

PM asks all to shun anti-business activities

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged all to refrain from activities that may leave a negative impact on business environment.

"We have to reduce our dependency on a narrow export basket and limited markets and add new products of international standard to expand the export market," she said while speaking at the National Export Trophy Award ceremony 2003 jointly organised by the Ministry of Commerce and the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) at Osmani Memorial Hall in Dhaka.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Top officials' transfer fuels rancour in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Secretary-level changes in the civil administration have congealed into frustration among senior civil servants who peg the moves as 'wrongful' punishment to some and 'inappropriate' benefit of some quarters.

Official sources said the government on the one hand has begun appointing secretaries to different ministries because of vacancies following expiry of contractual services of some officials and transferring the top officials ahead of their retirement, on the other.

Highly placed sources said the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

JANATAR MANCHA JS body sends back officials' list for further scrutiny

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiya Sangsad body yesterday refused to disclose a list of officials up for punishment for attending the anti-government Janatar Mancha (People's Platform) in 1996 and sent it back for further scrutiny to avoid victimisation of innocents.

The parliamentary standing committee on the establishment ministry sent back to the ministry the list of officials, who took part in the platform to force the previous BNP government from power in the wake of the February 15 ballot 'in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



A six feet fish weighing about 80kg caught in the Sundarbans gathers a crowd after it was brought to Lalbagh for sale yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh in WSIS: Lies and statistics

ABU SAEED KHAN

The first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) was held in Geneva during December 10-12 with the presence of more than 54 heads of state and government and 83 ministers and vice-ministers from 176 countries, including Bangladesh.

The leaders, namely from the third world countries, recognised information and communications technology (ICT) as a fundamental development criterion besides food, housing, health and education.

While addressing the Plenary on

NEWS ANALYSIS

December 11, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said, "Our aim is to build an ICT-driven nation comprising a knowledge-based society by the year 2006."

Bangladesh has less than a half telephone for every 100 people and more than 85 percent of its mobile phone users are unable to access the fixed network of state-owned monopoly. Only 30 percent of its 140 million people, comprised of 80 percent urban and 20 percent rural, have access to electricity.

Qualitative and quantitative decline in the education system is needless to reiterate.

So, the prime minister's dream "to build an ICT-driven nation comprising a knowledge-based society by the year 2006" requires rapidly synchronised development of telecoms and power infrastructures along with improved education system. It needs a clear vision and consistent political will.

The WSIS offered ample opportunities to bring the dream of an inclusive information society one step closer to reality. But the government had miserably failed to recognise those prospects. (SEE PAGE 17)

Wage hike overtakes inflation pick-up

Corruption, infrastructure lack taking toll on competitiveness, says BB Annual Report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Wages increased more than inflation did last fiscal year, reflecting an actual rise in demand for skills in the economy, according to the latest Annual Report of the Bangladesh Bank (BB) released yesterday.

The BB report also said corruption and infrastructure inadequacies are taking tolls on competitive-

ness.

"The inadequacies and inefficiencies of services in utilities, roads and ports continue to be serious impediments to output competitiveness. Besides, corrupt practices in many public services allegedly increase the cost of doing business in Bangladesh, hurting competitiveness," it observed.

"The wage rate index increase in

FY03 in the manufacturing sector was more than double the increase in FY02, and at 15.4 percent exceeded the rate of growth of nominal GDP as well," the report said. "In an economy with strong unionised collective bargaining for wages, this could have signified a pressure of wage-push inflation."

Inflation in the fiscal year stood at 4.4 percent, up from FY02's 2.8 percent, but still far below the wage

rate increase.

"In Bangladesh collective wage bargaining is yet to gain strong ground, with only about a fifth of the total labour in formal sector employment. The wage rate increases therefore probably reflect actual increase in demand for the related skills in the economy which

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

JS summoned only to oblige constitution

TIB report observes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three of the last four Jatiya Sangsad sessions were summoned only to meet constitutional obligations, a report of the Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) launched in Dhaka yesterday said.

Only the budget session, the eighth session of the current parliament, was called to function, the report launched at a press conference said, adding quorum crisis continued to dog the sittings, eating into taxpayers' money.

Speaking at the launch, TIB Trustee Board members Khan Sarwar Murshid and Muzaffer Ahmad said political rivalry, lack of accountability, the use of money to capture parliament membership, lawmakers' unawareness about their responsibility were reducing the effectiveness of Sangsad.

The report, Parliament Watch,

said quorum crisis that amounted to 31 hours of delay in 39 sittings wasted over Tk 2.80 crore.

Only one sitting of the current parliament sat on time while a sitting of the eighth session began about two hours behind schedule creating a new record in delayed sittings.

The sessions cost the nation about Tk 11.78 crore at the rate of Tk 15,000 a minute to keep the parliament building operative, the report said.

Asking the speaker to be more impartial, the report said parliamentary democracy was under threat because of rivalry between the treasury and the main opposition benches.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Expatriates ministry sits idle for logistics dearth

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The government's negligence has allegedly been responsible for a vital ministry's utter failure to kick-start its activities even after two years of its inception in December 2001.

The Ministry of Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment was formed on December 20, 2001 as per the election manifesto of the BNP. As the name suggests, the ministry was introduced with the two principal specific aims: to ensure expatriates' welfare and to generate more overseas employment.

Yet, since then, the ministry has been continuously stumbling over lack of logistic support and shortage of manpower to run its day to day operations.

The ministry portrayed this gloomy situation and its feeble position in a report that it submitted to a parliamentary standing committee yesterday. The report urged the government to take

immediate measures to correct the situation and meet its basic requirements for the greater interest of the expatriates, sources in the ministry said.

As many as 18 out of 47 posts are still vacant in the ministry. It has an office consisting of only five rooms. That obviously is too squeezed a space for the whole staff strength.

Even the secretary of the ministry does not have a fax machine or a telephone connection with ISD facility, the report grieved.

The ministry said in its report that it "had requested several times the housing and public works ministry to provide adequate office space. But to no avail."

The ministry claimed, due to the handicaps in logistics (including information and communication technology) and manpower resources, it can not maintain regular communication with the labour wings of the 12 embassies in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Minister, secy at odds over Tanguar Haor

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary body yesterday witnessed a heated debate between the environment and forest minister and the secretary of the ministry over their authority to take steps to save Tanguar Haor (water body) in Sunamganj.

The secretary told a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry that he had formed a committee to save Tanguar Haor.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

4 abducted in 2 days in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Four people including three businessmen were abducted by the outlawed Sarbahara operatives in two days at Jolabari village of Swarupkathi upazila in Pirojpur on December 13 and 14.

The Sarbahara party men led by Parimal Sikder Khokan abducted businessman Syed Shahidul Alam and his employee Subodh on December 13 and businessmen Santosh Baroi and Shekhar Hazra, 32, on December 14.

The police officials of Barisal, Pirojpur and Jhalakathi at an emergency meeting at Swarupkathi today take decisions to find the whereabouts of the four.

Prayer Timings

December 19

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	3-40	4-00
Maghrib	5-22	5-27
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation