

## Hasina supports demand for new wage board

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday supported the demand for a new wage board for the newspapermen.

"The government admitted that the cost of living has increased by tabling bills seeking enhanced allowances for the prime minister, speaker, ministers and MPs, she said while talking to a delegation of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) at the party's Dhanmondi office.

Led by DUJ President Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan and General Secretary Omar Faruque, the delegation apprised the Awami League chief of different problems of the newspaper industry and sought her cooperation in solving these issues.

If the salaries of prime minister, speaker, ministers, MPs and government officials are raised, why journalists and other newspapermen would not get it, she said. A new wage board had to be announced immediately, she said.

Sheikh Hasina gave the delegation a patient hearing and assured them of possible help. She urged the journalists to play a courageous role in combating crimes.

Referring to the killing of Chhatra League leader SR Polish, the Leader

of the Opposition said none dared to file a case against the criminals as they were threatening the victim's family over telephone.

Journalist leaders Habibur Rahman Milon, Akhter Ahmed Khan, Yasin Ahmed, Swapan Kumar Saha, Azizul Islam Bhuiyan, Saiful Alam, Saiful Islam Talukder, Noor-e-Jannat Akter Sima and Sohel Sani also spoke.

Awami League leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Kader, Sultan Mohammad Mansur Ahmed, Nazma Rahman, Advocate Abdul Mannan, Nuh-ul-Alam Lenin and Abdul Latif Siddiqui were present during the meeting.

## Saddam alive

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The intercepts indicated that Saddam was alive and needed to be protected, the newspaper said.

The United States said on Wednesday it had captured one of Saddam's closest aides, Abid Hamid Mahmud al-Tikriti, who was often at the side of the deposed Iraqi ruler. Mahmud now faces tough interrogation on the whereabouts of Saddam.

## Babri Mosque

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Giriraj Kishore were present. "I was also present in the meeting".

A letter was drafted by Rajmata Vijay Raje Scindia and Swami Chinmayanand, now Union Minister of State for Home, saying that the kar sewa would be symbolic and the government would protect the disputed structure, he said.

The same was sent to the Supreme Court and acting on that the apex court allowed kar sewa at Ayodhya, he said.

## Soccer clash leaves 50 hurt in B'baria

UNB, Brahmanbaria

At least 50 people were injured in a clash between two rival groups of villagers over a football match at Khariwala village in Ashuganj upazila yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the trouble erupted in the afternoon when the two sides sat for an arbitration to resolve disputes over the football match. Police rushed to the spot and dispersed the warring groups firing 16 blank shots.

Twenty-four of the injured were admitted to Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital.

## Body recovered

FROM PAGE 1 Firoz's body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for autopsy.

Police arrested one Nurul Islam Sujon on Thursday for his alleged involvement in the killing of the couple. Sujon is being interrogated on a seven-day police remand.

Police suspect that Firoz was the killers' actual target and Rubina was murdered because she recognised the killers.

A case was filed with Pallabi Police Station.

## Military action

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On Thursday criticised Iran's failure to comply with agreements designed to prevent the use of civilian nuclear resources to make atomic weapons.

But its statement fell short of the damning resolution Washington had hoped for.

## Bottled water

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water in the market, to the best of his knowledge, was impure. He said the so-called mineral waters marketed under catchy brand names were just tap water and that half of those products were impure.

It was also reported that BSTI had earlier conducted a random survey and examined samples of bottled water produced by a number of companies. The tests reportedly revealed that many of the samples did not contain the minerals as stated on the labels on their bottles. Besides, it was also found that levels of some of the ingredients found in different water samples were higher than specified for pure drinking water. Finally, the accepted levels of other microscopic elements as laid down by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) were also found to have been violated in many cases.

Under the circumstances, the government should direct its agencies concerned to ensure that quality control through a foolproof method is maintained and that violators are no longer allowed to operate with impunity.

It is widely felt that the authorities concerned should take necessary steps to verify information about the water processing systems, machinery used for the disinfecting process and all other relevant procedures as well as the sources of water.

The BSTI should be adequately equipped with modern equipment and laboratory facilities to correctly determine the quality of these bottled waters. Water-borne diseases can be deadly and any negligence by the authorities concerned could wreck havoc on public health.

## Water of poison

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has been providing such assistance under a grant through the DPHE to increase people's access to safe drinking water under a five-year project --DPHE-DANIDA Water Supply & Sanitation Components."

It has a target of bringing 1.3 million people in the coastal districts under safe drinking water coverage by June 2005 and half its target has already been achieved, claimed the officials.

But in reality the picture is different.

Suman cannot even apply for a government sanction for a tubewell because his unemployed family members cannot afford to make advance payments.

There are many such 'poorest of the poor' families which badly need safe drinking water but have no money to participate in the process of installing a DPHE-supplied tubewell.

Asked how the affected poor people like Suman's family could get tubewells, regional coordinator of the DAM Md Asaduzzaman said, "We are helpless. It is the policymakers who decide and we simply execute the plans. We cannot even ask the beneficiaries to pay the money later since we have to strictly follow the rules."

According to Alamgir Hossain, an official of the Association for Community Health Services, a partner of the DAM, those who are not able to pay are not selected as a member of the beneficiary group. "We choose only those who can pay the full amount of Tk 4,500."



PHOTO: STAR

Child artistes stage a dance sequence during a cultural programme, organised by the Kendrio Kachhi Kanchar Mela on the 92nd birth anniversary of poet Sufia Kamal in Dhaka yesterday.

## People's Right to Know

FROM PAGE 1

"In his interview with the daily Ittefaq on Tuesday, June 17, 2003 he said, (we quote the portion that deals with the media, translation ours). "When a political party makes a defamatory statement then the responsibility for that statement must be borne by that party and the person who made it. Similarly responsibility also lies with the newspapers that publish them. I have nothing personal against newspapers or journalists. But just as we politicians are answerable to our electorate similarly newspapers must be answerable to their readers and to the law of the land. But when some journalists and newspapers (he obviously means us and the Prothom Alo since he filed a case only against us) work to carry out agenda of any political party then that fact must be exposed to the public."

We welcome his comments to Ittefaq and find them eminently sensible. Mr. Chowdhury has every right to take us to court, which we respect, and we have every obligation to answer to our readers and to the law of the land, which we acknowledge. Let us examine what we wrote that made us "information terrorists" and convinced Mr. Chowdhury that we were implementing the 'agenda' of a political party. A letter by no less a person than the general secretary of our biggest opposition party was sent to no less a person than the prime minister of the country, about no less a subject than Bangladesh's candidature for the post of the secretary general of no less an institution than the biggest body of Muslim countries, the OIC.

The first question to ask is "Is this public interest or not?" More importantly do the people of Bangladesh have the "right to know" what is in that letter? As responsible newspapers are we to report it or not? We thought yes, and so did most newspapers in the country and a private news agency. Some newspapers published the full text of the letter and several others extensive extracts from it. They all did so from the fundamental responsibility of informing the public about what our biggest opposition party has to say to the government of the day about something which has a lot to do with our international standing.

The question therefore is why does Mr. Chowdhury feel defamed only by The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo, when more than several dozen newspapers across the country published the same news? Let us examine what we printed. Our report quotes Mr. Abdul Jalil's letter as saying "he was a controversial man" (which Mr. Chowdhury accepts in his Ittefaq interview) and that "nominating such a person is insulting to the nation as a whole"(an opinion that any citizen, leave alone a political party, has every right to have). The report quotes Jalil as saying "We will visit OIC countries if need be to inform them about his dark past." The report further quotes "You (the private minister) are aware that the Salauddin Quader Chowdhury was suspended from the BNP several times for his indecent behaviour. The Awami League thinks that such a man is unfit for the OIC secretary general's office". As Mr. Chowdhury rightly pointed out that we must be

answerable to our readers, so we urge our readers to read (again) our news item of June 3, 2003 and decide for themselves as to how much "information terrorism" we have indulged in.

The principal point to underscore here is that if democracy is to serve the people then we must be fully informed about the type of person who aspires to lead us. The public and the independent media must subject Mr. Chowdhury to every scrutiny as long as he is in the public domain. He said that he has nothing personal against the media or journalists. We also assure him that we have nothing personal against him. This is evidenced by the frequency of reports that we publish on him, which is very less. His speeches in the parliament get covered on the basis of its newsworthiness. He has been in the media lately because of his comments on women, Bangla culture and Amar Ekushey. His recent coverage by the media came when he became the country's nominee for the OIC post. So where is the "information terrorism" and malicious campaign against him that he accuses The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo of?

The moment he got nominated, the media should have started to examine his credential to gauge whether or not he was the most appropriate nominee of the country. In fact, the media did not do its duty and basically ignored the whole issue. (So did we. We hardly wrote anything about him or his candidature save one piece on a section of BNP's leaders' reaction to the nomination. We failed in our duty, which we will try to correct.) In fact except for his role in '71 which has been raised by a few organisations of known hue nothing much has been written about him. We think people have a right to know his political, business and personal track-record ever since he joined public life and even before. Everything about a public figure falls into the public domain and we, the media, have an obligation to reveal everything about him or her. But we must do so with the highest ethical standards of journalism and never with any malice or prejudice. Our purpose must be and only be to inform the public, objectively and dispassionately for the sole purpose of judicious decision making.

Can we not recall how many Presidential aspirants in the US had to cut short their dream when the media revealed things from their recent and remote past including personal, business and political scandals. Every nomination to high posts in the US including those in the Supreme Court undergo the most critical scrutiny, including by the media, before being finalised. It is the case in other democracies. The Indian deputy Prime Minister Advani has just been accused of involvement in the Babri Masjid destruction episode by an investigating body. This has not been proved in the court of law yet. So is the Indian media guilty of 'defamation' for publishing that news. The Indian media continuously wrote about his involvement over the last several years. Were they indulging in "information terrorism" against Advani?

Take the case of Gujrat's Chief Minister Modi. Every credible and

renowned Indian media directly linked him to the riots and relentlessly pursued him for his communal actions. Yet he has won a resounding electoral victory. So should the media stop holding him responsible for the thousands of people his party and his henchmen had killed. Was the media wrong to go after Modi now that he has won an election? No, and Modi continues to be so accused. Winning elections cannot be used as a protection for past crimes.

We recall that it was first the Thai media that revealed stories of wrong doing by their PM which led to the most intense investigation of any sitting PM in Thai history. His carrier almost came to an end till he was exonerated. Was the Thai media wrong to subject their elected Prime Minister to such a public scrutiny? Has the media been accused of 'information terrorism' against him or accused of defamation and taken to court? No because Thai people had a "Right to Know" about their PM's stock deals and the media had an obligation to reveal all the facts, many of which were not flattering to the Prime Minister, even though he was exonerated later.

One of the issues that our politicians never face is about tax. How much do they pay in relation to what they earn? We hardly ever write about the business that our politicians run and about the money they make and the tax they pay. A litmus test of public figure anywhere is tax payment, a test that our politicians never have to face, and we in the media never write about.

It was tax and related corruption issues that led the Italian Prime Minister to court the other day. These charges came to surface due to media coverage, which were later investigated by the police. When the US media came out with the fact that presidential aspirant George W. Bush had serious drinking problem as a young man were they indulging in "information terrorism" or trying to defame him?

They did what we are trying to do here--inform the public about a man who aspired to represent them. We think we owe to the citizens not only of Bangladesh but of all OIC member countries about what sort of a man we are proposing to lead the sole political institution of Muslim countries.

We conclude with what we started. "People's Right to Know" must be upheld in every aspect of our public life. Our leaders must become used to public scrutiny and should make their lives transparent to the people they claim to lead. They must become used to the fact that this is the age of accountability and that media will become bolder and 'nosy' about everything they do. They will have to give that 'space' to the media. We in the media, on the other hand, must ensure that we are never motivated by malice, prejudice or any intention other than public good and democracy. We in The Daily Star never are, and never will be.

## \$ 536m WB loans

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tion strategy paper (I-PRSP) this year to substantially reduce chronic poverty and invigorate social development in the shortest possible time.

According to the WB, the credit is being provided in a single tranche following a number of actions taken by the government as part of its medium-term policy framework. The actions include the granting of autonomy to the central bank and bringing under its purview nationalised commercial and specialised development banks, and approval of a new privatisation policy.

The actions also include establishment of an independent energy regulatory commission, adoption of an energy sector reform plan and continued progress in the separation of the judiciary.

The WB commended the government particularly for its progress towards achieving macroeconomic stability, reform and privatisation of state-owned enterprises and increasing access to electricity in rural areas.

It also lauded the government for supporting community-driven development, achieving gender parity in school enrolment and tackling systemic governance problems in the areas of financial management, procurement and legal and judicial reform.

The WB anticipates increased assistance over the coming years, if such progress continues. Its assistance will all be designed to directly support the poverty reduction strategy, with assistance in the next two years in areas like export development and competitiveness, state-owned enterprise and banking reform, education, agriculture, tax/customs administration, roads, power and health.

However, the WB report said although progress had been made in the health sector, broad reforms have not gone ahead as envisaged, especially in the full unification of health and family welfare services.

The report also found that progress was not satisfactory in arsenic mitigation, dealing with a growing HIV/AIDS threat, increasing access to justice, particularly for women and the poor, improving port operations and empowerment of local governments through decentralisation and governance improvements.

Of the \$236 million second credit, \$190 million will be spent on rural transport improvement, \$37 million on strengthening the central bank and \$9.12 million on rendering technical assistance in telecoms sector.

"We have been encouraged by the government's progress so far in improving rural infrastructure, and by its commitment to increase the private sector's role in telecommunications and to make the Bangladesh Bank an effective regulator for the banking system," said Temple in one of the press releases.

"These are the kinds of reforms needed to improve the lives of people throughout the country. In fact, it is the poorer people in Bangladesh who are hurt most by problems such as unpaved, washed-out roads, lack of access to phone lines and high interest rates which prop up inefficient and insolvent banks. We are glad to be able to provide assistance in these key areas and look forward to seeing positive results," said Temple.

The US\$190 million will support a rural transport improvement project that costs \$255 million in total, with the government providing the rest and the Local Government Engineering Department as its implementing agency.

The project aims at improving or rehabilitating around 3,000 kilometres of rural roads, many in poor condition and rendered unpassable in monsoon and 1,500 metres of missing minor bridges and culverts. It will also work to improve around 150 rural markets and construct 45 river jetties, essential to rural transport and market facilities.

According to a 2002 public expenditure review, Bangladesh

had a shortfall of 28 per cent of the required funds for rural infrastructure maintenance, said the WB.

The \$37 million approved for a central bank strengthening project is part of the total cost of \$46.13 million, with the government providing the rest. The project will help the Bangladesh Bank more effectively play its essential role of regulator and supervisor for banks.

The Bangladesh Bank worked closely with the WB on design and will implement the project, which will focus on its functional reorganisation, automation and modernisation. It will also undertake human resources development, strengthening of the legal framework and capacity building for more effective regulation, supervision and research.

The WB support through \$9.12 million for a telecommunications technical assistance project will increase people-to-people access across the country.

The WB said it will pave the way for the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board to operate on a commercial basis and improve the capacity of the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission.

Bangladesh currently stands at only around 0.83 lines for 100 people, compared to an international low-income group average of four lines for as many people.

Increased private sector participation in the sector is expected to meet significant unmet demand for basic telephone lines estimated at about 3.5 million immediately and expected to grow to 10 million in three years.

The total cost of the project to be implemented by the post and telecommunications ministry and the BTRC is \$11.11 million, with the IDA providing \$9.12 million and the government the rest.

## Megawati

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with bouquets. She is on the second leg of her 10-day Asia tour. The tour will also take her to Japan and Vietnam.

Earlier, a contingent of the three services presented her a guard of honour. She took salute while the band played national anthems of the two countries.

Four jets of the Bangladesh Air Force escorted the aircraft carrying the Indonesian leader to the Bangladesh air limits. During Megawati's visit to Dhaka, two memorandums of understanding, an agreement and a letter of exchange were signed to add a fillip to trade and commerce between the two countries.

These are: the Agreement on Avoidance of Double Taxation, a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on Counter Trade Arrangement, another MoU on the formation of Indonesia-Bangladesh Joint Business Council and a letter of exchange listing commodities, which will fall under the 'counter trade' arrangement.

Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury hoped that under the new counter trade arrangement trading of commodities worth \$20 million would take place in the first year with no LCs required for businessmen.

Bangladesh has already listed 17 commodities and will propose seven items under the arrangement in the first phase.

During her visit, Bangladesh also got Indonesian support in its bid to become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

The ARF brings together 10 ASEAN members -- Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam and 13 non-ASEAN members -- European Union (EU), Australia, Canada, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, North Korea, Russia, the United States, Papua New Guinea and Mongolia.

## Fix of freebies

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The bribers also target senior physicians "because when a senior professor prescribes an item, the juniors follow him," one representative explained.

Some of the representatives argued that the samples are simply designed to show the doctor what is available. But a professor from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, requesting anonymity, disagreed. "It is of course bribery," he commented, "and ultimately patients have to pay."

"The samples may not be the best or cheapest on the market, and doctors may be encouraged to prescribe them for other illnesses and conditions, for which the drugs are not ideally suited.

"Doctors often feel obliged to prescribe our products. So they sometimes prescribe drugs which the patient doesn't need," admitted one young medical representative.

It is not a one-way traffic: the medical representatives interviewed by The Daily Star claimed that some physicians ask them for money in exchange for a promise to

prescribe particular products.

Giving an example of unnecessary prescribing of costly drugs, a teacher from the pharmacy department of Dhaka University said: "Pure vitamins fall under the government's price control system. One out of 500 patients might need a bit of zinc, which would cost, for example, Tk 1. But vitamins mixed with the zinc solution are not under price control and could cost, say Tk 50, even though the real value may be not more than Tk 2. In such a case, a pharmaceutical company makes an extra profit of Tk 48 just by persuading the doctor to prescribe that product."

A Dhaka Medical College professor said that physicians who asked for money to prescribe products, or who advised patients to buy drugs merely because they had been paid to do so by pharmaceutical companies, were failing to live up to their social responsibilities.

"The government should form strict laws to control the practice," he said.

### DHAKA TODAY

**Film show**  
Academy Film Society will screen an American film titled 'Carlito's Way'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6.30pm.

**Orientation ceremony**  
The orientation ceremony of summer semester of Bangladesh University will be held. Venue: University auditorium, Mohammadpur. Time: 11.00am.

**Discussion**  
Manabik Sahajya Sangstha (MSS) organises a discussion on 'Good governance: a plan for election campaign through the Election Commission'. Venue: MSS conference room, Banani. Time: 9.30am.

**Rotary Dhaka Central**  
Weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club. Time: 1.30pm.

**Rotary North West**  
Weekly meeting of the Rotary Club of Dhaka North West will be held. Venue: House-63, Pikhana Road, Azimpur. Time: 7.30pm.

**Blood Donation**  
Quantum Foundation organises a voluntary blood donation camp. Venue: IUBAT campus, Dhanmondi. Time: 9.00am.

**Film show**  
Academy Film Society will screen an American film titled 'Magnolia'. Venue: 21/C, Jigatola. Time: 6.30pm.

**Concluding function**  
The concluding function of the National Tree Fair will be held with Environment and Forest Minister Shahjahan Siraj as chief guest. Venue: National Parade Square, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. Time: 4.00pm.

**Conference**  
The opening session of the three-day international conference on 'Migration, development and pro-poor policy choices in Asia', organised by the Department for International Development, UK, in association with the Refugees and Migrants Movements Research Unit of Dhaka University, will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel.

**Exhibition**  
The inaugural ceremony of an exhibition of handloom products, organised by Bangladesh Handloom Board, will be held with Textile Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury as chief guest. Venue: Public Library premises, Shahbagh. Time: The exhibition will remain open till July 1 from 10.00am to 9.00pm daily.

**SOS programme**  
The concluding programme of the International SOS Children's Village Day will be held. Venue: SOS Juba Palli auditorium, Mirpur-13. Time: 4.30pm.

### DHAKA TOMORROW