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17 killed as train rams bus in Tangail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Seventeen persons were killed and 25 others injured in a fatal accident early yesterday when a Dhaka-bound intercity train rams a passenger bus on a level crossing in Kalihati upazila of Tangail.

Of the dead, 14 were cloth traders from Rampur and Mominagar villages under Balla union of the upazila. The three others were the driver and two helpers of the bus.

Riaz Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Kalihati Police Station, told The Daily Star that 44 cloth traders from Balla union were on the bus headed for Karatia market in Tangail Sadar.

The bus left Ballabazar around 2:00am. The intercity Ekata Express from Dinajpur hit the bus around 3:05am when the bus was crossing Elenka Rajabari level crossing on the Mymensingh-Tangail Highway between the Ibrahimabad and Tangail stations.

Sixteen passengers of the bus including the driver and helpers died on the spot.

Locals and injured passengers said there was no barrier or gate-man at the level crossing at the time



A train-bus collision at this level crossing at Kalihati upazila in Tangail yesterday left 17 people dead. Wreckage of the bus is at the spot. PHOTO: STAR

Formal talks with parties by this month

Says Hossain Zillur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce and Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman yesterday said the formal dialogue between the government and the political parties will begin within this month.

"Preparations for the political dialogue in national level are going on in the form of pre-dialogue meetings, which will conclude within five or six days. We hope the dialogue would start within this month," Hossain Zillur told reporters after inaugurating a seminar at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in the capital.

"We will place the feedback from the pre-dialogue meetings to the chief adviser so that the dialogue becomes successful," the commerce adviser, also one of the five advisers holding the pre-dialogue talks with the political parties, said. "The country will head towards a smooth transition to sustainable democracy through the dialogue," he added.

About inviting the pro-Khaleda faction of BNP to the government's ongoing pre-dialogue talks with the political parties, Hossain Zillur said that they had invited all parties for the talks.

"Time has not passed yet. We have invited all the parties. Whoever comes, we will sit with them," the adviser added.

EC to ask BNP to come unitedly for reform talks

Invites both factions for talks today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday formally invited both factions of the BNP to sit with it today in an effort to resolve their differences so they can join the long stalled electoral reform talks together.

The BNP faction led by M Saifur Rahman is scheduled to sit with the EC at 10:00am while the other faction loyal to detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at 12:00noon at the EC Secretariat conference room.

The EC Secretariat sent the "courtesy call" invitations through a messenger to Khandaker Delwar Hossain, secretary general appointed by Khaleda, and Maj (ret) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, secretary general nominated by the party's standing committee, without mentioning their designations.

"It is a courtesy call and there is no specific agenda for discussion," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret) M Sakawat Hussain told The Daily Star.

Asked what they would discuss with the BNP leaders, he said, "We will ask them to come together to the electoral reform talks with the Election Commission. It would be better for us if they come together."

The EC will soon hold the stalled dialogue with the BNP to wrap its talks with political parties as the commission has already deviated from its electoral reform roadmap because of the persisting issue of leadership in the BNP.

The EC initiated the move to have the BNP united at its electoral reform dialogue as its earlier invitation to Saifur-led BNP faction made the split in the party distinct. On Tuesday, five advisers to the caretaker government held an informal talk with the faction to discuss the formal dialogue with political parties.

The EC on November 5 last year sent the invitation to Hafiz to join its electoral reform talks, ignoring objections from the Delwar-led BNP faction which claimed to be the mainstream BNP.

Later, the detained BNP chairperson filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the EC decision to invite Hafiz and the court stayed the operation of the EC letter. The commission suspended its November 22 talks with the Saifur-led BNP faction.

Finally, the High Court discharged Khaleda's writ petition on April 10, saying the court does not have the jurisdiction to resolve a

political party's internal disputes. On the same day, Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) ATM Shamsul Huda announced that the EC would informally take moves to resolve the differences between the two BNP factions.

But the CEC expressed his frustration on Tuesday over the current situation within the BNP, saying he does not feel encouraged to initiate such informal step since he did not get any positive signal for unifying the BNP.

However, in a sudden move the EC decided yesterday morning to sit with the two factions.

The nagging BNP issue hampered implementation of the EC's electoral reform roadmap according to which the dialogue between the EC and political parties was supposed to be completed between September and November last year. The electoral reform proposals were stipulated to be made into laws this February.

The EC began the electoral reform talks with political parties on September 12 and held talks with 15 parties within November except the BNP. It even completed the second round of the talks with these parties last February, excluding the BNP.



Shakib fights a lone battle

AFP, Multan

Left-hander Shakib Al Hasan hit a fighting hundred to lift Bangladesh's flagging innings to 210 in the fourth day-night international against Pakistan here on Wednesday.

The 21-year-old scored 108 for his second one-day hundred and shared a Bangladesh record ninth wicket stand of 97 with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (38) to revive the tourists, who were reeling at 109-8

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Pledge must for a code of conduct before polls

Saifur-led BNP faction tells of political activities, presses for institutional reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Stressing institutional reforms for a 'meaningful democracy', leaders of pro-Saifur faction of BNP yesterday said all political parties should become pledge bound through formulating a 'code of conduct for political activities' before the poll, so the people's verdict is reflected on the post election system of governance.

Demanding implementation of the announced electoral roadmap they also asked the military backed interim government to stop 'harrasing' political leaders, demanded lifting of the emergency, and urged it to allow political activities so the parties may prepare for the election.

Alluding to pro-Khaleda faction leaders, some pro-Saifur former

lawmakers said those who want to bring back politics of criminals and black money using the name of Khaleda Zia, will not succeed.

They however demanded immediate release of detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Many former lawmakers and leaders of the faction joined a post dialogue meeting of the faction yesterday in a Gulshan community centre in the capital with their Acting Secretary General Maj (ret) Hafizuddin Ahmed in the chair. About 70 former lawmakers of the faction attended the meeting.

"We want institutional reforms and reforms in the system of governance," said Saifur Rahman, acting chairman of the faction, who attended the meeting despite being ill.

In an unusual public appear-

ance in a lungi, former finance minister Saifur arrived at the meeting venue resting on the shoulders of his party colleagues, looking visibly sick. When he spoke, an associate had to hold the microphone for him.

"We want a kind of politics where nobody will boycott the parliament and we also want to see the culture of partisanship coming to an end," he said.

Demanding an election as soon as possible, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, a key leader of the faction who had been expelled by the detained party chairperson, said there is no alternative to an election as the country cannot move forward without an elected democratic government. On the party's unity, he said it is a must.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

President seeks clemency for 8 Bangladeshis

Writes letter to Saudi King

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

President Iajuddin Ahmed has written a letter to Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud seeking clemency for eight Bangladeshis sentenced to death for murder in Saudi Arabia.

The letter, sent yesterday, supplements government efforts to negotiate with the victim's family for dropping the charges in exchange of "blood money," says a foreign ministry spokesperson.

The Bangladeshi ambassador to Saudi Arabia has been asked to raise the money to be paid as compensation from the Bangladeshi community there.

The eight Bangladeshi workers were sentenced to death while three others were sentenced to 12 years rigorous imprisonment for killing an Egyptian worker in Riyadh last year.

Mamun, 25, Shafiqul, 23, Masud, 25, of Tangail, Faruk, 28, of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

ACC asks banks to seize 20 accounts of Khoka, family

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday instructed nearly a dozen banks to seize 20 accounts and a savings certificate worth Tk 15 lakh belonging to Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and his family members.

Dhaka city BNP chief Khoka is accused in a corruption case filed on April 2 by the corruption watchdog for amassing over Tk 17.57 crore worth of wealth illegally and concealing information about wealth worth more than Tk 10 crore in his wealth statement submitted to the ACC in December last year.

Khoka's wife Ismat Ara, daughter Sarika Sadeque and son Ishrak Hossain are also accused in the same case for aiding and abetting him in committing the crimes.

Sahmsul Alam, an Assistant Director of the ACC and investiga-

tion officer (IO) of the case, also asked the National Board of Revenue (NBR) to seize income tax files and other relevant documents turned in by the mayor, said sources.

While speaking with The Daily Star last night, Khoka said he was not officially made aware of any such move by the ACC.

He would face the allegations legally through his lawyers, the mayor added.

A source at the ACC said the ACC sent out the account seizure instructions to the banks yesterday and the day before.

The account seizure would be applicable only to the active bank accounts at eleven different banks opened by the mayor family, the source added. Unable to disclose the total amount kept in their bank accounts, the source said that the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Govt plans to create 1,000cr fund to combat natural disasters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to create a disaster management fund in the next budget to fight the fallout of natural hazards like floods and cyclones which severely affected the country's economy last year.

The government revealed this plan following a proposal of Bangladesh Economic Association (BEA) to create a Tk 1,000 crore fund in the next budget to help boost the country's economy.

"The government is already thinking about such a fund and has started working on it," Finance Adviser AB Mirza Azizul Islam told the BEA executive committee at a pre-budget view-exchange meeting at National Economic Council (NEC) conference room.

Explaining the issue, Finance Secretary Mohammad Tareque said utilisation of the fund will start, though in small size, in the next budget.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Potato cannot be alternative, but can ease pressure on rice

Says Gen Moeen

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Army chief Gen Moeen U Ahmed yesterday said potato cannot be an alternative to rice, but a food supplement that might reduce dependency on rice.

"Potato cannot be an alternative, but a supplementary item. We all should change our food habits and increase our daily potato consumption," said the army chief while speaking as special guest at the inaugural ceremony of a weeklong potato feast organised by Radisson Water Garden Hotel, Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Credible polls not possible keeping Hasina in jail: Zillur

UNB, Dhaka

Acting Awami League (AL) President Zillur Rahman yesterday said a free, fair and credible election is not possible in the country without releasing former prime minister Sheikh Hasina from jail.

"At the pre-dialogue talks, advisers of the caretaker government assured us of holding elections as per the announced roadmap and we believe that the polls would be held according to the scheduled time," he said.

He, however, said releasing

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Ensure textile mill workers' welfare

CA asks owners

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday called on textile entrepreneurs to ensure the welfare of workers.

He said the government would always stand beside the entrepreneurs by acting as the auxiliary force for industrialisation and hoped that the entrepreneurs would also put in their best efforts in industrialising the country.

Fakhruddin was speaking at the inaugural function of a three-day exposition of textiles, titled TEXTANGLA 2008, the fourth of its

kind, organised by Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

"Made in Bangladesh" is the theme of this year's expo which coincides with the silver jubilee of the BTMA.

The exhibition is designed to showcase world-class textile products manufactured in the private-sector textile mills of Bangladesh. Forty-four textile mills, factories and groups are participating in the exhibition.

The number of spinning mills in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

BUMPER BORO HARVEST PROSPECT

Rice prices unlikely to go below Tk 27

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and PORIMOL PALMA

Price of coarse rice is likely to remain Tk 27 to Tk 30 per kg even if the country witnesses a bumper Boro production this season, food ministry sources and economists say.

They attribute this to high cost of Boro production, and global shortage and price hike of rice.

In the wake of around 50 per cent increase in production cost, the food ministry has set procure-

ment price of Boro rice this season at Tk 28 a kg, considering 40 per cent profit on production cost of farmers.

"We are trying to strike a balance between producers and consumers' interests by fixing procurement price at Tk 28 per kg," Food Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman said at a press briefing at his office yesterday.

"We cannot predict retail prices of fine varieties like miniket and nazirshail but we can say price of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



River Labandaha in Gazipur, about four km off Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, has now been reduced to a flow of industrial waste. PHOTO: STAR

Stinky flows the river

PINAKI ROY, back from Gazipur

It is now hard to be recognised even as a canal, although the foundation stone of the bridge over it connecting the Hotapara and Pirajali roads still reads "Bridge on Labandaha River".

The Labandaha has virtually no water now, as only pitch-dark stinky industrial waste is flowing through the river-turned narrow canal. Untreated liquid waste from washing and dyeing factories is the main source of the flowing 'water'.

A vast wetland on both sides locally known as 'Labandaha Sagar' was once the main source of fish and rice. But all species of fish have disappeared and hardly one crop grows since the industries started discharging waste into it.

Residents of Pirajali, Monipur, Dugri, Bishia and Taltali villages in Gazipur near Hotapara allege untreated industry waste has totally changed the environment.

"We used to catch huge amount of fish during the monsoon from the wetland and cultivate two crops every year. But now only Boro grows there," said Abdur Rahman, a farmer from Pirajali.

"When the black water enters the land, paddy plants grow well but harvest yield is very low," he added.

Like Rahman, land of Neyamat Master, Shafiq Mandal and many others has been affected by industrial waste. However, the villagers seemed reluctant to talk about the problem.

"We have to live in this village. If we say something against the industrialists, it will be hard for us to live here," said a villager asking not to be named.

Around Labandaha, which is about three to four kilometres off from Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway, many industrial units have mushroomed in the last 15 years, mostly during the BNP-Jamaat rule.

Industries of Givency groups, Mark Wash and Dyeing, Bengal Textiles, Elegant Washing, and Zihan Textile - all are discharging waste into the canal and in the farmland, the locals allege.

One Composite Industry situated just beside Mark Wash and Dyeing does not have a signboard. But the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Peter Sands

Bangladesh needs to invest in education, infrastructure

Says StanChart CEO

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Bangladesh has a huge potential for wealth creation but the country needs to invest in education and infrastructure, and develop deeper connections with the international economy, says Standard Chartered group Chief Executive Peter Sands.

In an interview with The Daily Star on Tuesday, Sands said Bangladesh is often under-estimated but 'there is a huge potential for wealth creation' and turning the nation into a middle-income country by 2025 is a 'doable aspiration'.

"However, there are a number of 'massive challenges' the country has to overcome to achieve that level of income," he added.

The Chief Executive of the Standard Chartered board since 2006, Sands was in town on a brief tour of South Asia.

FULL STORY STAR BUSINESS B-4