

US envoy

FROM PAGE 1
World Bank chief.

"I praise the work of Prof Muhammad Yunus, and I am sure if he agrees to his nomination for the position it will be given the fullest consideration", Mozena told reporters at Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries.

He said he knew Prof Yunus's Grameen Bank very well, as he had lived in Bangladesh for three years a decade ago from 1998 to 2001.

"During that time, I visited many borrowers' groups of Grameen Bank. I saw with my very eyes the impact of Grameen Bank in helping the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable of the vulnerable, and helping women take control of their lives.

"And it was a beautiful sight", he said.

"I came back to Bangladesh only three months ago. Already I have visited three Grameen Bank borrowers' groups, and every time I felt very inspired.

"I think of the work and vision of Prof Muhammad Yunus, as it was his idea. Many people said 'oh, you can't help the poorest of the poor, the most vulnerable of the vulnerable', but Prof Yunus said yes, you could, and he did that".

The US ambassador said that if Bangladesh overcame some considerable obstacles, it would be a prosperous middle-income country in a decade or two.

He described communication infrastructure, power supply, corruption, political instability, investment climate, and rule of law, among others, as major areas where the obstacles exist.

Bangladesh could be the largest exporter of readymade garments in the world and a major player in the production of pharmaceutical supplies, he said.

Attending the launch of the Rajshahi Chapter of the Volunteers for Bangladesh with his spouse Grace Mozena yesterday, the US envoy said, "In America, volunteers play a critical role in developing our nation. Last year alone, 60 million Americans volunteered in their communities".

"In Bangladesh too, there is a strong spirit of voluntarism that can serve the people well".

Talking about journalist couple Sagar Sarowar and Mehrun Runi, Mozena described their murder as tragic and horrible.

"The media is a fundamental element of democracy and it cannot be democracy without a free and vibrant media. So, if the attack is against the media, it is even more horrific".

Stop speculative

FROM PAGE 20
criticised a statement of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at a rally in Lalmonirhat on Monday regarding the government's action following the murder incident.

Making such a statement, the leader of the opposition has already passed judgement in this murder case, which would certainly influence the investigators and judges, mentioned the court.

"If it were in America or Britain, she (Khaleda) would have been straightaway sent to prison for gross violation of the sub judice rule and also for contempt of court," Justice Shamsuddin observed.

Manzill MURSHID, president of HRPB, moved the litigation.

During the court proceedings, several lawyers including Yusuf Hossain Humayun, Nurul Islam Sujon, SM Rezaul Karim and Deputy Attorney General ABM Altaf Hossain condemned the statement of Khaleda Zia.

JU TEACHERS, STUDENTS FORM HUMAN CHAIN

Teachers and students of journalism and media studies department at Jahangirnagar University yesterday formed a human chain on the campus protesting the murder of Sagar and Runi.

They urged the government to ensure the security of the couple's only son Megh and take necessary steps to secure his future.

Electricity import

FROM PAGE 1
However, according to yesterday's currency rates, Rs 2.80 is about Tk 4.66.

Meanwhile, PDB officials in Dhaka said a maintenance charge of Tk 0.20 per unit could be added to the electricity price fixed. A PDB high official said the authorities expected that the price would be under Tk 5 per unit through negotiation and that the price fixed was within expectations.

Zaid Bakht, research director of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, said the rate is at par with the rate in which India sells electricity in its local market. However, Bangladesh will have to pay in foreign currency, which will mount pressure on its foreign exchange reserves, he said.

Yesterday, Azad said both sides at the meeting expressed satisfaction at the pace of work in Bangladesh and India for the completion of the transmission line connecting the power grids of the two countries.

The 250MW of electricity will be transmitted to Bangladesh through the Baharampur (India)-Bheramara (Bangladesh) grid, he said.

Yesterday's signing of the agreement is a follow-up to the joint communiqué issued at the end of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in January 2010.

The power will be sourced from the 10 percent unallocated quota of a number of India's state-owned power plants. Each Indian plant has 10 percent electricity that remains unallocated, said the Bangladesh power secretary.

He said both sides explored the possibility of purchasing power from the Farakka plant but the cost per unit turned out to be on the high side at Rs 3.80 per unit (around Tk 6.32 as of yesterday) and "Bangladesh was looking for electricity at low cost".

Azad said Bangladesh would also float a tender for buying an additional 250MW of power at market rate from India as a follow-up to the joint communiqué.

He said the Joint Steering Committee meeting, which was preceded by a meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Working Group on power sector cooperation on Monday, also agreed to form a joint venture company next month for the 1,320MW coal-fired power plant at Ramban in Bagerhat. An MoU in this connection was signed between PDB and India's state-owned National Thermal Power Corporation in Dhaka last month.

According to Azad, both sides agreed to hold the first meeting of the Board of Directors of the newly-incorporated company Bangladesh-India Maitree Bidyut Kendra next month when land development work for the proposed plant is expected to begin.

Replying to a question, Azad dispelled apprehensions about the environmental impact of the plant. He pointed out that as per environmental norms no power plant should be set up within 12km of the Sundarbans buffer zone.

The proposed project is 14km away from the Sundarbans, he said.

He cited more reasons as to why the environment would not be affected by the proposed Ramban plant. Firstly, the direction of the wind at the plant site is south east to north west in the summer and the reverse in the winter, which clearly means that ash contents of the plant will not be carried towards the Sundarbans, he claimed.

Secondly, the proposed power plant will use imported high-grade coal in which the ash content is just 0.2 percent.

Thirdly, the plant will have in place an environment mitigation plan.

The power secretary said India had also agreed in principle with Bangladesh's proposal for jointly developing the immense hydro power potentials of the north-eastern Indian states, including Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur.

sourcing electricity from the first unit of Palatana power project in Tripura and acquiring a stake in the project's second unit.

The Joint Steering Committee meeting decided to set up a six-member technical team comprising three members each from Bangladesh and India to study the possibility of joint power projects in the north-eastern Indian states and also buying power from the first unit of Palatana gas-based power plant in Tripura, Azad said.

Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar had declared during Hasina's visit to the state in January this year that his government was willing to give to Bangladesh 100MW from Palatana project.

The team will also study all the proposals for joint development of power projects in north-eastern India and submit its report in three months, Azad said.

Answering another question, Azad said Bangladesh would have to invest about \$1.2 billion to acquire a stake in the second unit of Palatana power project.

In another important development, Azad said India has informally given its green signal to allow export of electricity from Nepal to Bangladesh via the Indian power grid.

The Indian side asked the Bangladeshi team to begin talks with Nepal for import of power from the Himalayan nation.

Azad said Bangladesh had already informally asked Nepal about power purchase but no formal proposal could be mooted in the absence of a green signal from India. Now that the signal is 'available', "We will soon approach Nepal to expedite formal talks on importing electricity from Nepal".

While Azad led the Bangladesh delegation at the Joint Steering Committee meeting yesterday, the Indian delegation was headed by its Power Secretary P Umashankar.

Unity intact

FROM PAGE 20
widely interpreted as a sign of growing discontent within the 14-party.

However, at yesterday's meeting, the combine leaders said they were determined to stay united for the sake of the war crimes trial. Held at AL President Sheikh Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi, the meeting was chaired by Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, AL presidium member and coordinator of the 14-party alliance.

The meeting decided that the central leaders of the alliance would join human chain programmes in the district headquarters on March 9 and in the capital on March 11. They will also take part in a grand rally in Khulna on March 23 to drum up support for a quick completion of the trial of war criminals.

The human chain in Dhaka will be formed at 4:00pm and will continue till 5:00pm. The route will stretch from Sadarghat to Uttara via Gulistan, Noor Hossain Square, Paltan, Bijoynagar, Mouchak, Malibagh, Rampura and Khilkhet.

The meeting observed that the BNP-Jamaat alliance was out to foil the war crimes trial. It decided that the 14-party would mobilise public opinion across the country against "the opposition's conspiracy to hinder the trial".

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, AL acting general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the 14-party had forged movements in the past and its unity would remain intact.

AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu and Tofail Ahmed said none would be able to breach the unity of the 14-party.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said there might be differences of opinion, but those would be resolved through discussion.

Other senior combine leaders were present at the meeting.

Gas connections

FROM PAGE 20
economy organised by Board of Investment at its office in the capital.

Tawfiq said state-owned Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company Ltd (Bapex) would start drilling in three new gas fields -- Sriakal, Kapasia and Sunetra -- from next month to enhance gas supply to the national grid.

He said the government is also devising a policy to supply uninterrupted electricity to industrial units through separatelines.

The government has also removed all restrictions to new power connections and customers can now submit applications for connections online, added Tawfiq.

Domestic and foreign investment flow in the country remained stagnant over the last few years due to gas and power crises and the scarcity of land for setting up industries, said entrepreneurs at the roundtable yesterday.

They said they are facing trouble in the operations of factories due to inadequate supply of gas and electricity.

Many factories which were constructed earlier could not go into operations for the lack of gas and power connections. As a result, the flow of investment remained stagnant at 24 percent over the last few years, the Board of Investment officials said.

Abdul Matlub Ahmed, chairman of Nitol-Niloy Group, said Indian Arvind Group could not go into production due to lack of gas and power, although the group had signed an agreement with his group two years ago to set up a joint-venture factory at Comilla Export Processing Zone.

He also said the government should ensure three important things--gas, power and industrial land--for attracting both domestic and foreign investments in the country.

BNP leader

FROM PAGE 20
hailed from Khulna.

Abdul Jalil, who brought injured Raqib to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said Raqib was first rushed to a hospital in Mirpur and later moved to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died around 6:30pm.

He told The Daily Star that a few people around 5:30pm went to Raqib at his mosque and asked him to conduct a milad (a religious ritual) at a house near Balur Math in Bhashantek. Unidentified gunmen ambushed him when he was near the Balur Math. They shot him in the chest, Jalil said.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for autopsy.

Imtiaz Hossain, deputy police commissioner of Mirpur division, said, "He [Raqib] was accused in several extortion cases and was arrested several times on different charges." Imtiaz claimed that Raqib was a man of top listed criminal Ibrahim.

He said they were trying to unearth the motive behind the murder and arrest the killers. He, however, speculated that Raqib might have been killed by his rivals following a feud over establishing supremacy in the area.

Police picked up a few people for questioning in this connection but no case was filed as of 12:50am today, said Officer-in-Charge of Kafur Police Station Abdul Latif.

City BNP Member Secretary Abdus Salam, Kafur unit BNP President Ali Asgar and other BNP leaders rushed to the DMCH yesterday evening following Raqib's death. They demanded the arrest of the killers and their punishment.

DoE fines

FROM PAGE 20
Finishing Mills Limited Tk 65 lakh on Monday and the owner gave Tk 40 lakh as first installment.

DoE ordered the owner to run the effluent treatment plant by its necessary repairing within 15 days and take environmental clearance from DoE.

According to the DoE the factory started running on one acre land off the Shitalakhya in 1995 without any permission from DoE and later expended its area.

The factory which was established spending around Tk 10 crore have a capacity of washing 4 tonnes cloths everyday and has discharged around 16 lakh cubic metre untreated chemical waste into the river Shitalakhya in the last 16 years.

'Saline death'

FROM PAGE 1
About 30,000 square kilometres of Khulna and Barisal divisions and parts of Rajshahi and Dhaka divisions will be severely affected, they have noted. The capital also falls in the danger zone.

"We basically conducted a qualitative study based on information we got from several sources. The effect could be even worse," said a senior hydro and geo-environment analyst who was involved with the study.

There will be no flow in the north-western rivers -- the Teesta, Mahananda, Dharla and Dudhkumar -- during the monsoon as water will be diverted to the river Fulhar through the river Mechi.

The mega plan has remained highly contentious since it was first devised in 1980. Environmentalists and neighbouring countries oppose it, saying its execution will wreak havoc on the ecology of the entire region.

India maintains the Rs 5,000-crore project will increase its irrigation coverage from 120 million hectares to 160m and boost crop production.

The issue drew the attention of the media both in Bangladesh and India again on Monday as the Indian Supreme Court ordered a quick implementation of the project and appointed a high-powered committee to put it into action.

Biodiversity, agriculture and industry of the Ganges Dependant Area (GDA) -- both sides of the river Padma -- and parts of the Meghna river bank will be badly hit if India executes its river plan.

The GDA alone covers 20 percent of the country and is home to around 30 million

people.

"A large population in the country will be devastated due to lack of sweet water," said M Inamul Haque, chairman of Water and Environment, a non-government organisation.

The river-linking project aims at diverting river water from India's north-eastern region, an area with 3,500mm rainfall a year to its west, a region with annual rainfall as low as 700mm.

The result would be an extreme environmental degradation not only in Bangladesh but also in some parts of India, he said.

"It would destroy the biodiversity in half of the country's plain land and wetland."

The assessment report of Bangladeshi experts echoed the view of Inamul Haque.

They forecast a decline in river water and sedimentation, rise in salinity of soil, surface and groundwater, damage to agriculture, fisheries, navigation routes, coastal biodiversity and fisheries, and an increase in river erosion.

The experts who conducted the study do not want to be named.

They say if the Indian project is implemented, the Madhumati, Dhaleshwari, Padma and Meghna rivers will face saline intrusion.

The mighty Brahmaputra, which is known as the Jamuna and which meets up two-thirds of the country's demand of water during the dry seasons, will lose navigability.

Some other rivers -- Gorai, Madhumati, Nabagnaga, Ichhamati-Mathabhanga, Kapotakkhya, Betna, Meghna, Surma, Kushiara, Old Brahmaputra, Dhaleshwari, Buriganga, Shitalakkhya, Arial Kha and

Turag -- will shrink.

The scheme will require construction of large barges to store water for lean period. India will have to release water during the monsoon, resulting in prolonged floods in Bangladesh, said a young hydrologist who also conducted a portion of the study.

The study also says the river project will lead to inundations in Barisal and Noakhali.

Fukushima nuke plant still vulnerable

Says plant chief

AP, Okuma

Japan's tsunami-hit Fukushima power plant remains fragile nearly a year after it suffered multiple meltdowns, its chief said yesterday, with makeshift equipment - some mended with tape - keeping crucial systems running.

An independent report, meanwhile, revealed that the government downplayed the full danger in the days after the March 11 disaster and secretly considered evacuating Tokyo.

Journalists given a tour of the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant yesterday, including a reporter from The Associated Press, saw crumpled trucks and equipment still lying on the ground. A power pylon that collapsed in the tsunami, cutting electricity to the plant's vital cooling system and setting off the crisis, remained a mangled mess.

Officials said the worst is over but the plant remains vulnerable.

No journo harassed

FROM PAGE 20
IPI is a global organisation dedicated to the promotion and protection of press freedom.

The prime minister said the government, after assuming office in 2009, had abolished the section of the Special Powers Act that empowers the law enforcers to arrest journalists, Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Abul Kalam Azad briefed reporters after the meeting.

She mentioned that sometimes aggrieved individual persons filed defamation cases against newspapers for publishing, what they called, as untrue and fictitious. But the government did not have any involvement in those incidents.

The prime minister told the delegation that her government freed the media from all restrictions imposed by the

immediate past military-backed caretaker government.

She said the government enacted the Right to Information (RTI) Act and formed an Independent Information Commission to ensure the free flow of information.

Referring to the killing of 16 journalists during BNP-Jamaat regime, the prime minister said most of them were killed because of their professional commitments.

"Some BNP-Jamaat ministers and their musclemen were behind the murders," she alleged.

Hasina mentioned that 17 private television channels and four radio stations were currently in operation in the country. The present government has issued licenses to another 15 TV channels and seven FM radios.

According to Azad, the

prime minister said the government was working on formulating a broadcast policy and it would be finalised after taking the views and opinions of the stakeholders concerned.

"But, the BNP-Jamaat government just after taking over in 2001, shut down one private television channel for its pro-independence role," she said highlighting other incidents of repression on journalists and media during that time.

As the IPI delegation offered support for strengthening media in Bangladesh, the prime minister said her government would welcome any international cooperation in training up journalists, Azad added.

Ambassador at-Large M Ziauddin and PMO Secretary Mollah Wahiduzzaman were present.

DNA reveals clues

FROM PAGE 20
The work is published in the journal Molecular Biology and Evolution.

An international team of researchers studied the variation, or diversity, in mitochondrial DNA extracted from the bones of 13 Neanderthals.

This type of genetic information is passed down on the maternal line; because cells contain multiple copies of the mitochondrial genome, this DNA is easier to extract from ancient remains than the DNA found in the nuclei of cells.

The fossil specimens came from Europe and Asia and span a time period ranging from 100,000 years ago to about 35,000 years ago.

The scientists found that west European fossils with ages older than 48,000 years, along with Neanderthal specimens from Asia, showed considerable genetic variation.

But specimens from Western Europe younger than 48,000 years showed much less genetic diversity (a six-fold reduction in variation compared to the older remains and the Asian Neanderthals).

In their scientific paper, the scientists propose that some event - possibly changes in the climate - caused Neanderthal populations in the West to

crash around 50,000 years ago. But populations may have survived in warmer southern refuges, allowing the later re-expansion.

Low genetic variation can make a species less resilient to changes in its environment, and place it at increased risk of extinction.

"The fact that Neanderthals in Europe were nearly extinct, but then recovered, and that all this took place long before they came into contact with modern humans, came as a complete surprise," said lead author Love Dalen, from the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm.

"This indicates that the Neanderthals may have been more sensitive to the dramatic climate changes that took place in the last Ice Age than was previously thought."

Neanderthals were close evolutionary cousins of modern humans, and once inhabited Europe, the Middle East and Central Asia. The reasons behind their demise remain the subject of debate.

The appearance of modern humans in Europe around the time of the Neanderthal extinction offers circumstantial evidence that Homo sapiens played a role. But changes in the climate and other factors may have been important contributors.

"The amount of genetic variation in geologically older Neanderthals as well as in Asian Neanderthals was just as great as in modern humans as a species," said co-author Anders Gotherstrom, from Uppsala University.

"The variation among later European Neanderthals was not even as high as that of modern humans in Iceland."

The researchers note that the loss of genetic diversity in west European Neanderthals coincided with a climatic episode known as Marine Isotope Stage Three, which was characterised by several brief periods of freezing temperatures.

These cold periods are thought to have been caused by a disturbance of oceanic currents in the North Atlantic, and it is possible that they had a particularly strong impact on the environment in Western Europe, note the researchers.

Over the last few decades, research has shown that Neanderthals were under-serving of their brutish reputation.

Researchers recently announced that paintings of seals found in caves at Nerja, southern Spain, might date to 42,000 years - potentially making them the only known art created by Neanderthals. However, this interpretation remains controversial.

Pakistan army officials 'knew of Laden house'

BBC ONLINE

Mid-ranking Pakistani army officials may have known that Osama Bin Laden had a safe house in Pakistan, leaked material appears to indicate.

The claim was made in e-mails allegedly from US-based security think tank Stratfor, which were published by the whistleblowing website Wikileaks.

Stratfor warned ahead of publication it would make no comment on whether the e-mails were authentic or inaccurate.

Pakistan's government and military have denied knowing Bin Laden's whereabouts.

The al-Qaeda chief was killed in the Pakistani garrison town of Abbottabad in May last year in a covert mission by US special forces.

The compound in the north-western town was demolished by Pakistani authorities last weekend.

One email from a senior Stratfor employee to colleagues is quoted as saying: "Mid to senior level ISI and Pak Mil with one retired Pak Mil General that had knowledge of the OBL arrangements and safe house."

The messages go on to say that the names and specific ranks of these generals were unknown to the writer, but adds that US intelligence may have that information.

The emails allege that as many as 12 officials may have known, but says it is unclear exactly what position they may have had or even if they were retired personnel.

The information was allegedly obtained from material taken from the compound last May, according to the email exchange which took place in the weeks after the al-Qaeda chief's death.

It is unclear if the information was passed to the Pakistani government but the employee is quoted saying "I would not pass the info to the GOP [government of Pakistan], because we can't trust them."

2 ministers

FROM PAGE 20
Apparently aimed at gaining support of the transport workers, Shahjahan said, "A few months ago, I was about to lose my cabinet position because of my taking a stand in your (workers) favour, but I did not leave you. So, you should promise to stay beside me all the time."

In August last year, Shahjahan faced severe media criticism for recommending driving licences to over 24,000 people without written tests.

Claiming that the number of road accidents had been reduced, Shahjahan Khan said Bangladesh now ranked second among high accident-prone countries across the globe, while it was on the top few months ago.

However, addressing the function as chief guest, Quader stressed the need for government officials, transport owners and workers to work together to minimise road accidents and to develop the transport sector.

Heavily criticising the role of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), the communications minister said there were huge problems and corruption in the BRTA. Those anomalies would be removed on an urgent basis.

In response to workers' various demands, Quader assured a fulfilment of those demands that were rational and urged the workers not to call strikes.

BRTA Chairman Ayubur Rahman and leaders of bus-minibus workers' organisations also spoke at the meeting.

RHD HOLIDAYS CANCELLED

The communications ministry yesterday decided to cancel holidays for officials and employees of the Roads and Highways Division for the next three months to speed up maintenance activities on roads and highways across the country.

"The next three months are a dry season. We have taken the decision to reduce people's sufferings," the communications minister said at the function.