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# Motor vehicle deal in June

Agreement to allow cross-border movement of vehicles in 4 Saarc countries

REZAUL KARIM

Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal are expected to sign a motor vehicle agreement in June to start seamless transit of passenger, cargo and personal vehicle between the countries later this year.

Diplomatic sources said transport ministers of the four Saarc nations, also known as BBIN, are likely to meet in Thimphu, Bhutan to ink the deal, which now awaits cabinet approvals.

Talking to The Daily Star on Thursday, a senior official of the Roads and Highways Division said the Ministry of Road Transport and Bridges had almost completed the "internal procedure" for the deal's approval.

The agreement is likely to be placed in a cabinet meeting at the end of this month or early May for the final approval, he said.

The official also said the foreign ministry had already given its opinion in favour of signing the four-nation agreement which has the provision for the other Saarc nations to join the framework.

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Hajji Salim and Sayeed Khokon exchange greetings with locals at Chawkbazar in Old Dhaka after offering Juma prayers together at Chawkbazar Shahi Masjid yesterday. Now out of the mayoral race, Salim has agreed to work for Khokon, the Awami League-backed mayoral candidate for Dhaka South City Corporation polls.

PHOTO: STAR

# Haji Salim joins hands with Khokon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League leader Hajji Mohammad Salim has joined hands with the party-backed mayor candidate Sayeed Khokon to ensure the latter's victory in Dhaka South City Corporation polls.

Salim and Khokon along with other AL leaders offered Juma prayers at the Chawkbazar Shahi Masjid and had lunch together yesterday.

"He [Salim] has invited me to come to Chawkbazar mosque and offer Juma prayers. I have accepted his invitation," Khokon told reporters after saying the prayers.

"As a candidate, I have sought blessings from Muslims and he [Salim] also sought blessings," he said.

AL leaders Mahbul Alam Hanif, Jahangir Kabir

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# Biman leases 2 planes for domestic flights

Operations resume Monday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two leased Bombardier Dash 8 planes arrived in Dhaka yesterday afternoon putting Biman Bangladesh Airlines on track to resume its domestic flight operations from Monday, after almost a three-year pause.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will formally release the turbo-prop Dash 8-Q400 aircraft for commercial operations on Saturday at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, says a Biman press release.

After a couple of years of trying to acquire turbo-prop aircraft, the national flag carrier

finally dry leased the planes from Egypt's Smart Aviation for five years in an effort to grab a share of the growing domestic market, now dominated by local private airlines.

Manufactured by Bombardier of Canada, the Dash 8 Q400 is a 74-seater single-isle, single-class plane.

Biman sources said the airlines would have to pay \$1.68 lakh a month for each of the planes. It would also have to set aside \$600 for every flying hour for maintenance.

Due to a shortage of planes, Biman had suspended operations on four of the seven

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# Cops hunt for coordinator

Detectives learn 11 involved in Oyasiqur killing mission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 11 persons, mostly madrasa students, were involved in the murder of online activist Oyasiqur Rahman Babu, detectives say.

Five of them were trained at a two-room apartment of a five-storey building at Nayanagar in the capital's Jatrabari. They were recruited by five different persons, including their coordinator known to them as Mashul alias Masum.

DB officials learnt these after interrogating Zikrullah and Ariful Islam, who were caught by people and handed over to

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

# Yemen rebels quit presidential palace

Saudis airdrop arms to Aden defenders; Qaeda makes gains; Pakistan, China evacuate citizens

AFP, Aden

Saudi-led air raids drove back rebels in the last stronghold of Yemen's absent president yesterday, while al-Qaeda militants seized a major army base in the southeast of the country.

The impoverished Arabian Peninsula state has sunk further into chaos since the coalition spearheaded by Riyadh launched Operation Decisive Storm on March 26 to try to halt the advance by Shia Huthi rebels.

The turmoil has raised fears that al-Qaeda will expand its foothold in the deeply tribal country, which borders oil-rich Saudi Arabia and lies near key shipping routes.

On Friday the Sunni extremists captured the regional army headquarters in Mukalla, capital of the southeastern province of Hadramawt, with no resistance, a military official said.

The militants now control nearly all of the city, where they stormed a jail and freed 300 inmates a day earlier.

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Like many villages in Bangladesh, this one on the bank of Durgadunai River on the edge of Indian part of Sundarbans was hit by cyclone Aila in 2009.

# A trip through Indian part of Sundarbans

PINAKI ROY, BACK FROM INDIA

Things did not work as per the plan from the very beginning. The bad news came even before we flew to Kolkata.

The organisers said they had to change the plan as their luxury boat MV Paramhangsa had not got permission to cross the India-Bangladesh border.

Initially it was planned that a group of Bangladeshi journalists would fly to Kolkata, get on board the Paramhangsa along with a group of Indian journalists and return to Khulna through the trans-border waterways flowing through the Sundarbans.

The aim was to give the journalists from both countries an opportunity to observe the vulnerability, threats and the current situation of the world's largest mangrove forest, the home of Bengal tigers.

It was also expected that the journalists would get a chance to discuss what role they might play to save the ailing Sundarbans.

But the journey was cut short and limited within the rivers of the Indian part of 'bushy Sundarbans'.

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# BFA training flights stop in Rajshahi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Two days after the crash of one of its planes in Rajshahi, Bangladesh Flying Academy yesterday suspended all its operations indefinitely and moved its trainers and students to Dhaka following instructions from the crash investigators.

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**ONLINE POLL**

Do you think BNP's demand to the Election Commission to deploy army in Dhaka and Ctg city elections is justified?

Yes (80%)  
No (20%)

TOTAL VOTES: 45

**TODAY'S POLL**

Do you think that private sector employers would accept govt plans to make a law to introduce a mandatory pension scheme in the sector?

PLEASE CAST YOUR VOTE AT [www.thedailystar.net](http://www.thedailystar.net)

# Govt to merge 2 war crimes tribunals

A single court is enough to deal with pending cases

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

The government will merge the two international crimes tribunals into one as the number of pending war crimes cases has dropped recently.

"Within a few weeks, we will turn two International Crimes Tribunals into a single tribunal through reconstitution as more than one tribunal is not necessary now," Law Minister Huq told The Daily Star recently.

Only a few war crimes cases are now pending with the two tribunals as most of the cases have already been settled by them, he said.

There is no necessity of keeping six High Court judges in the tribunals for holding trials of the remaining few war crimes related cases, the law minister said.

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# Japan's internet cafe refugees

MAIL ONLINE

An increasing number of low income Japanese men and women are permanently living in tiny dark cubicles at internet cafes where they play video games in their spare time while saving on rent.

Known as 'internet cafe refugees', they spend every night washing, sleeping and eating at the gaming centres in between what is usually low-paid and menial employment, the People's Daily Online reported.

The worrying trend has been featured in a short documentary by Japanese photojournalist Shihou Fukada. Called Net Cafe Refugees, it reveals the lifestyle of people who moved from spending most of their time to all of their time inside internet cafes.

The trend started in the 1990s with some young men spending a growing amount of

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