

JS turns down 113 opposition motions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday rejected 113 'adjournment motions' submitted by opposition lawmakers on grounds of lack of sufficient evidence and recency. Five opposition legislators gave the notices seeking discussion on a raft of issues including ferry accidents and the war on Iraq, setting aside scheduled business of the House. The Chair disposed of the notices yesterday in the second sitting of the current session, boycotted by legislators from the key opposition party, Awami League (AL). AL deputies walked out of the House on Thursday, the first day of the session, protesting against what they said denial of their rights to speak on the floor on different public issues, including rehabilitation of the accused in the Jail-Killing Case. Shahjahan Khan, Faruk Khan
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5,500 corporation jobs on the line

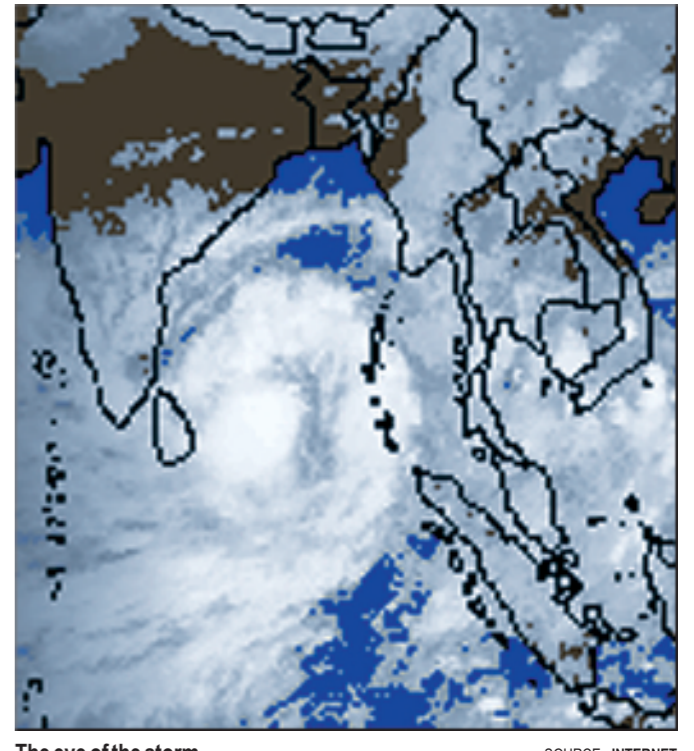
REAZ AHMAD
 The government will shed 5,500 jobs under the industries ministry. Industries Minister MK Anwar told the Jatiya Sangsad last night that a decision on the retrenchment has already been made. Later, Anwar told The Daily Star that the finance ministry has already allocated Tk 300 crore to say goodbye to the officials and employees of three corporations -- the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation and Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation. Anwar said the process of 'staff rationalisation' to make the corporations profitable would complete within a month. He said the government was getting "full cooperation" from the staff whose jobs would be axed. Speaking on two separate bills passed by the parliament for merger of two government offices - the Patents and Designs and the Trademark -- GM Kader of the Jatiya Party said such steps would not help contain wastage of public money. Rather, establishment of good governance is of urgent need. In response, Anwar revealed the decision of downsizing the three corporations and assured the House that the government was putting in its best effort to improve governance. During the Awami League tenure, the parliamentary standing committee on industries ministry had several meetings on shedding staff from different offices under the ministry. The Jatiya Sangsad last night also witnessed the passage of two bills -- Trade Marks (Amendment) Bill, 2003 and the Patents and Designs (Amendment) Bill, 2003. It also rejected GM Kader's proposal for seeking public opinion on these two bills. With the passage of the bills, a government decision taken back in
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HC directive for protecting parks and playgrounds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The High Court yesterday issued a *rule nisi* upon the authorities concerned to explain why they should not be directed to ensure proper maintenance and protection of 10 playgrounds and 61 parks of the city. The rule followed a petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA). The BELA argued that the parks, open spaces, gardens and playgrounds of Dhaka city are fast diminishing due to illegal occupation, poor maintenance, unlawful construction and so on. A Division Bench comprising Justice Tafazzul Islam and Justice A F M Abdur Rahman also directed
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Cyclone brews over Bay

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The tropical depression located over the Bay of Bengal has developed into a tropical cyclone. The storm is centred near 9.7 degrees north and 87.2 degrees east and is moving to the northwest at 15 miles per hour (mph). It packs the storm packs a sustained wind speed of 70mph with gusts reaching up to 85mph. The tropical cyclone is expected to intensify over the next 24 hours as it moves slowly to the northwest, met office sources said. However, they could not confirm where and when the cyclone might strike. Last evening the cyclone was
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The eye of the storm. SOURCE: INTERNET

AL calls 8-hour hartal tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday called for an eight-hour hartal across the country tomorrow. The 6:00am-2:00pm strike is mainly aimed at protesting the appointment of Major (rtd) Khairuzzaman, an accused in the Jail Killing Case, to the foreign ministry and switching off of the microphone of opposition leader Sheikh Hasina in parliament on May 8. Tuesday's agitation will also register protest at making parliament 'inactive', price-spiral of essentials, deterioration of law and order, and attack on AL leaders including party's presidium member Dr Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir. The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the party's central working committee and parliamentary body yesterday with
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Two boys glide down a slide yesterday at the children's park at English Road in Old Dhaka. Built around 20 years ago, the park nowadays is a hangout for drug addicts. To make matters worse, trucks and vans use it as a makeshift stand.
 PHOTO: A K M MOHSIN

Land ports remain deadlocked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
 Another land port in the northwest faces strike by the clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents while trade through all three ports in the south-western region remain suspended. Hundreds of trucks and rail wagons are now stranded with inbound goods at the border points. The situation at the Sona Mosque Land Port in Chapainawabganj is heading for a deadlock as the C&F agents have decided to go on an indefinite strike from May 24 over conflict with the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). The conflict arose after the BDR seized a number of trucks loaded with undeclared goods and banned items. The C&F agents observed a two-hour strike yesterday and decided to observe a four-hour strike today and a half-day strike on Tuesday before going for an indefinite strike if 'harassment by the BDR' does not stop. The C&F agents at a press conference yesterday alleged that the BDR was illegally seizing imported goods. Port sources said the government suffers a revenue loss of around Tk 15 crore every month because of widespread tax evasion through false declaration of goods. A section of customs officials and some C&F agents, importers and law-enforcement agencies are allegedly involved in the scheme. Their nexus came to light when the BDR seized 23 trucks of illegal goods in the last 30 days. Customs officials and traders accused Commanding Officer of the BDR at Chapainawabganj Lieutenant Colonel KM Mominur Rahman of high-handedness after the BDR seized at least 16 trucks in 10 days and filed 11 cases. Mominur was later transferred to Dinajpur on April 16.
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Cabinet to scrutinise anti-corruption body draft today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 A draft of an independent anti-corruption commission will be placed at the cabinet meeting today, which, if cleared, will be tabled in the parliament's coming budget session, sources said. The proposed commission would consist of three members. The president as per the recommendation of a six-member selection committee would appoint the members. Two government nominees, two nominees of the chief justice, the comptroller and auditor general and the chairman of the Public Service Commission will sit on the selection committee. The selection committee would propose several names for the anti-corruption commission on the basis of their competence, efficiency, honesty, educational qualification and experience. Any person, former bureaucrat or otherwise, can become a nominee. The president would then pick a chairman and two members from this panel. As per the constitution, the president is required to consult the prime minister in this regard. The commission would be empowered to take steps against ministers, state ministers, MPs, other public representatives and government officials of any level facing corruption charges. The commission members will have a four-year term during which they can only be removed by the Supreme Judicial Council consisting of the chief justice and two senior members of the Appellate Division.
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Section 54, 167 case Hearing on govt appeal against HC verdict tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Hearing on a government appeal petition against a High Court verdict that made illegal detention under Special Powers Act of anyone arrested on suspicion under Section 54 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) will be held at the Supreme Court on Tuesday. The chamber judge of the Appellate Division, Syed J R Mudassar Hossain, yesterday heard the petition and decided to send it to the full bench of the Division. The government filed the appeal against the High Court verdict on Saturday. Additional Attorney General Abdur Razzak Khan on behalf of the government sought a stay order on the High Court verdict. Barrister Tanjib-Ul-Alam
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Meet on WB loan sees rift over energy tariff

REJAUL KARIM BYRON
 A meeting between the World Bank (WB) and the government on a \$300 million balance of payment support credit ended inconclusively yesterday over rift on an energy pricing formula that would see tariffs shoot up. The meeting will resume today for the Bangladesh Development Support credit. To get the facility, the government has to agree on three conditions -- reforming the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), forming an independent anti-corruption commission and adjusting energy prices. The two sides yesterday remained wide apart on the energy pricing formula that aims at 'adjusting' the prices of fuel, power and gas on the basis of a new six-year formula. Earlier, the WB sent the finance ministry a letter on these three conditions, stating that the government should place a draft of the anti-corruption commission at the cabinet by April. It also outlined a plan on the NCB reforms which says that by September the government should change the management of at least one bank as a starter, among others. The government has missed the April deadline on the anti-corruption body and will place the draft at the cabinet today for approval. The status of NCB reforms and the proposed anti-corruption body were also discussed. Police yesterday arrested the parents of Shahriar Mahmood Kabir who earlier surrendered to the Motijheel Police Station after the killing of Halima Khatun, their housemaid at Shajahanpur. Police produced Shahriar's father Shahjahan Kabir and mother Mahmuda Kabir before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday afternoon. The court placed Kabir on a two-day remand and sent Mahmuda to the Dhaka Central Jail. Shahriar was interrogated on the first day of his two-day remand yesterday after police showed him as an arrestee in the housemaid murder case following his surrender on Friday.

Maid murder Employers arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
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Proposal for gas, power price hike turned down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 The Economic Affairs Council of the government yesterday rejected an energy ministry proposal for a massive increase in gas and power prices for most consumers. Sources said the council meeting chaired by Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman termed the proposal as "unrealistic" and "inconsistent with the socio-economic condition". The finance minister also maintained that the proposed gas pricing formula was 'flawed'. He noted that if the proposal was sent again in future, it should at first be reviewed on the basis of socio-economic condition.
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Rescue Khosru, reiterates press in port city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong
 Agitating journalists in Sitakunda yesterday reiterated their demand for rescue of the local press club president, Atahar Siddique Khosru, and protested arrest of Mahmudul Haq, another journalist. They termed the case against Mahmudul Haq false and demanded formation of a judicial committee to investigate the abduction of Khosru. The demands came at a meeting at the Sitakunda Press Club with its General Secretary Jahangir Alam in the chair. They also accused Assistant Superintendent of Police (Sitakunda) Moazzam Haq and Sub-Inspector Mahubul Morshed of abetting the abductors and harassing pressmen.
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Insulin trouble for diabetic patients

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
 Insulin dependent diabetic patients are facing a health hazard, as 'a good number' of vials of insulin are smuggled into Bangladesh from some Middle Eastern countries without proper preservation. Sources at the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) said about 20 per cent of the insulin dependent patients are using smuggled insulin without being aware of the danger. The smuggled products are available at drug stores in the city as well as in the district towns. Sources said insulin should be preserved in a cool place or a container having a temperature of less than 20 degrees Celsius to retain effectiveness. "When insulin is legally imported it is stored in a cool flask," said an official of the DAB, which first detected the smuggled insulin in the market. "The smuggled insulin is brought into the country through passengers' baggage and no preservation method is followed," the sources said. "Such insulin used by the diabetics may not have any effect and could lead to serious complications," said the sources. It is reported that some Bangladeshis, working in hospitals of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait, procure insulin, supplied to the hospitals free of cost, and send it to Bangladesh. Two brands of insulin including Actrapid and Insulatard are mainly smuggled into the country. The smuggled insulin has a label with a date tree printed on it and Arabic writing on its pack. In Bangladesh the DAB and some other companies import insulin which has to have the registration number of the drug administration and the name of the importer. But the smuggled ones do not bear the seal of the drug administration or the name of the importer. Some drug traders at Shabbagh said they sell smuggled insulin as the margin of profit is higher.
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Where have the hilshas gone?

AKTER FARUK SHAHIN, Barisal
 Hilsha, once found plenty, is now a rare fish. The hilsha season began about a month ago, but there is yet no trace of the usual swarm of the fish in the bay. According to fishermen and wholesalers, the season of hilsha began from early April. The season is expected to last for at least four months. Fishermen and suppliers are frustrated, as very few hilsha have been caught this season. The general secretary of the wholesalers association of Barisal said during the peak season 10 to 15 thousand maunds of hilsha is caught every day, but the production has come down to a few hundred maunds.
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Workers laze out at a hub of hilsha in Barisal, as they have no work these days. Hilsha is not found in plenty, although its season began in early April.
 PHOTO: STAR