Rajshahi court yesterday.

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Charge sheet soon on Aug 21 grenade attack

Says IGP

UNB, Dhaka

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad yesterday said the charge-sheet in the case of August 21 grenade attack on Awami League rally will be submitted soon.

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Prayer Timing		
October 18		
Fajr	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-50	5-25
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-38	5-41
Esha	7-15	7-45
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Somali gunmen storm UN base

AFP, Mogadishu

Government forces stormed the United Nations compound in Mogadishu yesterday and detained the World Food Programme's (WFP) top representative in the capital.

"About 30 Somali government forces in two military trucks and armed with machine guns have raided the UN headquarters, forcefully entered the offices and arrested Idris Mohamed Osman," said a UN official, who declined to be identified.

"They took him to the presidential palace area and we do not know why they have arrested him," he said. The forces had left the UN compound in southern Mogadishu, headed.

The WFP spokesman in the Kenyan capital confirmed the incident, which came hours after Somali forces battled insurgents in overnight artillery duels that left four civilians dead and at least 34 others wounded.

"Mr. Idris Osman, officer in charge of WFP Mogadishu, was detained this morning and we are urgently taking up the matter with the authorities," spokesman Peter Smerdon told AFP in Nairobi.

Government officials could not be immediately reached for comment.

Violence in Somalia has forced

many humanitarian groups to quit the country, leaving UN agencies and a few others who rely on local staff to run limited operations.

Overnight fighting on Tuesday saw rival sides pound each other with heavy artillery mainly in southern Mogadishu but also touching northern areas.

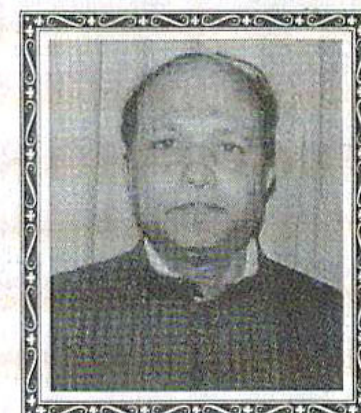
The clashes broke a week-long lull in Mogadishu battles between Ethiopian-backed government forces and insurgents allied to an Islamist movement ousted from the country's southern and central regions at the beginning of the year.

Since then, insurgents have carried out a string of guerrilla attacks, mainly in Mogadishu, targeting government officials, Ethiopian troops and African Union peacekeepers deployed to bolster the government.

The attacks, as well as inter-clan feuds, have displaced hundreds of thousands from the sea-side capital, with most sheltering in squalid settlements in neighbouring regions, lacking in basic supplies.

The Horn of Africa nation, home to about 10 million people, has been torn apart by conflict since the 1991 ouster of dictator Mohamed Siad Barre set off a bloody power struggle that has defied numerous internationally-backed peace initiatives.

12th Death anniversary of Late Alhaj Jahurul Islam



For commemorate the 12th death anniversary of Alhaj Jahurul Islam, the founder of Islam Group, there will be Milad & Doa Mahfil separately at the mosque at Jahurul Islam Medical College Campus, his Agro Based Business unit and different educational institutions at his birth place, Bhagalpur, Bajitpur, Kishoregonj at 11.30 A.M. on October 19, 2007 (Friday).

All the relatives, friends and well wishers are requested to make it convenient to attend the Mahfil to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

For and on behalf of Family Members and Islam Group.

Manzurul Islam
Chairman