## Cattle markets

of the road from the DCCapproved space in Armanitola.

The court also conducted a raid on Chankharpul cattle market and evicted the traders from the ille-

gally occupied land Contacted, Nazmul said, "I have conducted the drive in Lalbagh and Kotwali and will continue it. I have learnt that more mobile courts will carry out similar drives tomorrow [Monday] in other areas.'

Traders of Golapbagh cattle market have captured the adjacent footpaths, parts of the main road

### Scant security measures set **Eid passengers** to uncertainty

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT** 

Homebound passengers eager to celebrate Eid-ul-Azha with their families are not feeling adequately secured at the city's bus, launch and railway terminals and on their journeys as the government is not providing the similar measure of security as it was ahead of the last

Shortage of law enforcers and antiquated security techniques are leaving the home bound Eidtravellers alone to face troubles including unavailability of bus, train and launch tickets at the counters, scalping of tickets at exorbitantly high prices, nagging traffic jams, snatching and mugging. Incidents of extortion and mugging have significantly risen in the last few days.

Every year about five million people leave the capital on the eve of Eid.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in a news release however said this year the government has deployed police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and other law enforcement agency members to prevent harassment of passengers, scalping of tickets and charging of extra fares. But the number of law enforcers deployed is much lower than what it was ahead of the Eid-

Five closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras were set up at Sadarghat Launch Terminal, metal detectors were installed at all bus terminals, Kamalapur Railway station and Sadarghat Launch Terminal, people and their luggage were checked at all entrances during the Eid-ul-Fitr rush but none of the steps are taken ahead of the coming Eid-ul-Azha.

"It is impossible to provide security to such an unusually huge number of home bound passengers as the number of law enforcers is lower compared to the need,' said a policeman at Kamalapur Railway Station.

A good number of passengers who were leaving the capital by buses, launches and trains vesterday expressed dissatisfactions over the government's decision to not install CCTV cameras and metal detectors at the terminals during the Eid rush this time around.

#### and open spaces near Golapbagh

At Kamalapur market, the

Sale of animals has so far been low in the capital, but the traders expect it may gain momentum today as the Eid is only one day

Market observers said both the traders and buyers are waiting for the last moment, one side for a hike and the other for a fall in prices.

Buyers, who have already visited different cattle markets, said the price is much higher this year than last year's.

reasonable price."

mal but the customer left without bargaining.

Traders of Kamalapur market said they are also experiencing the same shying away of the buyers. However, the buyers alleged the traders are claiming too much

Members of police, paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles and Rapid Action Battalion have been deployed in and around the city to maintain law and order. They are patrolling the streets to ensure safety of the homebound passengers and cattle traders.

Union Club at Kamalapur. Other sites are the open space of Rajuk at Uttara Sector 12, Meradia Bazar, Rayer Bazar playground, open spaces near Taltala bus stand, Agargaon, in front of Alam Market in Postogola, and Sunrise

Besides, sale is on at the city's only permanent cattle market in

ficed every year in the country marking the Eid-ul-Azha.

#### Minority

FROM PAGE 16

not to list any minority workers, staff or owners of any business house, reports our CU Correspondent.

launch services for seven hours early yesterday at Paturia-Daulatdia. Several hundred buses and trucks were stranded on either side of the river.

reports: Hundreds of buses and trucks were at the Kazirhat ferry

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Some 50 watercraft carrying more than one lakh passengers from the capital were stranded in Meghna and its tributaries near Chandpur, beginning from 2:00am yesterday. They reached their destinations after delaying for up

In northern districts, foggy conditions prevailing for three consecutive days made life miserable, our Rangpur correspondent

Thousands of poor people have been subjected to abject misery with the onset of extreme cold weather. The day labourers in the rural areas seem to be the worst affected by the cold wave-like

The people living along the Teesta, Bhrammaputra, and Dharla rivers did not go out of their houses for work since the cold wave hit the region.

Azahar Ali, a rickhsaw-puller at Kagzipara of Gangachara upazila, said he could not go to work in last

"Me and my family members do not have warm clothes. It's hard to buy food for them let alone clothes,

he added Marzia Khatun of Boro Rupai of the same upazila told The Daily Star that they would have had to starve for several days had they bought warm clothes for three

daughters and two sons. Meanwhile, Civil Surgeon of

traders have occupied the side lanes and footpaths of the adjacent

Abdul Gafur Bepari, a trader who has come to Golapbagh on Wednesday with 28 cows, said, Most people are coming as visitors. They don't even bargain for a

He asked Tk 45,000 for an ani-

The temporary cattle markets selected by the DCC are open spaces near Chitra Cinema in Armanitola, Khilkhet Tanpara, Jhigatala-Hazaribagh ground, Golapbagh ground, Rahmatganj layground, Dhupkhola ground, Hussaini Dalan Road (from Chankharpul crossing to Bakshibazar signal point) and Balur Math near the Brothers

playground in Shahjahanpur.

Millions of animals are sacri-

party cadres led by Barma Akram on Saturday directed enumerators

"The Muslims of my shops and other business houses were listed, while we were skipped," he alleged.

The people of at least 800 shops The people of at least 800 shops run by the minority Hindus on Tamakimundi Lane were excluded," Zafar Alam of Chowdhury Boot House told The Daily Star

The owners and employees of Poshaki Traders, Baro Awlia Store, Beauty Fashion, Baishali Traders and Rupraz Store, among others, were excluded, witnesses alleged.

Rangpur Tomsil Uddin denied that anyone had died in cold diarrhoea

hundred people have been down

with pneumonia, bronchitis, cold

diarrhoea and asthma during last

temperature has not dropped

people are feeling cold as differ-ence between the highest and

lowest temperatures has reduced,

Spiking politics

below 10 degrees Celsius.

"It's not a cold wave yet as the

three days' cold weather.

said Akram Hossain.

the district but said several

# Fog blanket wrecks

to cross the rivers by ferry.

Our Manikganj correspondent eports: Fog disrupted the ferry and

Our Pabna correspondent

Sources working in Bangladesh Authorities (BIWTA) said some 500 water vessels were stuck in a long queue at different jetties, causing immense sufferings to the people.

the utilities, infrastructure and ports, reducing the lead time, developing backward linkage, moving into new product lines and markets, seeking duty free access to foreign markets like the USA, and making efforts to increase regional trade within the framework of Safta and Bimstec, the report added. to eight hours.

It pointed out that to generate a sustainable high GDP growth rates envisioned in the MTMF, a significant increase in investment, both ıblic and private, and improvement factor productivity are needed.

The report pointed out some drawbacks on part of Bangladesh including inadequacies of utilities and infrastructure, higher transportation cost, higher corporate tax and lack of continuity of government policies.

Regarding the present inflation-ary trend, the BB believes, easing of omestic supply bottlenecks and a tightened monetary policy will help ontain the inflationary pressure in he present economic condition.

"Inflation is projected to remain unchanged in FY06 at FY05 level of 5 percent and then come down gradually to 4.5 percent in FY09, with easing of domestic supply bottlenecks and an appropriately tight-ened monetary policy stance owards maintaining price stability, coupled with the support of a pru-dent fiscal policy," the report

explained. Economists, however, are of the opinion that a tightened monetary policy will hamper the momentum created in the industrial growth and will ultimately upset the GDP rate.

#### Trucks with hide to be barred from going out of Dhaka

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a bid to stop smuggling of hides during Eid-ul Azha, a home ministry meeting on law and order yesterday not to allow any truck carrying hides to go out of Dhaka for a few days from the Eid-ul Azha.

"What's the necessity of trucks carrying hides to go out of Dhaka when all the tanneries are in the city? The trucks will be allowed to move up to Aminbazaar as there is a tannery there," State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfozzaman Babar told reporters after the meeting.

The hide traders and the customers who will carry large amount of money will be provided security if

The meeting was informed that police are escorting the cattle trucks coming to the capital to stop extortion and robbery on the highways and waterways

Two control rooms will be set up at Aminbazaar and Hazaribagh to monitor management of hides and maintain law and order.

The deputy commissioners and police superintendents across the country will take necessary steps to ensure security at the cattle markets and Eid jamaats.

Law enforcers will sweep the idgahs before the prayers. Eighteen mobile courts are working in the capital to ensure observance of law and order at the

makeshift cattle markets and termi-

nals. Mobile courts are also operat ing in Narayanganj and Gazipur. Besides plainclothes and uniformed police and Rab, community police will work at the cattle markets to ease traffic movement and

ensure security. The meeting decided to clear a part of Nayabazar cattle market that causing problem in the movement of traffic and people, especially on the way to Sadarghat launch terminal.

Bangladesh Rifles and police will work to stop harassment of passengers, realisation of extra money for tickets, scalping, mugging and look into problems at bus, train and launch terminals.

Hawkers have been evicted from the Sadarghat launch terminal to ease movement of people.

"We'll not allow overloading in the launches and passengers' travelling on the roof," the state minister told reporters. Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authorities have

arranged special launches for carrying home-bound passengers. Asked about the government's steps to stop extortion, Babar said he did not receive any complaint of

"We're prepared to take immediate action in any such case," he

#### No uncertainty over Karnaphuli bridge, savs Huda

Construction to start

in April

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT** 

Ruling out uncertainty over the third Karnaphuli Bridge, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda vesterday said its construction will begin from April following the work order for the government funded 900metre bridge to be given in March.

Drawing attention to a Daily Star report that said four out of seven bidders had withdrawn from the tender for the bridge, the minister said four Chinese and one Korean pre-qualified firms are likely to participate in the January 15 bid. Two Japanese bidders have withdrawn citing shortage of time and personal reasons.

The communications secretary in a meeting with the pre-qualified bidders told them that 75 days is enough to submit bid proposals and this time frame will not be extended, the minister added.

The Roads and Highways Department has provided the bidders with all information related to geo-technical and river morphological data. The minister claimed that there

will be no compromise with the quality of the construction of the The Daily Star on Sunday

reported that engineers and the project's consultants for this bridge had suggested a time frame of six months for studying and launching of this scheme. But Chittagong based ruling

party MPs and policy makers pressured the communications ministry to cut it down to two months so that the bridge building can be utilised in the next general election campaigns in Chittagong to their advantage.

Such shortening of time will jeopardise the quality of the design for the bridge, officials told The Daily Star.

### 3 die

FROM PAGE 16

were later shifted to Pangu Hospital. In another wall-collapse inci-

dent at Dhalkanagar in Shyampur, Fazlul Haque Raju, 35, a labourer from Jamalpur, died and another person was injured. Police said a newly constructed

wall collapsed on Raju and Shahidul Islam around 8:00am when they were working near the wall. Locals rushed them to Mitford Hospital where Raju died

# Citizens' body slate

feet (tcf) energy reserve--30tcf gas and coal equivalent to 70tcf gas-which can meet the country's requirement for "decades"

According to the consultant firm of Petrobangla, the present gas reserve ranges between 10.41tcf and 13.95tcf, meaning it can meet the country's demand until 2013 or 2015 only, the commission noted.

On the other hand, the country has a reserve of 258 million tonne extractable coal, equivalent to 6.7tcf gas, it said, terming the energy adviser's comment "information terrorism" BEA President Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, who

chaired the briefing, said a move is

on to ink a deal with the Asian

Energy beyond people's knowledge. "We don't want another Nikolike deal to be made with the Asian Energy," he asserted. Comparing the Asian Energy with Niko in terms of technical and financial ability, commission member SK Abdullah said the Asian Energy has submitted a proposal of an open pit method for the Phulbari

pit method anywhere in the world," he pointed out. Abul Barakat, general secretary of BEA, said the Asian Energy has proposed a royalty of only six percent to the government, which means "the country will get almost

mine. "But [the Asian Energy] does

not have any experience in the open

The Asian Energy has proposed to invest \$2 billion for the project and already raised more than \$2 billion from the London Stock Exchange, he added.

nothing if the proposal is accepted."

mittee on energy, crucial issues are not placed before it. Commission members Badrul Imam and Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal also spoke at the press brief-

He regretted that although there

is a parliamentary standing com-

The commission agreed with the observation of the Anwarul Azim-committee that held Niko responsible for the blowout of the Chhatak (West) gas field while it disagreed with the estimation of 8.9 billion cubic feet gas loss, claimed by the

Tamim-committee in the two blowouts at Tengratila.

Terming the estimation "misleading and totally unacceptable", the commission said it thinks 115bcf gas worth Tk 1,500 crore was damaged in the blowouts.

#### 10 killed

FROM PAGE 16

cash and gold ornaments from the victims before police arrived there.

Bogra Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan, Superintendent of Police Matiur Rahman Sheikh and Chairman of Sherpur Municipality Jane Alam Khoka visited the spot.

#### PM

FROM PAGE 1

by a helicopter from Dhaka around 2:40pm for Satkhira but had to return due to lack of visibility in the upper atmosphere.

Khaleda was scheduled to address a public meeting at GKMK Pilot High School in Kolaroa upazila. She regretted the inconveniences caused to the local people for her not being able to be there due to the inclement weather, officials said.

According to the Prime Minister's Office, the revised schedule for her visit to Satkhira will be announced later.

Khaleda was scheduled to inaugurate the newly built buildings of Satkhira Polytechnic Institute and Kolaroa Poura Bhaban and lay the foundation stones of 50-bed Kolaroa Upazila Hospital and Upazila Parishad auditorium.

#### Khaleda

FROM PAGE 16 carried the PM's greetings card to Hasina's Sudha Sadan residence in the evening.

A personal staff of the Awami League chief received the card, Mohiuddin Khan told BSS.

## EC meet on HC order

however, said yesterday they did not know anything regarding the release while sources at the Supreme Court registrar's office said a certified copy of the judgement was already dispatched to the EC.

The HC judgement reads:"The chief election commissioner should immediately call a meeting of the commission and the commission should decide and take all appropriate steps to implement the decision of the commission taken on 6<sup>th</sup> of August 2005 in its meeting for preparation of electoral roll in the light of this judge-

But the EC secretariat could not vet fix the date for an EC meeting as vesterday.

Election commissioners M Munsef Ali and AK Mohammad Ali, who have repeatedly been speaking for carrying out the court directives, yesterday could not contact the CEC to ask him to convene a meeting. "We are not told anything about

the commission's meeting and the

ongoing work of preparing the voter list," Mohammad Ali told journalists before leaving his office vesterday afternoon. As the EC secretariat has vet to collect a certified copy of the judgement, Mohammad Ali himself communicated with the office of

the Supreme Court registrar for the copy yesterday. "I've requested a deputy registrar for a copy and he assured me of sending one through a special courier," Mohammad Ali said.

Meanwhile, today is the last workday before the Eid vacation beginning tomorrow. If the CEC joins office today, there might be some developments in holding the much-awaited EC meeting. The last time the commission sat was on August 6,2005.

Family members of the CEC said physical condition of MA Aziz good and he has been advised rest by his doctors. "Doctors have advised him [CEC] not to join the work until his

condition improves," Mostafa Faruk, personal secretary to the CEC, yesterday told journalists. In this situation, the commis sion will have no scope to hold its meeting before January 15, the first workday after the Eid vacation and by this time, the secretariat will have another week to continue the

voter-listing job undertaken unilaterally by the CEC. The EC secretariat yesterday continued non-compliance with the HC directives on electoral roll by beginning yesterday the scrutiny of the information collected on

the prospective voters. The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) in a statement yesterday condemned the CEC and secretary to the EC secretariat for violating the constitution as well as the HC directives by continuing voter registration by the enumerators recruited controversially.

accounts official said.

voltage supply. According to the submitted report on fuel cost for the generators, Tk 1,48,38,000 was spent in July, Tk 45,49,000 in August, Tk 66,76,000 in September and Tk 1,47,76,000 in October. The estimate of the fuel cost in November is yet to be made, said a top Wasa

The dishonest Wasa staffs also have bagged lakhs of taka in overtime pays for operating the generators in the last few months. Tk 3.80 crore is allocated for overtime bills in the current fiscal year. But, overtime bills for Tk 2.36

crore, or more than half of the total yearly allocation, have been submitted in just three months of July to September, Wasa officials said. The Wasa bought the generators about four years ago to meet the power crisis, and the graft has been going on since the very begin-

ning, said a top Wasa official, requesting not to be named. The Wasa board discussed the issue several times but the situation remains unchanged. However, Wasa Superintendent Engineer Syed Quamrul Ahsan

denied the grafts, saying there is no

scope for inflating or deflating the fuel cost. He said if the generators

work more time, the fuel cost will definitely rise. On the other hand, sources said, the newly appointed Wasa chief engineer has started monitoring the daily operations of the generators and thus has checked the swindling. They said from December 17 to 21, the generators were shown to have worked for an average of 56 hours a day, which

had been 500 hours previously. Wasa Chief Engineer M Nurul Haque, however, expressed his reluctance to talk to the press on the issue and referred to Wasa

Managing Director Kazi Ali Azam.

Kazi said over telephone that due to a strong monitoring at present the situation is much better than the recent past. "We now are checking the matter every month. We take action against any person we find to be involved in such irregularities. So, we have been able to bring the matter under

control. The Wasa has the maximum production capacity of 150 to 160 crore litres of water a day, against a daily demand for over 200-crore litre. Eighty-two percent of its water comes from the under-ground and the rest from various

### Outlaw

FROM PAGE 1 police, leading to a 15-minute shootout that left Sohel bullet-hit

and dead. Sub-inspectors Fazlul Karim and Kamal Hossain and three police constables received bullet wounds during the gun battle while the other outlaws fled the scene.

The injured policemen were undergoing treatment at Tangail Police Lines Hospital. Police recovered a rifle with shortly afterward," he said. three bullets, one large dagger, and some used shells from the spot.

Sohel, the chief of the notorious

Sohel group, was an absconder accused in nine criminal cases

including eight of murder in differ-

ent police stations under the dis-

trict, police said. Other sources, however, claimed that Tangail sadar police arrested Sohel three days before and no police members were injured in the incident.

#### Ershad, Rawshan get bail in CPB's theft case

**COURT CORRESPONDENT** 

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to former president HM Ershad, his wife Rowshan Ershad and Jativa Party (JP) presidium member Abu Hossain Babla in a theft case filed by the Communist

Party of Bangladesh (CPB). Ershad, Rowshan Ershad and Babla along with their lawyer Sheikh Muhammad Serajul Islam appeared before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and prayed for bail while the prosecution opposed it.

After hearing both the sides, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shafique Anwar granted the bail upon a bond of Tk 0,000 with two guarantors. General Secretary of Dhaka City unit of CPB Ahsan Habib Lablu

and a large number of unknown JP activists on January 1. In the case it was alleged that a JP procession celebrating the party's 20th anniversary led by Ershad and Rowshan Ershad tried to march towards the Baitul Mukarram mosque and came face-to-face with a CPB rally in front of

the CPB office. The CPB leaders and the onduty policemen asked the JP leaders to change their route but they did not pay heed to it. At one point, the JP activists started to hurl chairs and strike the CPB activists with sticks that left several members of the CPB central committee, including CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan, injured.

A number of JP central committee members, including a female member, also received minor injuries during the incident.

The JP activists set fire to at least a dozen vehicles, several book shops, a mobile phone shop and a rickshaw around Paltan Crossing and Bijoy Nagar during the sporadic bursts of violence between 4:30pm and 6:30pm. They also damaged furniture and other things of Mukti Bhaban worth about Tk 50 lakh, the first information report (FIR) alleged.

## India, Pakistan

FROM PAGE 1 and Pakistan, and the dates will be

fixed based on mutual convenience," a high official said. Though no formal response either from New Delhi or Islamabad has yet reached Dhaka, the officials are expecting that the foreign secretaries of the two countries will come soon with proposed dates for Khaleda Zia's

A competent source told The Daily Star yesterday that the PM's tour to India may take place in early March because New Delhi is busy with formalising a tour in February wthe HS Presid "Both India and Pakistan have

long been eagerly waiting to welcome our prime minister because bilateral tours to the countries have become overdue," the source said. Official sources said Dhaka was expecting a visit from Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran this month to work out the details of the bilateral tours by the

Bangladeshi and Indian premiers to each other's countries. After Saran's visit Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin will pay a similar visit to New Delhi,

sources said. "We want to follow the diplomatic norms and traditions ahead of any visit by a head of state or government. How can PM's visit to New Delhi take place unless the Indian foreign secretary comes and fixes the modus operandi of the

visit," said a senior official on condition of anonymity. Meanwhile, there has been a debate in the government over the

prime minister's visit to India. Some influential ministers and officials said the Indian PM should embark on his overdue visit to Bangladesh first while some others said Khaleda Zia could visit India first if the Indian PM confirms dates of his visit to Dhaka shortly after her visit.

An influential official at the Prime Minister's Office told The Daily Star that the Indian prime minister did not incorporate the much-expected bilateral tours aspect into the itinerary during his stay in Dhaka to attend the 13th SAARC summit. He said Bangladesh wanted the

Indian prime minister to combine

the SAARC summit with his obliga-

tion to bilateral tours, even if for a

day, but India refused to extend Dr

Singh's stay in Dhaka during the

November 12-13 summit. Dr Singh could have come a day earlier or stay a day extra after the summit. "We are expecting Manmohan Singh to pay an overdue bilateral visit to Bangladesh first and our prime minister will visit India

A senior cabinet minister on condition of anonymity said the prime minister should not confirm the dates of her visit to India unless New Delhi schedules a reciprocal visit to Bangladesh by the Indian premier. About Khaleda's trip to

Pakistan, official sources said her tour to Islamabad has become long overdue because Pakistani premiers had already visited Dhaka.

# US helicopter crashes

The Black Hawk was part of a twoaircraft mission flying between bases in northern Iraq when communications were lost with the aircraft on Saturday night, the military said.

"Flight records indicate that eight passengers and four crew members were manifested for the flight. An immediate search and rescue operation was launched from nearby military installations.

The spokesman said he could not immediately give details about those on board.

The plane was found at about noon (0900 GMT) on Sunday.

In the deadliest such incident, a US marine transport helicopter crashed in western Iraq in January last year, killing all 31 marines aboard. There have been a number of

similar crashes since the middle of 2003, with several of the aircraft shot down by insurgents. filed the theft case against the three Earlier, the US military announced

that five US marines had been killed in and around the restive western Iraqi town of Fallujah over the weekend. Three "were killed by small-arms fire in separate attacks while conducting combat operations against the

enemy" on Sunday, a statement said. Another two were killed by roadside bomb explosions to the south and east of the city on Saturday. The latest casualties in the fighting took the death toll of US soldiers in

at least 2,197, according to an AFP toll based on figures from the Pentagon. In a rare glimmer of hope in the hostage crisis blighting the country, a French engineer kidnapped in Baghdad was released after a five-

Iraq since the March 2003 invasion to

FROM PAGE 1 The police however suspected the relatives of Umir who had a dispute TENGRATILA BLOWOUTS

### Niko pays off Tk 42 lakh in damages to 625 families

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Niko Resources Ltd Sunday handed over a cheque of Tk 42 lakh to the government to compensate 625 families who were affected by the blowout of Tengratila gas-field in Chhatak under Sunamganj district, company officials said.

Niko's Country Manager for

Bangladesh Brian Í Adolph handed

over the cheque to Energy Advisor

and Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) Mahmudur Rahman. The latest compensation package is for the families living within three kilometres around the blowout spot and each family will

receive a one-time compensation

of Tk 5,000 under the package. Only one family, which suffered more damage than the others, will receive Tk 133,000 as compensa-

tary to the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs. Water Resources Additional The Energy Advisor will hand over the money to the deputy commissioner of Sunamgani for ministry. distribution among the affected

of Islam and a once-in-a-lifetime obligation for all devout, ablemake the journey.

to Mina after dawn prayers. They will spend the day known as "Yawm at-Tarwiya" in prayers and meditation, sleeping at night in fire-proof tents before heading further south on Monday to Mount

Hundreds of security force members in military fatigues fanned out in the area while Asian

Mina in specially-equipped ambulances, a senior health official said. shrines (Saudi's King Abdullah) ordered it," said Khaled al-Samiri.

repeated.

weekordeal.

Bernard Planche, 52, was freed Saturday near a checkpoint set up by US and Iraqi security forces to the west of the Iraqi capital, an Iraqi security source said.

"The kidnappers were in a car with the hostage, they fled when they saw the soldiers," he told AFP on condition of an on vmity.

In Paris, French President Jacques Chirac's office confirmed the release. saying he was "very pleased at this fortunate conclusion.

Planche "will be collected by French embassy services and will return to France," it said.

The engineer, who was working on

water projects, is the fourth French hostage to survive a kidnapping in Iraqsince the US-led invasion. He was seized by an Iraqi rebel group on December 5 from his home

in an upmarket Baghdad neighbour-The group, calling itself the Battalion of the Lookout for Iraq, threatened to kill him if France did not end its illegitimate presence in Iraq"

in a video broadcast by Al-Arabiya television on December 28. The French government pointed

out it has no military presence in Iraq. The Dubai-based channel showed a black-and-white video bearing the group's logo and showing a man with a moustache, on his knees, with two

gunmen standing behind him. Two days later, the man's brother and daughter appealed for his release on Al-Arabiya, saying he was in Iraq only to help the Iraqi people.

### 4 of a family

with him over a piece of land. They arrested Sujit Kumar and Animesh, nephews of Umir, in connection with the murders. Reshuffle of

admin STAFF CORRESPONDENT

high-ups in

tions, transferring two secretaries and four additional secretaries. Rural Development and Cooperatives Secretary Abu Solaiman Chowdhury was made secretary to the Ministry of Liberation War Affairs. Water

Resources Acting Secretary Shahid

Rashid Sarkar was made secretary to

Textiles and Jute Secretary Abdur

Alam replaced him.

The government vesterday shuffled

a number of secretary level posi-

the food and disaster management ministry, being replaced by AFM Solaiman, chairman of Bangladesh **Jute Mills Corporation.** AKM Ibrahim Hossain, director general of the Environment Directorate, was made acting secre-

Secretary Syed Md Zubayer was

### Brian told Mahmudur Rahman. are lying vacant. Hajj today

Niko will soon hold talks with

the government to take decision on

supply of gas through a pipeline 16

kilometres away from Tengratila,

Arafat for the climax of the hajj. Balloons and national flags fluttered above the white tents

labourers in orange jumpsuits swept the streets. Even some of those wounded in Thursday's building collapse will leave their hospital beds and go to

"God has ordained the kingdom to serve this sacred spot and the Almost 60,000 security, health,

King Abdullah, members of the royal family and the religious establishment and several ministers have come to Makkah to be close to the progression of the hajj, which is a matter of national pride

made acting secretary to the same A number of 48 recently promoted additional secretaries are yet to get posting while many positions of the rank, including those in the education ministry, water resources ministry, environment ministry and

Economic Relations Department,

rescue operations Friday and the rubble of the Luluat al-Kheir (Pearl of Grace) hostel was removed to allow a sea of pilgrims to flow from

Makkah to Mina, five kilometres

The hajj is one of the five pillars

(three miles) to the east.

bodied Muslims with the means to Men and women of all age, colour and nationality dressed in white robes and sandals started marching on foot or boarded buses

covering the arid valley to guide pilgrims

"The custodian of the two holy

emergency and other personnel are involved in organising the hajj this year, trying to make sure none of the deadly incidents that have marred it in recent years are

for the ultra-conservative kingdom that considers itself a beacon for the world's estimated 1.3 billion Muslims.

In addition to stampedes that

killed 251 pilgrims in 2004 and 1,426 in 1990 and a campfire in

1997 in which 343 perished,

authorities have to tackle the threat of disease, rioting and terrorist attacks. The health ministry said it was not worried about avian flu, which has killed three children in Turkey

over the past week and nearly 40

came in are disease free," said

spokesman Khaled al-Mirghalani.

"All the pilgrims that already

Pilgrims were required to show

people in Asia last year.

proof they were vaccinated for common contagious diseases before being allowed into the country. Samiri said 9,600 doctors, medics and other staff were on standby at 14 hospitals, clinics and field facilities, while hundreds of ambu-

lances and helicopters are on

"I feel relaxed that we are ready,

standby.

Mina.

Tariq al-Arnous, the head of emergency operations at the health ministry A similar attitude was echoed by some of the pilgrims leaving for

the rest is in God's hands," said

from Somalia, accompanied by his wife and his wheelchair-bound mother-in-law. Another pilgrim from Yemen said he was worried about poten

tial accidents after the hotel col-

happen," said Ahmed Omar, 40,

"Whatever God ordained will

"But I must do this for God," said Qaed Mehdi, 50. The most perilous rite of the pilgrimage will take place on Tuesday when pilgrims flock back

to Mina from Arafat to stone three pillars symbolising the powers of the devil. The area is the scene of most of the deadly stampedes.

# Wasa loses crores