## Italian PM Prodi Tk 1.4 cr Saudi quits after losing Senate vote

AFP, Rome

Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi resigned on Thursday following 20 rocky months in office after the centre-left leader lost a vote of confidence in the Senate.

President Giorgio Napolitano asked Prodi to continue in office as the head of state holds consultations with political leaders, beginning Friday afternoon with the speakers of the Senate and the lower house Chamber of Deputies, the presi-

dent's office said in a statement. Prodi, 68, crippled by the defection this week of the centrist Catholic UDEUR party, had decided to go ahead with the Senate showdown despite appeals from top leaders, including Napolitano, to resign instead.

The mild-mannered former economics professor appeared resigned to the near certainty that he would lose the vote but determined to carry throughwithit on principle.

"I am here because you cannot hide from the judgement of those who represent the people, and our

people are watching us," he said beforehand.

Despite a last-minute change of heart by one of UDEUR's three senators and the support of five of Italy's unelected senators for life including 98-year-old Rita Levi-Montalcini, Prodi fell five votes short in the upper

Predicting that Prodi would "go for broke" in the Senate, the daily Corriere della Sera had said Thursday: "We have all the ingredients of a political suicide broadcast

Tension ahead of the vote spilled over into open acrimony and high drama when UDEUR member Nuccio Cusumano announced to the chamber that he had changed his mind and would vote for Prodi.

UDEUR's Senate group leader Tommaso Barbato, beside himself with rage, hurled insults at Cusumano, who broke down in tears and was carried out of the chamber on a stretcher.

The president, following consultations with party and parliamentary leaders, can either call early elections or set up a transitional government.

under a tight security net for the WEF

conference. The participants, who-

ever they may be, have to show ID

badge whenever they encounter

police around the Congress Centre,

centre, the state premiers, ministers,

economists and journalists -- all

government are here this time. But

few people care about global leaders

walking by them. Cherry Blair, wife of

former British prime minister Tony

Blair, posed for a photograph with-

out having to handle the hassles of

uled to take place over the five days of

conference being attended by more

than 2,500 participants. Except some

special invitees, most of the dele-

gates, the businessmen in particular,

One hundred sessions are sched-

But as long as they are inside the

Twenty-nine heads of state or

the main venue.

could move with ease.

attending the meet.

Sharon Stone the year before.

giant" for its faltering economy.

Intelligence

officer among

A senior intelligence officer investi-

gating killings largely blamed on

Syria was slain along with three

other people in a car bombing in the

Lebanese capital yesterday, security

ber of the Internal Security Forces

(ISF), and his bodyguard were

among those killed, a security offi-

cial told AFP. He said 38 other people

were wounded, with nine taken to

and was involved in many investiga-

tions concerning bombings in

Lebanon," the official said. "He was

involved in sensitive probes and this

February 2006 narrowly escaped

another attempt on his life when

someone threw a grenade in front of

Many of the bombings over the

past three years have been blamed

by Lebanon's Western-backed

parliamentary majority on neigh-

bouring Syria, a charge denied by

ISF and who was at the site of the

blast in a Christian suburb of Beirut,

said the car bomb was yet another

attempt at destabilizing the country

crisis since the 1975-1990 civil war.

Nizami, Mojahid

Police Station told UNB that the

case was registered following the

court order (Case No 60). Sub-

inspector Hamidur Rahman has

been made investigation officer of

tion report (FIR), Amir Hossain

Mollah alleged that Jamaat leaders

According to the first informa-

Six other accused are former

general secretary of Islami Chhatra

Sangha Mir Abul Kashem, former

president of Islami Chhatra Sangha

Sarder Abdus Salam, late Khwaja

as it grapples with its worst political

General Ashraf Rifi, head of the

The official added that Eid had in

is a major loss for us."

his Beirut home.

Damascus.

FROM PAGE 16

the case.

Pakistan.

"Eid was a key member of the ISF

Captain Wissam Eid, 31, a mem-

four killed in

Beirut blast

AFP, Beirut

officials said

### Leaders worried

and Europe has become a matter of concern for all

Besides heads of government and ministers, bankers, economists and businessmen take part in the conference. In fact, they dominate the assembly and so do economic affairs.

Nobel Laureate and former US vice-president Al Gore and Irish rock star Bono however offered the audience a different taste by bringing up the issue of global climate change.

Gore said, "The countries are not taking appropriate measures to face the challenges of climate change and as a result, the situation is worsening."

Coming down hard on the rich countries. U2 frontman Bono said the G-8 countries are not making good on their pledges to support the developing world.

On the second day of the conference, Microsoft Corporation Chairman Bill Gates called for establishing "creative capitalism," saying "the world is getting better, but it's not getting better fast enough, and it's not getting better for everyone"

He observed, "There are roughly a billion people in the world who don't get enough food, who don't have clean drinking water, who don't have electricity, the things that we take for

granted. Diseases like malaria that kill over a million people a year get far less attention than drugs to help with

Gates called on the chief executives of the major commercial institutions to spend some of their talent,

segments of society. Though President Pervez Musharraf hogged the limelight on the second day, economy returned to centre stage on the third day. There is

efforts and resources on the poorer

however hardly any issue left out of theWEF agenda. People from all walks of life come here, but not everyone stays for all five days. For example, the US foreign minister left as soon as her speech

was over on the inaugural day. Chief Adviser of Bangladesh Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed was also scheduled to leave yesterday.

The entire Davos has been placed

### ljtema

FROM PAGE 1

damaged in the rain forcing the pilgrims to collect more mats, while many of them collected polythene as an alternative since they were more cost effective. Some pilgrims were seen collecting sand from adjacent areas to spread over the muddy ground.

Most of the pilgrims could not reach their specific zones of stay on the ground due to stagnated water on the ground and muddy soil.

Many elderly pilgrims had to take shelter in various mosques and other places adjacent to the ijtema ground.

Kakrail Mosque Khatib also Sura Committee Member of Tablig Jamaat Moulana Zobayer led the jum'a prayer.

Not finding any space on the ijtema ground to pray, many were seen offering the jum'a prayer on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway. Traffic on Dhaka-Mymensingh and Dhaka-Gazipur highways were brought to a grinding halt for an hour during the

According to official sources, 5,636 foreign Muslims from 56 countries joined the event till 4.00pm yesterday, 1,949 of whom spoke Arabic, 2,200 spoke Urdu and Hindi, 1,430 spoke English, and 57 spoke Chinese. Sermons of Muslim scholars were

translated into 16 languages. The foreign pilgrims were staying in two camps designated for them at the northern end of the ijtema ground. Sources said more foreign pilgrims

were on their way. Many women and elderly pilgrims were also participating in the literna staying with their relatives in Tongi and

Motiur Rahman Nizami, Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojahid, Quader Uttara. Mollah, Quamruzzaman and six Meanwhile, law enforcers arrested others had killed 100-150 people at 75 pickpockets yesterday and on Alabdigram behind the Botanical

Thursday from the ijtema ground. Garden on April 4, 1971. About 12,000 security personnel

from police, Rab, Bangladesh Rifles

(BDR), Armed Police Battalion (APBn),

and Ansar were deployed to ensure security. A few hundred members of various Wasimuddin and three nonintelligence agencies, Bomb disposal Bengalees -- Akhter Goonda, Newaj units from the army and Rab, and and Doma -who later fled to several mobile courts were also in operation there.

# seized at ZIA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs authorities at Zia International Airport (ZIA) seized 8.10 lakh Saudi riyal worth about Tk 1.40 crore from two Singapore bound passengers on Thursday night.

They also arrested the two passengers, Mukul Hasan and Omar Faruk, in this connection.

Customs sources said they found the currencies hidden in two clay pots, which they kept inside their luggage.

Two separate cases were filed yesterday with Airport Police Station under Special Powers Act and Money Laundering Act.

#### Bali meet

FROM PAGE 16 culture of corruption with an envi-

ronment of integrity." A key item on the meeting's agenda will be to create a means to

review the treaty's implementation. "The UN anti-corruption convention provides benchmarks to plug holes in domestic legislation and strengthen national capacity to fight corruption," added the UNODO

the convention. "An effective review mechanism will ensure that this powerful piece of international law lives up to its potential."

official whose office is custodian of

To promote a greater engagement of the civil society in the fight against corruption, a number of special events will take place in Bali.

One of such events will gather one senior journalist from each of the least developed countries (LDCs) that have ratified the convention. Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Djibouti, Guinea Bissau, Haiti, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, the Maldives, Mauritania, Rwanda, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania and Yemen are among the

Renowned journalists, who have devoted their careers to reporting on corruption, will participate in a peerto-peer media forum during the conference.

The goal of the media forum is to provide an international stage for the media from developed and developing countries to unite and lend each other support on an issue of global

have to contribute a hefty sum for Of the other special events, the launch of UNDP Asia-Pacific Human British actress Emma Thompson Development Report on Corruption, has been invited to this year's conferand Human Development and ence to add glamour. Last year it was Artists for Integrity will take place on Hollywood actress Angelina Jolie and January 28, ministerial roundtable on Asset Recovery and Forum for The US, which usually plays the Non-Governmental Organisations central role in the conference, this on January 29, Business Coalition: time, has been dubbed a "wounded The UN Convention against Corruption as a New Market Force on January 30, and Peer-to-Peer Media Forum: Covering Corruption with

#### Discussion

Integrity on January 31

FROM PAGE 16 development to improve the status of the poor to fight against terrorism and extremism.

Fakhruddin said a quiet social change in Bangladesh is underway to ensure economic stability through micro-credit and non-formal educa

Ensuring safe and fair holding of the February 18 parliamentary elections in Pakistan, Musharraf said international audiences should not judge Pakistan's political system by

inapplicable standards. The session began with an expression of partnership and cooperation in resolving instability as Musharraf and Karzai shook hands on stage.

Musharraf said, "The election must be fair, free and transparent. And I have added a new word--we will make sure they will be peaceful.

Asked later about last year's dismissal of the chief justice of Pakistan Supreme Judicial Court--the entity that would also resolve any questions about election fraud--Musharraf urged his audience not to impose on Pakistan "misperceived ideas of human rights or Western views of human rights"

He said, "Please look at Pakistan from Pakistan's eyes and not from anybody else's eyes. We also believe in [these ideals] but give us some time." He pointed to a number of regulations his government instituted to ensure fairness in elections.

Musharraf and the other leaders stressed the importance of economic development in reducing extremism and fostering democracy.

Regarding security in Iraq, Barham Salih referred to the positive developments in Anbar province, saying, can say, may be for the first time, Iraq is on the road to winning.

### CA: Help Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1

"Bangladesh is importing rice from India, a natural supplier of the country," he said, appreciating the Indian government for allowing Bangladesh to import a fair quantity of rice. He said the process of importing the rice from India is going to be finalised.

He said beyond the Safta, India has agreed to import eight million pieces of garments from Bangladesh. Fakhruddin hoped that some more Bangladeshi goods would have access to the Indian | Mobarak. market without any impediments.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Dr Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, Ambassador Debapriya Bhattacharya and chief Resources Planning Organisation adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim were present at the press conference.

return home today.

## Chilly wind, drizzles

FROM PAGE 1

The lowest temperature in the country yesterday -- 12 degrees Celsiuswas recorded at Dinajpur. In Dhaka, the lowest temperature was 15.3

Dhaka, Khulna, Barisal, Jessore, Patuakhali and many other areas of the country experienced rainfall, the Met office said. In the capital, difference of mini-

mum and maximum temperature was only 2.4 degrees Celsius causing the biting cold. People living in the open were seen

covering themselves and their belongings with polythene sheets. Price of many items in kitchen markets further shot up yesterday as

supplywas disrupted. Our correspondents in Rajshahi, Rangpur and Bogra report: A cold wave swept the districts for the last

three days, coupled with drizzles. Hundreds of people living on streets, river embankments and open spaces suffered the most.

The district administration of Rangpur sought 20,000 pieces of blankets and equal numbers of sweaters, jackets and children's clothes for distribution among distressed peo-

Our correspondents in southern districts reported that severe cold and rains affected economic and other activities in the entire region yester-

Met office sources said the highest and the lowest temperatures in the region on the day were almost the

A BSS report from Barisal quoting Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital sources said cold-related diseases are spreading among the children and elderly people in the city.

About 800 children and 600 aged people were already treated at the hospital

Our Khulna correspondent reports: Suffering of Sidr-hit homeless people in Bagerhat district further worsened owing to drizzles and severe cold. They are badly in need of warm clothes.

Our Magura correspondent says the cold wave has made lives of people, specially the poor and homeless

Official sources said cold-related diseases are spreading. Patients suffering from bronchitis and asthma are crowding the Sadar Hospital in the district town.

Our Nilphamari correspondent reported that an increasing number of children are being attacked mainly with pneumonia and other respiratory diseases as a cold wave persists. At the 100-bed Sadar Hospital in the district town, the children's ward with 12 beds have about four times the number of such patients. Besides, 100 children are being treated at the outdoor every day.

### Over 400 crows die

town died in last consecutive two days. Locals and district livestock officials said the birds died in Puran Bazar of town. Two dead birds were sent to Barisal and Dhaka on Tuesday to ascertain the cause of death. On Thursday evening lab reports revealed that the crows died of bird

Meanwhile, 4,716 chickens, ducks and pigeons have been culled at farms in and around Rajbari of Dinajpur town after bird flu was detected in the area.

Sources said the culling started Thursday night and went on till vesterday afternoon.

District Livestock Officer AKM Nurzzamal said 2,000 birds were culled in the town's Rajbari, Katapara and Rajarampur area after bird flu was confirmed at three farms on January 19. Birds in seven other farms were later infected with the

Mentioning that there is no need to panic, he said the authorities concerned have decided to use megaphones to make people aware of the disease. There has also been strong monitoring of the border with India so that no birds are brought into the country as there is a bird flu outbreak in North Shiliguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Cochbihar districts of West Bengal in

District administration of Patuakhali and Barguna yesterday declared their districts as bird flu affected area.

Patuakhali authorities culled about 3,000 domestic birds in the townThursdaynightwhile over 4,000 domestic birds were culled in Barguna three days ago.

They also declared a three-month ban on trading of such birds in the districts.

Abu Taher, Patuakhali district livestock officer yesterday said at least 2,640 domestic birds were culled with the help of police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), and army personnel. They also destroyed 1,155

The culling took place at farms and houses in Nutan Bazar, Chawk Bazar, Puran Bazar, Katpatti, College Road areas and they were buried near Lawkathi of the Sadar upazila.

In Barguna at least 4,074 domestic birds were culled with the help of police, Rab, and army personnel Wednesday night as bird flu was identified there.

Authorities concerned in both the districts already started awareness programmes including distributing leaflets and using loudspeakers to inform people about the disease.

In a press release Thursday FAO Chief Veterinary Officer Joseph Domenech said, "The H5N1 [a strain of avian influenza] avian influenza crisis is far from over and remains particularly worrying in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Egypt, where the virus has become deeply entrenched despite major control efforts."

He said countries should continue to keep a close eye on the evolving situation. "The virus has not become more contagious to humans but has managed to persist in parts of Asia, Africa and probably Europe. It could still trigger a human influenza pandemic," he warned.

He said India is struggling to keep the worst-ever avian influenza outbreak in West Bengal under control. Indonesia remains one of the worst affected countries with 31 out of 33 provinces infected since 2004, many heavily. The continuing number of human cases gives cause for con-

In Bangladesh, 21 out of 64 districts have been infected with H5N1 and the situation seems to be worsening. The disease appears to be endemic in the country Surveillance and control campaigns have so far not succeeded in interrupting virus transmission between provinces. FAO is strengthening its presence in Bangladesh to support the government in its efforts to bring the disease under control, the press release said.

#### Allahr Dal

FROM PAGE 16

the district and sessions judge's court in November. Sources said some of them have resumed their activities.

Sources in Meherpur and Chuadanga said Islamist militants are regrouping in the two districts and urging people to join them for establishing 'rule of Islam' in the

bility study on engineering plan-

ning, environmental impacts and

tions in 2005, the erstwhile govern-

ment took initiatives to appoint

consultants for the study, and even

signed a contract with a company,

but the work order is yet to be

awarded to the company. The

government even opened an office

for 'Feasibility of Ganges Barrage

Project', but the whole office with

its staff has been sitting idle for

years, as there has been no work for

staff. But we will need more staff

once we start working," Engineer

Abdul Matin Bhuiyan, the director

western part of the country, which

is 37 percent of the total land area

and depended on the Ganges river

Now the people of the south-

of the project, said yesterday.

'Right now we don't have many

Following Warpo recommenda-

## Ganges project

idea of excavating any new canal, rather using the rivers and the system of canals that exist already.

It would help to improve the current situation of the people and the environment as it would increase fish production and irrigation, and would also improve navigability of the rivers, he said.

"Appropriate use of water from Ganges Barrage would increase sweet water flow in the rivers and canals of the Sundarbans, saving a portion of it," he added.

During a recent visit to the Sundarbans, rivers and small canals were found heavily silted with no big boat being able to navigate through them during low tides, not even through bigger rivers like the Gorai and Madhumati.

Md Mobarak Hossain, an engine boat owner from the Sundarbans, said he cannot navigate through the rivers and canals there even with his small country boat during low tides. "The situation is the same at

Jamtala, Boyar khal, Kotka, Kochikhali, and Nilkamal -- almost everywhere. During low tides we cannot navigate through small canals but the situation was not like this just five years ago," said Sources in Water Development

Ganges Barrage and made recom-

system, are suffering severely from salinity in the rivers, as they are heavily silted. The sufferings of the people have been on since the Indian government built Farakka Barrage in 1975, reducing water flow in the Ganga river system. Dr Azizur Rahman, a water resources expert now working with

Development Design Consultants Ltd, said if Ganges Barrage is built, the increased water flow would Board said following the water wash out the silts from the river treaty with India in 1996, Water bed. Besides, under the project, rivers and canals would also be (Warpo) did a preliminary study on dredged, resulting in reduction of the inundation problem in the mendations to the government. south-western region including The Chief Adviser is expected to Before starting construction, the the areas around Bhabadaha and government intended to do a feasi- Beel Dakatia.

TALKS WITH CA

### **Dutch PM** offers water management expertise

UNB, Davos, Switzerland

The Netherlands yesterday offered its expertise in water management in Bangladesh as Dutch Prime Minister Jan Peter Balkenende held bilateral talks with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum's (WEF) meeting.

the Dutch prime minister told journalists after the meeting with the chief adviser at the Congress Centre, the venue of the WEF meet-

"We've had a fruitful meeting,

Offering condolence to the victims of Cyclone Sidr, he said the Netherlands expresses solidarity with Bangladesh.

He said they discussed political situation, elections, human rights and the fight against corruption in Bangladesh.

The Dutch prime minister welcomed the roadmap for holding the elections in Bangladesh. The Dutch premier also recalled

his meeting with the chief adviser on the sidelines of UNGA session in New York in September last. The chief adviser told the reporters that he has explained his

government's reforms, prepara

tions for the elections and other

activities, which the Dutch prime

minister has appreciated. Mittal Group Chairman LN Mittal had an informal interaction with the chief adviser at the centre.

#### Former BNP MP sued for illegal sand lifting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former BNP lawmaker Fazlul Hug Milon has been sued for lifting sand illegally from the shoals of the Shitalakkhya.

Md Shamsuddin, assistant land

officer of Kaliganj Land Office, filed the case with Kaliganj Police Station yesterday. Six leaders of BNP, Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal and Chhatra Dal (JCD) were also made co-accused in the

case. They are Kaliganj JCD President Masud Rana, Kaligan BNP joint secretaries Farid Ahmed Arab Ali and Shahidul Islam, and Juba Dal laders Mithu and Lablu. In the case statement, the com plainant said the accused illegally

#### lifted sand from the shoals of the river from October 2004 to October 2006. Locals loot bricks

FROM PAGE 16 Daily Star that locals are stealing hundreds of thousands of bricks, digging holes or farming in the 40 reserved sites in and around

Pundra Nagar. Pundra Nagar is a city that holds relics from the Maurya, Shangu Gupta, Pal and Sen eras dating back

to at least 2,000 years. "People cannot do anything about it because of legal complications," Alam said adding that hundreds of people obtained fake documents to grab land within the fenced area declared reserved in 1922. Pundra Nagar covers a 2.25

crore square foot area. According to government rules, any archaeological or private digging within a four-mile radius of Pundra Nagar requires permission from the deputy commissioner's (DC) office. But, the DC officials say that no such permission has been taken from them to construct

houses or farms in the area. A number of officials from the geological survey department are alleged to have been involved in encouraging encroachment

through forged documents. At least three people were seen building concrete buildings in or around Pundra Nagar who seem to have paid well below the market

rate of land in the area. Builders were seen using bricks from thousand-year-old houses to build their own, which has damaged the structures of most of the buildings.

#### Father, son

informed police that Jewel's father Halim also remained missing since Monday. Police then searched the area and found Halim's body in a hole on the farmland.

Jewel's brother-in-law Noor

Mohammad told reporters that both the father and son had been driving their own maxi on the Dhamrai-Nabinagar route. He said Halim and Jewel went missing since 2:00am on Monday

refilling gas from a filling station. Halim's wife Hazera Khatun filed a case with Ashulia Police Station accusing eight to 10 suspects.

when they were on way home after

When contacted, Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Ashulia Police Station, told The Daily Star, "We have sent our forces to Dhamrai to arrest the suspected killers." He, however, declined to disclose their names.

The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

## Khaleda's green signal

FROM PAGE 1

whether the party should participate in the election with herself in a spe-

Delwar at a discussion meeting on Wednesday said a neutral and credible election is 'impossible under the present Election Commission (EC)', as it has lost neutrality by inviting 'so-called reformists' of the rival faction to electoral dialogues as representatives of BNP.

But leaders of Khaleda backed faction think they might end up contesting in the election under the present EC after all, if their faction is invited to the electoral dialogues and if they are allowed to have the sheaf of paddy as their electoral symbol, as the chairperson seems interested in her party's participation in the electoral process to restore democracy in the country.

"We will participate in the election with party's electoral symbol the sheaf of paddy," said a former lawmaker of the party, who had been present at Khaleda's cantonment residence when the former premier had gone there on a short parole on January 19 to pay her last respect to

her late mother. Party leaders claimed Khaleda Zia talked to her lawyers about the cases filed against her, as well as party affairs. Later the lawyers conveyed her messages to the pro-Khaleda

leaders. But when asked, Rizvi Ahmed, acting office secretary of the faction, told The Daily Star yesterday, "The secretary general did not discuss the matter with us, so I am not clear on whether the chairperson gave any suggestion or not," although other party leaders said the chairperson suggested her senior leaders to work together asking them to take preparations to contest in the upcoming election.

She, however, expressed her

#### TV channels FROM PAGE 16 talk show Ekushey Somoy and Ekushey Raat.

Authorities imposed a ban on telecast of any sorts of talk show during the August violence last year. A few days later TV channels got permission to telecast talk shows on nine-point condition. But TV channels started to broadcast live talk shows frequently

avoiding live talk shows. Meanwhile, Channel 1 stopped audience question portion of its

though the government suggested

live talk show Nirbachito Khobor. Information Secretary Jamil Osman yesterday told BBC that no media house has officially been given any such direction. He however said the govern-

reservations about bringing back a few party leaders who had announced reform proposals for bringing changes to the party constitution in her absence, a former BNP

lawmaker close to Delwar said. Meanwhile, Delwar has been trying to communicate with leaders of different political parties to discuss ways for restoring democracy, pro-

Khaleda leaders said. On Thursday night, he had informal talks with Awami League (AL) leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Col (retd) Farukh Khan at an event hosted by Australian High Commission in Dhaka marking the

national day of that country. During his conversation with the AL leaders Delwar told them that his organisation is working to restore democracy in the country. In reply to which the AL leaders said they had 'started the struggle for democracy during BNP-Jamaat alliance government's regime, when there had been

### Gas supply

no democracy in the country'.

FROM PAGE 1 branch of Titas Gas, told the journalists that the divers and engineers worked on the ruptured line for several hours on Thursday

They could not continue the work at night due to unavailability of electricity. But it resumed at 8:00am vesterday, he added.

Titas Gas officials primarily found out that the pipeline went up in flames as the propeller of the vessel hit the pipeline, which goes 12 feet under water, damaging a portion of it. The damaged portion was measured at about six to eight inches in Sources said Nayarhat-bound

vessel MB Messrs Sharmin Shipping Lines was heavily loaded with sand when it hit the pipeline. The lower part of the vessel was

after hitting the pipeline. Police seized the vessel soon after the accident but released it yesterday. Savar police filed a general diary

also damaged and it got stranded

in this connection. The Tiatas Gas authorities said they are thinking of filing a case. A portion of the underwater gas pipeline on the bed of River Turag went up in flames at Aminbazar in

of the cargo vessel pierced through it. The fire died down at around 1:00pm after the Titas Gas authorities turned off the supply of gas through the pipeline from Ashulia to

Savar on Thursday as the lower part

Aminbazar. Gas transmission in parts of the capital was disrupted following the accident. The colossal force of gas coming out through the damaged portion of

the pipeline hit the 1.33-lakh KV live

#### ment advises them to maintain electric wires running above the river. Restoration works of the damself-censorship during the state of aged electric line are yet to begin. emergency.

India, France agree

over the next five years.

FROM PAGE 16 The visit has seen defence ties high on the agenda, with France lobbying hard in a country ranked as the biggest weapons buyer among emerging nations and expected to spend an estimated 30 billion dollars on arms

blow last month when New Delhi cancelled a Eurocopter bid for a 600million-dollar (410-million-euro) helicopter contract due to alleged irregularities. The alleged payment of bribes in a submarine deal is also being probed. France was the second largest

French-Indian defence ties took a

arms supplier to India after Russia but has now been overtaken by Israel. The United States is also pushing for a place in the Indian market. However, French firms are expected to be invited to upgrade India's fleet of Mirage fighters in a

-- and they are set to compete in a tenderfor 126 war planes. Sarkozy also announced progress on a nuclear cooperation agreement that has been in the works for years to allow France to supply equipment and fuel to India once it has cleared hurdles with the UN's nuclear

contract worth up to 1.5 billion euros

watchdog. A joint statement said "this agreement will form the basis of wideranging bilateral cooperation from

basic and applied research to full civil nuclear cooperation including reactors, fuel supply and manage-India is currently banned from

related equipment because of nuclear weapons tests in 1974 and The French deal hinges on the outcome of negotiations between India and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and with the

45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group,

buying fuel for atomic reactors and

which controls the global nuclear "The needs of India in energy are huge... If we do not let India accede to civilian nuclear energy it will have to go to more polluting means," Sarkozy said, adding he expected to see an international consensus emerge within "weeks".

Singh said the process would "take time" -- alluding to domestic pressure from the government's communist allies who say such a pact with the IAEA, which would involve some international inspections, compromises India's strategic programme.

Sarkozy has lined up a visit to

India's famed 17th century monu-

ment to love on Saturday, after

attending India's annual Republic

## Bird flu: India

the smuggling of chicken to city markets from affected areas," said state animal resources minister Anisur Rahaman in Kolkata, which has 13.2 million people, many of whom live in congested slums.

"All we can do is keep a watch on

themarkets," he said. Officials at entry points to Kolkata were disinfecting cars and other vehicles making their way into the

India has not so far had any human cases of bird flu. But Rahaman said he feared the disease would spread to humans with hundreds of people reporting flu symptoms and children "playing with chickens.

The outbreak was first reported in the village of Margram, 240 kilometres from Kolkata, the capital of the state, which is in the east of the country. Elsewhere in West Bengal, party

tions.

with infected poultry, but experts workers in the Marxist-ruled state were set to join vets and doctors in a bid to ramp up the culling of hundreds of thousands more chickens after two days of rains slowed opera-

target of 2.2 million birds by the end of the week as health authorities seek to control India's third and by far worst outbreak of the disease. "The rain is greatly delaying the culling," said Rahaman.

The state says it needs to reach its

"I hope the rains will cease later in

the day and we can return to culling

on a war footing. We're involving

more teams to reach our target in the next three days." Two days of unseasonal rains have turned many rural dirt roads into mud rivers, making it impossi-

ble for health teams to reach farms.

Nearly one million chickens have already been slaughtered since the beginning of the outbreak but some villagers have complained that culling teams were leaving the carcasses on the side of the road to rot. Humans typically catch the

disease by coming into direct contact

fear the deadly H5N1 strain of the virus may mutate into a form easily transmissible between people. Migratory birds have been largely

blamed for the global spread of the disease, which has killed more than 200 people worldwide since 2003.