

## BNP to seek

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committee, said, "How can the opposition leader sit with the committee before getting the details of their [committee's] plan regarding constitutional amendment?" In fact, the plan to meet Khaleda is nothing but the ruling party's political ploy that they have done something, he said.

Rafiqul, a senior lawyer and president of Jatiyatabadi Ainjibi Forum, a pro-BNP organisation, said people have a lot of questions about the government's intention. It is "cheating on court judgments," he said.

While talking to The Daily Star, another member of the standing committee said, "Before sitting with the committee, the chairperson has to know about each of the proposed changes that the government wants to make in the constitution."

Party insiders said the chairperson and senior leaders do not want to sit with the special committee as they already termed the committee illegal but they want to avoid the committee tactically so that none can blame the opposition for rejecting the invitation for discussion.

They said a group of party leaders, who are also senior lawyers, are working on the draft constitution and monitoring the activities of the special committee to finalise the BNP stance and the chairperson will sit with them soon.

## 1 to die

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Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), and investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the court on March 11 in 2004, accusing Shukur Gazi, Ripon, Ganesh Banerjee and Imam Sarder.

Judge Md. Moinul Huq sentenced Shukur Gazi to death by hanging, at 5:00pm. Ripon Ahmed and Ganesh Banerjee were acquitted, while Imam Sarder died in 'crossfire' in 2005.

Statements of eight out of forty-nine prosecution witnesses were recorded by the court during the trial in presence of the three defendants.

The case pertaining to Explosive Substances Act was recorded with Khulna Sadar Police station on August 25, 2003. Abdullah Al Mamun Jami, youngest son of Manjurul, filed the case.

Manjurul Imam, president of Khulna City AL, was killed in a bomb attack by extremists on August 25, 2003 at 10:30am near his residence on Shamsur Rahman Road in Khulna Sadar.

Advocate Bijon Bihari Mandal who was accompanying the AL leader to court and rickshaw puller Saidul Islam Akand, were also killed in the same attack.

Two cases, one under Bangladesh Penal Code 302 and the other under Explosive Substances Act, were filed against the accused. All the four charge sheeted accused were earlier acquitted by the same court.

## Govt to import

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during the five-day visit by Food and Disaster Management Minister Dr Md Abdur Razzaque, who left Dhaka for Hanoi on Saturday night.

According to the MoU, when needed Bangladesh can import rice from Vietnam at government level.

As per MoU, the prices and amount of the imported rice to be determined through discussion on the basis of international market prices at the time of import.

"Vietnam will export more rice as the Vietnamese government gives importance to the requirements of Bangladesh," the source said.

The food minister, who is leading a three-member delegation, will call on prime minister of Vietnam and hold bilateral talks with Vietnamese industries and commerce ministers.

Two other members are Director General of Food Directorate Ahmad Hossain Khan and Joint Secretary of Food Division Khandaker Atiur Rahman.

## Kanchpur chaos

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uninterrupted signal-free traffic flow in every direction," Md Shamsul Hoque, professor of civil engineering department at Buet, told The Daily Star.

He said vehicles coming from Chittagong and taking right-turn for Sylhet halt traffics from Dhaka to Chittagong and Sylhet to Dhaka at the junction. The same way, traffics on Dhaka-Chittagong road remain halted when vehicles from Sylhet take right-turn towards Dhaka.

According to a study of the Buet expert, two-thirds of the total vehicles remain stranded due to the two right-turns.

He said Sylhet-bound vehicles from Chittagong, Comilla and Narayanganj will be able to take right-turn if the U-loop is constructed under the bridge.

Another U-loop could be on the Chittagong road several hundred metres off the junction for the vehicles coming from Sylhet and heading for the capital. This will make sure that the vehicles either going to Dhaka from Chittagong and vice versa can move unhindered, he added.

"Once the loops are opened, vehicles don't have to wait for long while crossing the junction," said Prof

Shamsul, urging the government to immediately construct the loops.

He said passengers coming from Sylhet and Chittagong often face the gridlock and waste their valuable hours and fuel. Vehicles heading towards Dhaka from Chittagong, Sylhet, Comilla also face gridlock on the Kanchpur bridge.

There are already two U-loops on the western part of the bridge to ease traffic movement.

The average daily traffic on the busy highways is about 50,000, according to statistics of the RHD.

Sources in the communications ministry said RHD became active after the armed forces division recently expressed their interest to construct the U-loops in the quickest possible time.

Communications Minister Syed Abul Hossain, who visited the Kanchpur Bridge area in October 2009 to see if the area was really prone to perennial traffic congestion, said moves are already underway to construct the U-loops.

"We have also taken a Tk 120 crore project to turn the four-lane Jatrabari-Kanchpur bridge into a eight-lane one," he told The Daily Star, adding that the RHD is preparing tender documents in this regard.

## DFID aid to rise

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partnership with government, civil society, the private sector and other donors. We will prioritise maximising the coherence and effectiveness of all external aid to Bangladesh."

Dalton said DFID's priorities will include strengthening the state's capability and resilience to help Bangladesh do better in meeting the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable.

"The DFID will support inclusive political settlements and democratic processes, strengthen core functions of government, strengthen the public's ability to hold government and local officials to account and provide more support for basic social services through an increased investment in government-led approaches and continued support for non-state provision for the poorest or most marginalised," Dalton said.

The DFID will focus on the poorest 10 percent of the population in both urban and rural areas as part of its efforts to improve people's ability to get out of poverty, she said.

"The DFID will expand programmes to strengthen the business climate in order to increase foreign and domestic investment; at the household level, expand

initiatives to increase access to credit and to markets; and strengthen the labour market through skill development, linked to market demand and private sector provision."

Dalton urged the country's civil society to play a transformative role to help the government eradicate poverty, and function as a watchdog to improve governance, transparency and accountability.

Academics, civil society members, and representatives from non-governmental organisations and international donor agencies were present there.

## IOM chief

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capital's Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel. Ministers of 11 labour sending countries and ministers and officials from labour destination countries will attend it as observers.

Bangladesh government is hosting the meeting with support from the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

During his visit from April 18 to 22, Lacy Swing will have courtesy calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharrar Hossain.

## Rajapaksa arrives

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Ahead of the visit, Sri Lanka's external affairs ministry said President Rajapaksa's visit would reaffirm and further reinforce the friendly and warm relations between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Several agreements in the areas of export promotion, business, shipping service, agriculture, fisheries and livestock, education and culture are expected to be signed during his April 18-20 visit.

The special flight carrying the Sri Lankan president is scheduled to land at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 12:30pm. President Zillur Rahman is expected to receive him.

Rajapaksa will be given 21-gun salutes and a guard of honour by the three services.

Sri Lankan first lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa will accompany the president who will lead a 54-member high-powered delegation. The delegation includes External Affairs Minister Prof GL Peiris, parliamentarians, top civil and military officials and an 11-member media team.

On arrival, Rajapaksa will lay a wreath at National Mausoleum at Savar and will hold talks with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's office today.

The official talks will be followed by signing of several agreements.

Before the talks with Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni will call on Rajapaksa.

In the evening, Sheikh Hasina will host a dinner in honour of the Sri Lankan president and the first lady.

Rajapaksa will lay a wreath on the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Bangabandhu Museum tomorrow. He will also visit Buddhist Temple at Merul Badda in the capital.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) will host a luncheon in honour of the Sri Lankan president. Later in the evening, Rajapaksa will call on President Zillur Rahman when the latter will host a state banquet.

The Sri Lankan first lady will visit Proyash, a school for autistic children in Dhaka Cantonment. She will also visit some other traditional attractions in Dhaka.

On Wednesday, the foreign ministers of the two countries will hold a joint press conference on the outcome of the visit.

In the morning, the Sri Lankan president will meet with the Sri Lankan community in Bangladesh and leave for Colombo at 2:00pm.

Diplomatic relations between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were established in 1972.

## 600 Bangladeshis

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repatriation of those Bangladeshis who have come from Libya without any passport.

However, the representatives of IOM at the Al Salloum border point informed the consular team that IOM is unable to immediately arrange flights due to shortage of funds.

There are now 226 Bangladeshis awaiting repatriation at Ras Jdir border point of Tunisia. No Bangladeshis had crossed over to Tunisia on Saturday.

Biman will organise a flight tomorrow to bring them back from Tunisia.

The consular team at Ras Jdir border point in Tunisia has been receiving frequent calls from a good number of Bangladeshi families from different cities of Libya seeking advice on their return to Bangladesh.

The team is advising them to take a safe route to Ras Jdir and is coordinating their entry into Ras Jdir with the available flights.

Since the beginning of repatriation, a total of 130 flights have operated so far. Among these, 113 flights were IOM chartered on a cost-sharing basis with Bangladesh government while Biman independently operated 17 flights.

As of now, 35,211 Bangladeshis, who were employed in Libya, have been repatriated to home.

Of these, the return of 3,845 persons has been arranged by their employers while some returned on their own arrangements, and 27,101 people have been repatriated by the IOM. Of the total repatriates, 4,265 took Bangladesh Biman flights.

In Greece, one Bangladesh national still remains missing at Hania, Crete Island.

Meanwhile, in Libya, the Embassy of Bangladesh in Tripoli is currently conducting HSC Examinations of six Bangladeshi students.

## 3 killed

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in Ramgarh. The dead were identified as Ayub Ali, 30, Nawab Ali, 70, and Sunil Sarkar, 35, of Bara Pilak Bazar.

Meanwhile, a press release from district unit United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) claimed that an Adivasi, identified as Remong Marma, 32, of Shankhola Para, died in the clash. The press release signed by UPDF Press Secretary Neron Chakma also claimed some nine to ten people went missing after the incident.

Khagrachhari Deputy Commissioner (DC) Anisul Haque Bhuiyan described the incident as "not-so-serious". Talking to The Daily Star over the phone, he said they have so far confirmed two deaths.

Section-144 was imposed in both Ramgarh and Manikchhari after the string of clashes between Banglaees and Adivasis.

Additional police forces have been deployed to prevent further outward incident, the DC added.

Abdul Ali, a local, over the phone said the Bangalee people own the piece of land and have been using the land for a long time. But recently some Karbaries (village head) were trying to grab the land.

Failing to do so, they resorted to violence, Abdul added.

Cipru Marma, of the area, however, said the incident took place as the settlers wanted to grab their land.

Zahadul Alam, general secretary of district unit Awami League, visited the spot and urged people to maintain peace and show respect to laws.

## Cop stabbed

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police sources said.

Borhan was rushed to Mirsarai Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead.

Parvez is an accused in three cases filed with the police station, said Officer-in-Charge Humayun Kabir.

Police later raided different areas of the upazila and arrested Osman, 32, and Tipu, 30, and recovered a machete from them.

## Mismatch in salt prices

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without spending anything, which they think is not a fair share, he added.

The salt farmers bear 97.7 percent of production costs to get only 54 percent of the sale proceed, while land owners and brokers pocket the rest, revealed a report of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) and Sachetan Nagorik Committee (Sanak) in a survey report in 2008.

Around 44,500 families are engaged in salt cultivation in 75,000 acres of land that produced around 1.7 million tonnes of salt against the target of 1.34 million tonnes in 2009-10.

The farmers have long been deprived as the government did not have any salt policy.

"Now the government has made a policy, which protects the interest of the salt farmers," said Mostafa Kamal Akand of Coast Trust, a non-government organisation working for the salt farmers.

The mill owners' syndicate compels the farmers to sell their product at a

cheaper rate. Otherwise, they import it from India, though Bangladeshi farmers are capable of meeting the country's demand, he said.

"But now the government has decided that the mill owners have to pay Tk 4 for a kg," he added.

Asked why the Indian farmers' rate is cheaper, Mostafa Kamal said they produce the salt on government land.

"So they don't need to pay rental for the land on which they produce the salt. On the other hand, here the farmers have to rent land at Tk 15,000 to Tk 20,000 per year," he said.

Without having any policy, the country's salt sector remained one of the most neglected sectors over the years since independence. Finally, the government last month approved the draft National Salt Policy, 2011 to protect the interests of all stakeholders including the farmers, mill owners and consumers.

The special features of the salt policy include discouraging salt import, fixing fair price, providing farmers and

mill owners with loans on single digit interest, developing a buffer stock, increasing production through providing technical assistance to farmers, collection and preservation of information related to salt, and providing farmers with infrastructural assistance during natural calamities, say sources in the industries ministry.

In the salt policy, it was said if import of salt during surplus production continues, tariff and non-tariff barriers will be imposed to prevent such import for the sake of the local industry.

Under the policy, steps will be taken to augment salt production by increasing salt-growing land and farmers will be encouraged to produce white salt through BSCIC-invented polythene method.

The government however will facilitate the import of industrial salt for preparing chemical products.

Nearly half a million people are engaged in the salt industry directly and indirectly, the sources add.

## Grabbers choke Karatoa

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constructed a three-vent regulator in Khalisha area in 1989 to control the flow of the river.

BWDB Sub-Assistant Engineer AKM Najmul Hassan in Gaibandha told The Daily Star over phone that at least 20 km out of 25 km of the river in the district has almost died. "Locals grabbed the riverbed from Khalisha into 15 km downstream for cultivation and other purposes," he added.

The Karatoa is a very old river mentioned even in the Vedic literature and stood as the mark of limit of the Aryan expansion to the east.

M Inamul Haque mentioned in his book "Water Resources Management in Bangladesh" that from the Rennell's Map of 1779 it appears that the Karatoa originated from the foothills of the Himalayas in Darjeeling of West Bengal and joined the Atrai river in the plains.

"Land grabbers have occupied huge valuable land on both sides of the river from Matidali to Madla in Bogra town to construct commercial and residential buildings," said AKM Moutaz Uddin, executive engineer, BWDB, Bogra.

He said a development project worth Tk 136 crore was initiated to improve the Karatoa channel and other infrastructure in 2006. However, that project has yet to start, he added.

Raj Kumar Behani, 60, a well-known businessman in Bogra, has constructed his house and business centre allegedly occupying 10 decimals of land on the east bank of the river at Chalopara.

Contacted, Raj Kumar denied the allegation and said he constructed the buildings on his paternal land.

The Diabetic Association, Bogra unit, also allegedly grabbed 6 decimals of river

land on the west bank and constructed a multi-storey hospital building about 14 years ago.

Amzad Hossain Tazma, president of the unit, said the organisation constructed the building on a written permission of the district administration in 1997.

Farmer Md Ishake Ali, 45, admitted that he has been growing paddy in the riverbed for 12 years. He claimed he has some paternal land in the riverbed like other people of Subjabad village in Shahjahanpur upazila of Bogra.

Md Nazmul Haque, director, Department of Environment, Rajshahi Division, said huge land has been occupied on both banks of the river.

"We are gathering information about the grabbing on both sides of the river for necessary action to improve the situation," he added.

## Police thwart Azerbaijan democracy rally

AFP, Baku

Police in the energy-rich former Soviet state of Azerbaijan staged a show of force yesterday to prevent an unauthorised pro-democracy rally, arresting activists who were attempting to protest.

In the latest clampdown in the mainly Muslim country where demonstrations are rarely tolerated, riot officers with batons cleared Sahir Park in central Baku, where the opposition wanted to hold the banned rally.

Few activists approached the park, but many of those who tried to do so were detained, including a woman with a young child who shouted the word "Freedom!"

The opposition said that more than 100 people were held, including two Swedish journalists who were later released, although the authorities said that 65 people had been detained.

## 2 ex-DGs

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Chowdhury, also a senior ASP of CID, moved the petition saying the two NSIDGs -Brig Gen (retd) Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury and Brig Gen (retd) Abdur Rahim - should be quizzed for the sake of investigation.

"We are going to interrogate the two within three to four days," Muniruzzaman said.

IO moved the petition on April 12, said Assistant Commissioner (Prosecution) Nirmalendu Bikash Chakraborty.

On April 13 this year, former DGFI DG Maj Gen (retd) Sadik Hasan Rumi in a statement given before a Chittagong court said Brig Gen (retd) Rezzakul Haider was involved in the smuggling of the arms.

## Israel becomes CERN nuclear group member

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's cabinet yesterday announced it had approved the country's membership in the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, becoming the research group's first non-European delegation.

"Israel is joining an exclusive club, which provides unusual visibility, exposure prestige and international status," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in announcing the cabinet decision.

He said membership in the organisation, known as CERN, reflected the "capabilities of Israeli scientists and constitutes recognition of their ability."

Israel had previously held special observer status at the organisation, which is best known for its "atom-smasher," the so-called Large Hadron Collider which is installed in a tunnel straddling the Franco-Swiss border.

## Hundreds flee

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Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi fired rockets at rebel positions, hospital officials said.

"Gaddafi's forces approached the city, they bombed the western gate. The sound of the guns are coming closer, that's why many are leaving," said Omar Salim Mufta, a 27-year-old resident rebel supporter who has not taken up arms.

Another civilian, 48-year-old Milud Ghait, appealed for Nato forces to carry out air strikes on the area as about a dozen pickup trucks carrying rebel fighters left the eastern town.

"Gaddafi's forces are on the western outskirts of Ajdabiya, but Nato is doing nothing. Where is Nato? What are the French, British and Americans doing?" he asked.

It was not immediately clear if there were casualties from yesterday's shelling whose range is about 20 kilometres, suggesting pro-Gaddafi forces were within that distance of Ajdabiya.

The ragtag rebel fighters had previously appeared set to move on Brega, 80 kilometres west of Ajdabiya, with some correspondents reporting they were on the outskirts of the strategic oil town.

In the besieged western bastion of Misrata, meanwhile, rebels said they mounted successful raids on Gaddafi's troops in the city.

Smoke billowed over the centre of Misrata, which a witness said was from a destroyed regime tank, as the rebels claimed to have taken out several pro-Gaddafi snipers along the port city's main avenue, Tripoli Street.

On the diplomatic front, the New York Times reported US President Barack Obama's administration has launched an intense search for a country, likely in Africa, that could provide refuge to Gaddafi.

On Saturday, France said a new UN resolution to push Gaddafi into quitting was unnecessary, and Germany suggested frozen Libyan funds be diverted to the United Nations to pay for aid to victims of the conflict.

"We think that given his behaviour, his savage repression of the population, Gaddafi has lost all legitimacy to stay in power," Juppe said.

US-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) accuse Gaddafi forces of using cluster bombs but a spokesman for the Libyan regime denied the accusations.

Tens of thousands of migrants have already fled Libya since the rebellion erupted in mid-February.

Meanwhile, the European Union and Nato deepened their coordination for a potential EU military mission to deliver urgent humanitarian aid to Misrata, diplomats said.

The International Organisation for Migration said about 1,200 migrants have been evacuated from Misrata to the eastern rebel stronghold of Benghazi. Most were Bangladeshis and Egyptians.