

## Fuel fillers go on strike today

### Govt threatens legal action, police, BDR on alert

**STAR REPORT**  
 As the filling station owners go on indefinite strike from today, the government has said they would face up to three years in prison if they refuse to serve customers. The government yesterday declared petroleum products essential under the Essential Commodity Act (ECA) that provides for the punishment after talks with the Petrol Pump Owners Association fell through yesterday. The owners refused to withdraw their demand for compensation for evaporation and operational cost from the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC). The govern-

ment has termed the demand "unreasonable". "The government has already increased their commissions," State Minister for Energy and Resources AKM Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star last night. "The commission hike would cost the government an additional Tk 47 crore every year. We cannot offer more than that." Commission on depot prices of octane and petrol has been refixed at 1.9 per cent and diesel at 2.06 per cent since January 8. The association says the commission hike is nominal. As the association stuck to its position, the government had little

choice other than declaring petroleum as essential goods, the state minister said. "The decision would be implemented tomorrow (Thursday) through a gazette notification. We have already put the police and the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) on alert for any untoward incident." The association, however, said it was still open to fresh negotiations. "We cannot do anything if a democratic government takes such a decision," Organising Secretary of the Petrol Pump Owners Association Nazmul Haque said. "We will hold a meeting among ourselves again and decide on the next course of action." "We cannot provide services to

people by spending our own money." Meanwhile, most of the filling stations in the city pulled the shutters down from last night. But the government depots would remain open, said the state minister. Earlier at the talks, the state minister asked the association leaders to form a committee, comprising representatives from petroleum agents and dealers, and the energy ministry, for evaluation of their demand. The leaders turned down the minister's offer and stuck to their strike decision. Mosharraf Hossain said with law enforcers in action, petroleum



Motorcars queue up for fuel at a filling station in the city yesterday as petroleum dealers, distributors, agents and petrol pump owners go on an indefinite strike from today. PHOTO: STAR



A six-storey shopping mall at the Shankar intersection on Satmasjid Road has been constructed with the walkway in the front converted into a parking space. PHOTO: STAR

## Doctored buildings on missing files

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
 The trick is simple. Have your land assessed by an architect. Get them to draw a design, meticulously abiding by all the building construction rules. Then get the plan approved by the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha (Rajuk). Now, take a copy of the approved plan to an architect 'who knows exactly what to do'. Follow the doctored plan and you have a building that grossly violates all the Rajuk rules. For instance, the rules forbid you from building a market at an intersection, and make it mandatory to have proper parking facilities.

But when the building is constructed following the doctored plan, you will find it a bustling shopping mall on a narrow, busy intersection without any proper parking facilities. The results - traffic jams and pollution. Traffic sergeants will sweat to streamline traffic. Noise pollution will soar. The walkways will turn into parking space and pedestrians will be forced to walk on the busy roads. In case your building plan is rejected for one reason or another, the Rajuk officials and their organised gangs are ready to help you out. If someone wants approval for a 20-storey building at a location marked for six-storey buildings, the

gang would get the approval with 'proper signatures' of the 'authorised officers', sources said. In the process, they would hide or destroy the files in Rajuk's archive. If the shopping mall venture becomes a public concern and attracts media attention, Rajuk would be asked to review the plan. But don't be surprised when Rajuk's 'naïve' officials report that they cannot find any file or plan of the building and so they cannot take any action. The excuse Rajuk top officials usually give is that the whole 'nuisance' took place during the tenure

## Electioneering ends tonight in 327 unions

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
 The Union Parishad (UP) polls begin next Saturday. The Election Commission (EC) is set to conduct the two-month long polls, amid speculations of violence and intimidation. Electioneering comes to an end at 12.00 tonight (Thursday night) in 327 union parishads, where voting takes place on the first day. Contenders and campaigners were seen adopting new techniques to pursue voters in different places. Colourful processions were brought out in villages in favour of the candidates vying for the posts of member and chairman at the lowest tier of the local government. The workers were distributing leaflets and posters. Boys and girls, young and adults, were chanting slogans, braving the biting cold, in favour of the candidates of their choice, according to information received in the capital. Side by side, the candidates went on a door-to-door last minute campaign. Spokesman at the Election Commission secretariat told the Daily Star yesterday that the commission had finished all preparations to conduct the election peacefully, although the government was yet to respond to the EC's demand for deployment of the army. Meantime, the EC has chalked out an elaborate security plan with members of police, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Ansars. According to the plan, 15 law enforcers, five of them armed, will guard every polling centre. The BDR will be deployed as a strike force.

## Religious group halts women's football

**SPORTS REPORTER**  
 A religious group yesterday forced cancellation of a women's exhibition football match in Netrokona saying 'women playing football is degrading and obscene.' The Towhidi Janata, a little known group, kicked off its hate campaign on Tuesday and threatened to stage a sit-in outside the Netrokona playground if the match between the visiting West Bengal team and the Netrokona XI was not called off. The tourists, who arrived in Bangladesh on January 18, were scheduled to travel to the northern district from Dhaka to play the last game of their three-match tour, but had to stay back at the Sultana Kamal Women's Complex in city for security fears. "It is unfortunate that they have to leave Bangladesh earlier than expected. The girls are really scared now knowing the reason behind the cancellation of the match," said Indian team leader Shankar Das. The panic-stricken visitors rushed back to India via the Benapole border in the evening yesterday. Their first game in Jessore on January 19 and the second match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on January 21 however passed off peacefully.

## Teesta talks drift to April meeting

### Delhi turns down Dhaka demand for interim arrangement

**STAR REPORT**  
 Talks to share the Teesta water ended in failure as Bangladesh and India remained wide apart in their views at the end of a two-day secretary-level meeting in the city yesterday. However, both sides will sit again in April in New Delhi to find a solution at least to Teesta water. Delhi made it clear that a permanent water-sharing agreement for

Teesta, as Dhaka demands, is not possible without hydrological survey. It also turned down Dhaka's proposal for an interim arrangement until the study is done, according to meeting sources. The two-day meeting of the joint committee of experts (JCE) of the Joint Rivers Commission also focused on water-sharing of six other common rivers - Dharla, Doodhkumar, Monu, Khowai, Gumi and Muhuri.

Delhi also pinned hydrological surveys to any water-sharing arrangement for these rivers. "We have narrowed down our differences and hope to settle the matters in the next meeting. Water sharing is a very technical and complicated matter," Indian Water Secretary AK Goswami who led his country told newsmen after the talks. "We will continue dialogues to

## Morshed off to US for talks with Powell

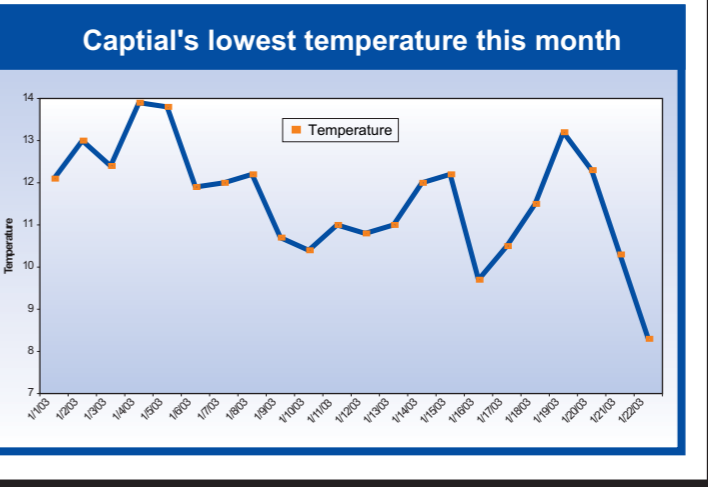
**UNB, Dhaka**  
 Foreign Minister Morshed Khan left for Washington yesterday evening for talks with US Secretary of State Colin Powell on Friday to sort out the issue of immigration restrictions imposed on Bangladeshis. Khan embarked upon the urgent mission as the US measure taken against 'terror-risk' countries could adversely affect Bangladesh's interests. Earlier talking to reporters, Khan said he would like to know from his counterpart about the criteria for including Bangladesh in the restriction list. On Saturday, Khan wrote to Powell for excluding Bangladesh from the list of countries with immigration restrictions imposed by the US Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), "since Bangladesh is a moderate, tolerant and democratic Muslim country".

## Coldest day this winter

### Mercury may dip further, thick fog likely

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
 A second cold wave hit the country yesterday pushing the mercury down to 4.3 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga, the lowest this season. Yesterday, eight international flights were delayed at Zia International Airport (ZIA) due to fog. Several passenger launches were also delayed. Even a bright sun could not beat off the chill in the capital. The Dhaka dwellers were caught off-guard when the temperature hit the lowest of 8.3 degrees Celsius of the season yesterday. And the Met office forecast could not bring any warmth, as it said temperature might dip further in the next two days. The met office also forecast thick fog in early mornings.

The lowest temperature so far recorded in the country is 2.8 degrees Celsius in Srimangal on February 4, 1968. According to ZIA, two Biman Bangladesh Airlines flights, one from Jeddah and another from London, were diverted to Chittagong. Northward long distance coaches were also delayed.



## Iqbal's bail prayer rejected, sent to jail

**COURT CORRESPONDENT**  
 Former Awami League lawmaker Dr HBM Iqbal, an accused in connection with the Malibagh killings on February 13, 2001, was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday, after his bail petition was rejected. Iqbal, along with his lawyers advocates Abdul Baset Majumder, Kamrul Islam, and Jahangir Hossain Selim, appeared before the Speedy Trial Tribunal, Dhaka Division at 10.30am yesterday and sought bail. The lawyers stated that Iqbal obtained ad-interim bail from the High Court (HC) and he did not misuse the privilege of bail. Moreover, he was not an FIR-named



Former Awami League lawmaker HBM Iqbal is on his way to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday. The Speedy Trial Tribunal, Dhaka Division sent him to jail in connection with the Malibagh killings. PHOTO: STAR

## Draft law on HR commission okayed

**UNB, Dhaka**  
 A meeting of the cabinet committee on the proposed human rights commission yesterday finalised the draft of the proposed law in this regard. The meeting with Law Minister Moudud Ahmed in the chair yesterday went through the draft and finalised it, which will be placed before the cabinet meeting on February 3. On approval by the cabinet, the bill is likely to be placed in the ensuing session of parliament. Officials said the proposed Human Rights Commission would have five members including a retired judge and a female member. Three others will be drawn from personalities having role in the field of human rights.

## West Bengal police nab 164 alleged Bangladeshis

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
 West Bengal police yesterday claimed that they had arrested 164 alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, including 84 women and children, from Jhargram in West Medinipur and Chagachha in Howrah. BBC last night reported that the deputy inspector general (DIG) of police of the state, Narayan Ghosh claimed that the arrested had come from Mumbai and other places in Maharashtra. DIG Ghosh told BBC that the police arrested 77 Bangladeshis from the railway station of Jhargram in West Medinipur on Tuesday night, as they had failed to show any documents. He claimed that the arrested people said that some brokers had brought them from Bangladesh. He further said another 87 Bangladeshis were arrested from Chagachha in Howrah. He said this group also told the police that two or three brokers had brought them from Bangladesh. Ghosh said that they were returning to Bangladesh from Mumbai, as they could not find any employment opportunity there. He said they might be pushed back to Bangladesh after their trial. Meanwhile, an official of the deputy high commission of

## One to die for acid attack on housewife

**COURT CORRESPONDENT**  
 The 8th Additional District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday sentenced a man to death for acid attack on a housewife. Mohammad Saidul Islam of Dohar in Dhaka district was tried in absentia and convicted of throwing acid on his brother's wife Hena Begum. The case filed with Dohar Police Station alleged that on May 6, 1994, Saidul threw acid on the victim as she rejected his amorous advances. After cross-examination of all 10 prosecution witnesses, Judge Mir Mohammad Awlad Hossain found the accused guilty and announced the verdict in a jam-packed courtroom. The death sentence would be carried out after convict's arrest.