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A kind of Indo-Pak conflict is going on in  
Afghanistan, says Musharraf

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# KSA executes 8 Bangladeshis

*Beheaded for robbery, killing in 2007; Amnesty International says Saudi court proceedings fall short of fair trial*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Comilla, Abul Hossain and Matiar Rahman from Faridpur.

Three other Bangladeshis -- Abdus Salam, Masud Rana, Alam -- were sentenced by the kingdom's highest court to imprisonment for different terms and flogging for their involvement in the incident, Bangladesh embassy officials in Riyadh told The Daily Star yesterday.

The 11 Bangladeshi workers killed Egyptian security guard Saeed Mohammed Abdulkhaleq while stealing electric cables from a warehouse in Riyadh on April 22, 2007, as

documented in case statements.

Haroon-or Rashid, Labour Counsellor at the Bangladesh Embassy, said the workers were charged with murder, robbery and "creating a reign of terror." They all confessed to the crimes in court, said the diplomat.

A huge crowd witnessed the executions at Justice Square near Al Hakam Palace in Riyadh.

Though Saudi Arabia carries out beheadings in public, execution of

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## Tale of a torchbearer

*Visually-impaired ex-cotton mill worker runs free education centre for children in Tangail*

MIRZA SHAKIL, Tangail

Rafiqul Bari indeed knows what it means to see nothing. He was born with normal organs, but a slight stomach problem at the age of two changed his life forever. Wrong treatment by a quack made him blind.

So to ease a little the heavy burden weighing down physically or mentally challenged children in life, he has set up a centre to give them the basic education and vocational training for free.

Founded in 2003 at Ghatail in Tangail, the Welfare Centre for Challenged offers general education up to class-III. The "school" has now 120 students aged between five and 16, 45 of whom are mentally challenged.



Rafiqul Bari along with the students of the Welfare Centre for Challenged at Ghatail in Tangail.

PHOTO: STAR

Inspired by Rafiqul's initiative, some local youths joined hands. Of them, Bhajan Chandra Nath took charge as headmaster and

Md Mukul, Shamsunnahar Begum, Shiuli Akhter and Razina Akhter as assistant

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# Meghna Bridge under threat

*Riverbed scouring makes several piers vulnerable; overloaded trucks damage deck, expansion joints; experts suggest immediate repairs*

M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The Meghna Bridge is under threat as riverbed scouring has left several piers vulnerable while high traffic volume and overloaded trucks are damaging the deck.

bridge called for immediate repairs. The Meghna Bridge is crucial to smooth road communication between Dhaka and Chittagong.

There has been extensive damage to expansion joints and hinge

bearings of the bridge. The Roads and Highways Department engineers blame it on very high volume of traffic on the two-lane bridge and unforeseen erosion of the riverbed near the pier foundations.

The authorities concerned say

that they would soon enforce a speed limit on the bridge and put signs warning vehicles about the damaged bridge. They fear the situation would worsen if repairs are not done immediately.

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The expansion joints, inset, of Meghna Bridge have been damaged due to very high volume of traffic. The photos were taken on Friday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## Rice of hope

*Scientists breed 3 new high-yielding varieties of rice that can withstand drought, salinity, cold weather up to a certain level*

REAZ AHMAD

Researchers have developed three early-maturing varieties of rice that can withstand up to a month of rainless days and moderate levels of salinity and cold bite.

Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) has recently released the three high yielding varieties (HYVs) -- BRRI dhan-55, 56 and 57.

Officials of BRRI and the Philippines-based International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) that provided technical support for the research disclosed this to The Daily Star yesterday.

BRRI dhan-55 is a moderate salinity and cold-tolerant variety with a per hectare yield of seven tonnes compared to six tonnes of BRRI dhan-28, the most popular rice variety in Bangladesh, said Dr Tamal Lata Aditya, a chief scientific officer at BRRI.

The new variety is equally suitable for cultivation in the salinity-prone southern region and cold-hit northern region of the country, she said.

Tamal, involved in a joint breeding research initiative of IRRI and BRRI, also said BRRI dhan-56 and BRRI dhan-57 are capable of withstanding rainless days up to one month.

With this latest rice breeding developments, BRRI begins its annual research review workshop today at its Gazipur

headquarters.

An IRRI release said, "Farmers in drought-prone regions of Bangladesh can now look forward to a more bountiful rice harvest as the wet season ends and water becomes scarce, with two recently released drought-tolerant rice varieties-- BRRI dhan-56 and BRRI dhan-57."

Unlike most rain-dependent rice varieties in the country planted in Aman season (monsoon) from July to November, BRRI dhan - 56 and 57 remain healthy during drought, which can occur toward the end of the season, because they take a shorter time to mature than other popular local varieties, said IRRI.

Drought has been one of the biggest problems of farmers in Bangladesh. In 1999, the country suffered the longest drought in 50 years --more than four months without rain -- and in 2010, it recorded its lowest rainfall since 1995.

IRRI rice breeder for drought tolerance Dr Arvind Kumar, who pioneered the breeding research that eventually enabled BRRI to release the two drought-tolerant rice varieties, said, "Both varieties are also resistant to blast -- a common rice disease in Bangladesh -- and have good grain quality."

Tamal, who worked with Arvind, told this correspondent yesterday BRRI dhan-56 can withstand rainless days up to one

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## Top Jamaat, IOJ leaders may skip road march

RASHIDUL HASAN

The top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote are unlikely to take part in tomorrow's road march to Sylhet to avoid "government harassment", sources in the parties said.

Instead, the two components of BNP-led four-party alliance have directed their mid-level and grassroots leaders to join the programme.

Meanwhile, the main opposition BNP is getting ready to ensure the maximum presence of its leaders, activists and supporters in the road march to be led by its chief Khaleda Zia.

The leader of the

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## Hasina asks AL men to expose BNP's misrule

*Nationwide rallies planned to counter opposition agitation*

HASAN JAHIID TUSHER

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed her party's rank and file to expose "corruption, criminal activities and misrule of the last BNP-led government" at mass rallies in an apparent attempt to counter the opposition's agitation.

She also asked them to focus more on the government's success made in the last two-and-a-half years and drum up public support for government steps like holding of trials of war criminals and abolishment of the caretaker government system.

She made the directives at a meeting with her party's central leaders at her political office in Dhanmondi. At the meeting, she also decided to have similar meetings every Saturday so that she could be more aware of what is going on in the party at each level.

She directed them to start holding councils at the grassroots to make the party more vibrant. Awami League has over 45,000 committees at ward and 5,000 at union levels.

Hasina asked party leaders to work with party workers more efficiently through better communication and ensure proper coordination to face the opposition's movement. The BNP is to launch a series of agitation programmes centring the caretaker government issue this week.

Hasina Thursday night decided to take part in the important rallies the party is going to hold across the country to counter the opposition's agitation programmes.

At the meeting, Hasina asked the rank and file to beware of opposition's attempt to create anarchy on the streets.

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## Osman or Ivy to get party backing

*AL high-ups meet them again today*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League has decided to back either Shamim Osman or Selina Hayat Ivy in the October 30 mayoral polls of Narayanganj City Corporation to avert split of pro-AL votes.

Shifting from its earlier decision of not backing any of the two, AL will ask one of them to pull out of the election to ensure victory of the party favourite.

Both Shamim, a former AL lawmaker, and Ivy, vice-president of town unit AL, have been called to the party chief's political office in Dhanmondi at 10:00am today, AL

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