

## Kafco to set up

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"We have met with the Board of Investment (BoI) executive chairman and informally discussed the investment plan with him," May said.

He said the government will be happy because the country needs more fertilizer.

"There is certainly a shortage of urea in Bangladesh and the demand is growing. The national annual demand for fertilizer is growing at a five to six percent rate."

Kafco has a fully established infrastructure enabling it to expand with shorter implementation time than other investors, he added.

The company started its operation in 1995, with a plant which has the capacity of producing about 1,700 tonnes of urea and 1,500 tonnes of ammonia a day, in a joint venture with the Government of Bangladesh and companies of Japan, Denmark and the Netherlands.

Kafco paid \$50.3 million to the government as gas price in the fiscal 2004-05 in an average rate of \$2.34 for a thousand cubic feet of gas.

It made a net profit worth \$63.6 million in the fiscal 2004-05, which is a record among the Bangladeshi corporate houses, May claimed saying that the company paid off all its debts this month.

Kafco also paid \$10 million dividend to its shareholders in

February, 43 percent of which went to the government exchequer.

"Kafco successfully paid off its debts and offered dividends to its shareholders due to a rise in fertilizer prices across the world," May said adding, "The average fertilizer price was \$70 per tonne a few years back which now rose to \$230 per tonne in the international market."

The top executive of Kafco said the company paid \$25 million in forms of taxes and duties and injected another \$70 million into the economy of Bangladesh in forms of wages, services and contracts.

Asked about raising fund from the local capital market, May said the company has a plan to do that in future.

"The issue has been discussed in the last board meeting," he said adding that Bangladeshi capital market is developing day by day and it needs more shares from good companies.

Kafco produced 685,214 tonnes of urea and 549,973 tonnes of ammonia in 2004-05 fiscal, about half of which were supplied to the Bangladesh government under an export formula.

The company also sells fertilizer to Australia, Thailand, Vietnam, Pakistan and India.

## Ekushey Padak

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journalism, and Aftab Ahmed of The Daily Ittefaq in photojournalism.

A cabinet committee on the national award proposed a list of 17 personalities including five ministers on February 2 for Ekushey Padak.

The five ministers whose names were proposed for their contributions to their respective fields are Health and Family Welfare Minister Khondaker Mosharrar Hossain, Education Minister Osman Faruq, Science, Information and Communications Technology Minister Abdul Moyeen Khan, State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharrar Hossain Shahjahan, and State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Haque Milon.

Sources said the news of including ministers for Ekushey Padak created controversy, following which the prime minister dropped their names and approved the list.

The cabinet committee at a meeting chaired by Environment Minister Tariqul Islam yesterday added the name of Prof Asaduzzaman for the award.

Last year, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman and Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain were awarded the Ekushey Padak for their contributions to the 1952 Language Movement.

Introduced in 1976, the Ekushey Padak is awarded for outstanding contributions to the Language Movement of 1952, and in the fields of education, literature, journalism, and culture.

## Bangladesh meet

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newly approved venue at the heart of the northern district.

Bangladesh have announced a 12-member squad for the first match yesterday with Alok Kapali making a comeback after more than one year to boost the batting. Opener Javed Omar, pacer Nazmul Hossain and left-arm spinner Manjural Islam Rana have been ignored. Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak is expected to be the super-sub.

The good news for the home side was the return of strike paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortuza. Mashrafe was injured at the start of Bangladesh's tour of Sri Lanka and had to return home.

The Tigers have lost all their previous 14 ODIs against the islanders but they are buoyed by the absence of three senior Lankan cricketers, Marvan Atapattu, Chaminda Vaas and Muttiah Muralitharan.

"We are confident to make something different on our home soil. We will try our best to make an impression in the first game. Sri Lanka may miss some senior players but they are still very strong opponents. One can't call them a second-string side," said Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar on the eve of the match.

"We are confident to win all matches here but we will not take Bangladesh lightly," said skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, skipper Mahela Jayawardene, chosen to lead the side after their board decided to rest regular captain Marvan Atapattu.

## Khaleda

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in various fields and economic progress achieved during the alliance rule and urged the people to maintain the current trend of development by giving their fresh verdict in favour of the BNP.

Presided over by Tamijuddin upazila unit BNP President Hafizur Rahman, the rally was also addressed, among others, by Water Resources Minister Major (ret'd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Huq and PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated a Tk 1 crore 250-line Tamijuddin Digital Telephone Exchange with internet facility.

## Salma Khan clarifies

In a clarification to The Daily Star report published on February 9 with the headline "3 new envoys appointed, one gets extension", Salma Khan, a member of UN Cedaw, pointed out she is an elected member of the UN body.

While Salma Khan was appointed as the ambassador to Indonesia, her membership at Committee on the Elimination of Discriminations Against Women of the United Nations (Cedaw) was not cancelled as reported in The Daily Star report.

In her letter she also adds, "Cedaw committee being an UN Treaty Body members are elected by the state Parties (180 UN member countries) from amongst the nominees of the countries concerned."

Once one is elected as a member, they work independently in their personal capacity and do not represent any country in the committee, she said, adding that her current term will expire on December 30, 2006.

**Our Reply**  
Our report was based on an establishment ministry circular that said Cedaw's elected member Salma Khan was being appointed as the ambassador to Indonesia on a two-year contract, subject to her discontinuing to hold any other posts.

## Urea

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duction cost of Tk 6,000 only. Contacted, BCIC Chairman Major General (ret'd) Imaam-Uz-Zaman denied any supply dearth in urea.

"We're providing the dealers with urea from six factories in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet divisions and 21 buffer godowns to Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal divisions," he explained.

The BCIC chairman however attributed the problems of fertiliser carrying and some localised problems of distribution reasons to some tensions over urea availability in certain pockets of the country.

He refuted any allegation of buffer godowns running short of urea, saying, "We have over 2 lakh tonnes of urea stocked in 21 buffer godowns."

Another BCIC official gave statistics showing that six factories are generating 9,000 tonnes of urea everyday, while the government has already procured 2 lakh tonnes from abroad and 2.6 lakh tonnes more from Kafco.

"Kafco is still providing us with 2,000 tonnes of daily urea input, while the government would soon float tender for 1 lakh tonne of urea import. Besides, a decision to import yet another tonne of urea has already been taken," a source said.

Official sources suspect a huge amount of urea is being smuggled out to Myanmar due to the big price gap - Tk 4,800 (subsidised selling price) per tonne in Bangladesh and Tk 18,000 per tonne in Myanmar.

But the local administration in many districts reported hoarding and black marketing by a section of dishonest dealers.

Deputy Commissioner of Faridpur Mohammed Nasiruddin told The Daily Star over phone last night that police caught several fertiliser dealers in his district last month for black-marketing and they were prosecuted under the Special Power Act.

"Later we recovered the urea, meant for Faridpur, from Khulna and Bagerhat."

"As we took precautionary measures well in advance, there is no urea dearth in Faridpur. But we're hearing of some problems in some other districts because of monitoring lapses."

## Cabinet talks

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form the review panel drawing from that pool to look into the issue.

But the provision for short-listing a pool of panel members has been dropped from the revised bill. It allows the government to form a review panel with in-service bureaucrats if it wants. And the panel's recommendations will not be mandatory for the government to execute.

The sections related to irregularities and punishments have also been massively changed. In stead of specifying what punishment to be meted out for what crime, the revised bill just says, in case of any irregularity, the persons responsible will be punished as per the rules of the departments or agencies concerned.

In the original draft, there was a provision for forming a permanent advisory committee to assist the government in addressing any public procurement complications. But the entire provision has been expunged from the amended bill.

Four new sections have been added to the bill. One of them, Section 71, vests the government with the authority to intervene in any complication and its decision will be final on that matter.

The cabinet on November 2, 2005 had approved in principle the much talked-about procurement law and assigned a five-member committee headed by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to examine the draft and make the necessary changes.

The committee after a number of sittings came up with the revised bill that, after the law ministry's vetting, is now going to be placed before the cabinet.

In the original bill there were 79 sections in seven chapters, while the revised one has 73 sections in nine chapters.

## Nothing but age

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can earn Tk 60 on those days when jobs are at hand.

Yet, Sakhina could never get a loan from any NGO. The massive microcredit operations of a few thousand NGOs have bypassed her, because she is an extreme poor and a doubtful borrower.

"I wanted to take loans from Brac, but I figured I would not be able to repay the loans," says Sakhina. "How can I, when all I can earn a day is Tk 60 and that too not every day?"

Sakhina and thousands like her today make a volley of questions: Is microcredit the most effective tool to fight dire poverty? What else should be in place? Are the ultra-poor getting the benefits? And a more burning question is: How well are the microcredit borrowers elevated to small business-men and -women to generate employment?

Figures are there that support that microcredit has missed the ultra-poor by and large. At least 30 percent of the total population falls under the extreme-poor category and microcredit could touch only 12 to 15 percent of them, even after much debates, embarrassments and concerns among the NGOs that the wretched have been left out of the credit bandwagon.

There are now about 1.6 million microcredit borrowers, but if overlapping of their memberships of more than one NGOs is considered, the net number will come down to about 1.2 million. A rough estimate says only 10 to 12 percent of them can eventually become small entrepreneurs.

"We have two tough tasks at hand," says Shaiful Islam, chief of ASA, one of the top four microcredit organisations. "One is to reach the extreme poor -- those who have no ability to repay loans in weekly or monthly instalments. The other is creating the missing middle -- the small business group graduated from microcredit borrowing."

"It is difficult for us to target the extreme poor," says Dr Imran Matin, director of research and evaluation division of Brac. "They are basically the floating population, people who are victims of river erosion and so on. They don't have any permanent address and so chances of getting back loans from them is slim."

But that makes them doubly vulnerable, like Yusuf Ali of Nazir Char in Kurigram. In his mid 20s, Yusuf looks fragile. His eyes are set deep in the sockets, his collarbones sharply visible. Today he did not have any food in the morning -- the only meal most working-class villagers have until the sundown -- and he does not know how he will manage some food for the night.

"I have not found any job for the last three days," he says. The edge of desperation is clear in the voice. "I

am weak and the landowners don't want to put me to work. Even if they do, I get paid less."

Like Yusuf, these extreme poor are getting lower wages, and since they don't have access to capital, either from banks or from the NGOs, they are unable to become 'poor' even.

However, experiments are now going on. Brac has started a programme to transfer assets to them. Under the scheme, an ultra-poor is given, say, a cow and the support including feeds and veterinary care to rear it. He is provided with healthcare to plug illness-related drain on his income. Once he completes a full cycle of the scheme and turns better off, he is then brought under the mainstream microcredit fold. Experiences show 60 percent participants in this ultra-poor programme have crossed the threshold into microcredit.

Similarly, ASA has opened up special branches in the chars to provide lambs and goats to the ultra-poor who do not need to go by weekly repayment instalments. Rather they return the money once they sell the cattle, may be a year later.

Grameen too has similar programmes through which it even provides funds to beggars.

But underlying all this, one feeling is clearly prevailing -- that despite such efforts, pockets of extreme poverty may be left out and that some of the money may never come back, because these ultra-poor keep drifting.

Alli Hossain of Bhagabatipur in Kurigram is one such person. Forty years of age and 19 times of losing everything to river erosion have left him shattered today. He is getting ready to be displaced once more as the Brahmaputra's cruel current has already gnawed away a big chunk of the char.

"Each time the river takes my home, I become poorer," Ali says. "I have been living like a gypsy -- never in one place for long. Who would care to give me loans?"

The NGOs have started creating the 'missing middle' too. For example, Brac now provides loans of Tk 30,000 to Tk 200,000 to set up small businesses and ASA gives Tk 100,000 to Tk 150,000 for such ventures.

But these efforts are taking a long time to make any real impression on extreme poverty or broad-based equality. And as time passes by, life on these northern chars remain unchanged.

## CEC

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left the EC compound without responding to journalists' queries about the progress of the task and if the EC extended the time limit for it.

Newly appointed election commissioners SM Zakaria and Mahfuzur Rahman also refused to talk to the press. Acting Secretary to the EC Secretariat Mohammad Zakaria who attended the review meeting forced journalists to leave the office room.

Meeting sources said the CEC expressed his dissatisfaction over the progress of the task.

Election Commissioner Mohammad Ali termed the task for preparing a fresh voter list, ignoring the HC directives, illegal. "I will not include my name as a voter in the fresh list as it is illegal," he told reporters while leaving his office yesterday.

Meanwhile, the EC's appeal against the HC directives for revising the existing electoral roll still remains unresolved.

The Supreme Court Appellate Division yesterday adjourned the hearing of the EC appeal until February 23 as Appellate Division judge Justice MM Ruhul Amin was absent due to illness.

The work of preparing a fresh voter list undertaken by the unilateral decision of the CEC began on January 1. The HC on January 4 disposing of two writ petitions asked the EC to revise the existing voter roll.

However, the EC Secretariat continued its task ignoring the court orders and asked the commission to call a meeting immediately.

The CEC convened a meeting on January 19 only after being sure of majority in the EC with the appointment of two new election commissioners, SM Zakaria and Mahfuzur Rahman. The meeting decided to appeal against the HC directives amid opposition by election commissioners Munsef Ali and Mohammad Ali.

The EC on January 31 extended the time limit of its ongoing task for preparing the fresh voter list until February 20. On February 13, the time limit was extended again until March 12 and the EC asked the field level manpower to complete the task for preparing the draft voter list by then.

Meanwhile, district election officers said the field level task has apparently come to a halt as the EC has not yet clarified its position on the remuneration of the field level manpower working since January 1.

The progress of the task is very slow in Dhaka district, where the district election office sources said they found inconsistency in the increase of voters. The number of new voters increased by 2 percent under Ramna and Kotowali thanas while the Tejgaon thana is yet to witness any increase.

## Mohiuddin

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him before the court after a six-day remand.

"I am innocent and victim of a conspiracy", Mohiuddin, who looked relaxed, told journalists as he was being escorted out of the court.

But the police recorded him as saying before bringing him to the court, "I studied well the books of law for two years. I told you (police) everything, but I will never confess before any court."

"Our investigation so far shows that the man standing in the dock (Mohiuddin) was the mastermind of the killing", Court Inspector Mahbubul Kuddus Siddiki told the court opposing the bail prayer.

Mohiuddin persuaded the alleged killers -- Taher's housekeeper Zahangir, his brother Abdus Salam and their relative Nazmul two months before the murder alluring them with money, computers and offers of jobs, Siddiki said.

He also said, apart from confessional statements of the three alleged killers who are already in police custody, the police obtained a number of other evidences connecting Mohiuddin with the murder.

The killers are poor and ambitious, a disposition that gave them reasons to believe in the promises of jobs by an influential teacher like Mohiuddin and Shibir leader Shalehi, he said.

Advocate Saiful Alam Shelly, the defence counsel, said the murder charge against Mohiuddin is imaginary because Mohiuddin had no scope for grievance against Taher as the RU vice-chancellor had already processed his promotion.

He also said Mohiuddin's alleged presence at the scene of the murder is not believable if he hired the killers.

Prof S Taher Ahmed was found murdered in a sewer on the backyard of his residence on the RU campus on February 3. The police arrested Mohiuddin on Feb 7 in connection with the killing.

**MOHIUDDIN'S STATEMENT**  
The police recorded Mohiuddin as saying that he had borrowed the revolver used in Taher's murder from Shalehi and gave it back to him after the murder.

Zahangir told the police earlier that he took the revolver from Mohiuddin and hit Taher on the head from the back with its butt.

Mohiuddin said Shalehi took away the missing file that Taher had brought from Dhaka. The file contained documents that argued against Mohiuddin's promotion.

He told the police that Shalehi helped him in the murder.

The police, however, recovered Taher's missing ATM cards and business cards from the bank of the Padma River at Shahapur following Mohiuddin's confession on February 12. They videotaped the process of the recovery.

Mohiuddin told the court that those who are demanding his death penalty before the trial are conspiring against him.

He also alleged that the police forced him to be present at the scene of the recovery of the missing documents.

## Gujarat poultry farmer

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Nandurbar district in Maharashtra where the dreaded bird flu came to be noticed. It was being ascertained whether they were suffering from the avian flu, officials said.

Meanwhile, wearing protective gloves and masks, health officials in Maharashtra began culling over eight lakh chickens and vaccinating another two lakh to stop the spread of the disease.

Of the 12 to 13 lakh birds in Nandurbar district, nearly 2.5 lakh had been culled since Saturday night, officials sources said.

Seeking to allay fears over reports on bird flu at Navapur in Maharashtra, Indian Health Minister Anbumani Ramadoss said adequate measures had been taken to check spreading of the disease.

"People need not worry about bird flu. Adequate preventive measures have been taken to protect people as well as fowls," he told reporters.

The government also rushed stockpiles of Tamiflu, the most potent drug against bird flu, to the Navapur where the dreaded disease was officially confirmed for the first time to have broken out among chickens.

"The Central government laboratory in Bhopal of Madhya Pradesh has confirmed the presence of bird flu there," said Uttam Khobragade, principal secretary of Animal Husbandry and Dairy Development Department.

The confirmation by the Bhopal lab came after a committee of experts was formed to examine the samples and compare those received from Bangkok. This was for the first time the lab found strain of the disease since it started testing samples three years ago.

The government ordered quarantine of three km area around Navapur, Khobragade said.

Three children and a woman of Navapur, with suspected symptoms of the avian influenza, are under observation. Their samples had been sent to National Institute of Virology in Pune and it will take two more days for a confirmation if they are suffering from the disease, Indian Health Secretary P K Hoti told reporters here.

Some more people have been quarantined as a precautionary measure and samples of twelve more people will reach the National Institute of Virology soon, Hoti said.

Earlier reports held a seasonal disease responsible for the death of around 40,000 chickens in and around

Navapur during the last week.

A five-member team of specialists from National Institute of Communicable Diseases and veterinary doctors were already in the affected area.

Maharashtra has stopped all kind of poultry trades in Nandurbar district. Indian Federal Cabinet Secretary B K Chaturvedi confirmed the arrival of the disease in India and said 60 teams of specialists and a rapid response of epidemiologists were already in the disease-hit place.

While no national alert has been issued, authorities in Maharashtra and neighbouring Gujarat and Karnataka states have been asked to remain on guard.

India is estimated to have 75 million doses of Tamiflu, the best-known drug manufactured by Swiss pharmaceutical company Roche, to combat the avian flu. Hyderabad-based Indian company Hetero Drugs has been given the licence for bulk manufacturing of the drug.

"We have supplied five lakh doses to the government last week and they have ordered another two lakh capsules," Hetero director Srinivas Reddy said adding that one million additional doses are under production.

The breaking out of the disease is likely to hit the Rs 30 thousand crore poultry industry of India.

## BB clarifies

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getting fresh credit from other banks, the clarification said.

As per the new policy the defaulting borrower who has availed interest waiver must settle at least 15% of the compromise amount (excluding the down payment on rescheduling as per present guideline) to get any further credit facility from any bank, it said.

While the defaulting borrowers could easily avail themselves of loans from other banks, the new policy has made it mandatory that the information on the concerned credit account should be reported to the CIB in case of interest and credit waiver, the central bank clarification added.

Taking opportunity of the previous policy, defaulters showed reluctance to pay the earlier loan to the lending bank.

But the new policy has made provision for reflecting the loan defaulters' performances in the report of the Credit Information Bureau, which will help to decide on giving further loan, the clarification said.

## Villagers feel helpless

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at night. "We don't disturb them. We're not with any party. We went there to help the land office take possession of the land," he claimed.

He said, "We were directed by the district administration and did our duty in presence of a number of government officials."

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Savar was present at the spot during the take-over. "I was present there and as far as I know it is a khas land," he said.

Asked if he can hand over a land when cases are under trial over it, he said he did not know anything about the cases.

Savar Assistant Commissioner (Land) Jahirul Islam said Mirza obtained the lease of the government land in 2005. "So, we went there to take possession of the land and hand it over to the leasee," he said. "There was no incident of land grabbing, as we actually handed over the land to its real owner."

When asked then how had the villagers been occupying the land and paying taxes for more than a hundred years, he said that was illegal and they did it mistakenly.

However, Jahirul said, "Now, if

the court orders to give the land back to them," we will do that.

More than 1,000 women and children of about 500 families had been staying in their houses fenced off by barbed wire during Thursday's drive.

Earlier, in October 2005, the police and Mirza's men tried to take possession of the land but failed in the face of villagers' resistance.

A former deputy commissioner of Dhaka district told The daily Star that leasing out the land in such a way was not fair. "Even if the land was khas, the villagers should have received priority in getting the lease," he said, requesting anonymity.

Meanwhile, the home ministry in a rejoinder has denied any involvement of the state minister of home in the lease of taking possession of the land. It said the media reports that implied using the influence of State Minister Lutfozzaman Babar in obtaining police assistance in the occupation were completely untrue, wily and baseless.

## Israel slaps sanctions

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Palestinian government would be regarded as beyond the pale.

"It is clear that in light of the Hamas majority in the PLC (parliament) and the instructions to form a new government that were given to the head of Hamas, the PA is, in practice, becoming a terrorist authority. The state of Israel will not agree to this," said Olmert at the start of the meeting.

He then received overwhelming backing for a series of sanctions including a ban on Palestinian workers crossing into Israel for work as well as a freeze on the payment of customs duties, worth around 50 million dollars a month, which Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.

"As we stated immediately after the PA elections, upon the conclusion of the transitional government, Israel will immediately cease the transfer of funds to the PA," he said.

Abbas's spokesman criticised Olmert's team for implementing a change of policy even before a new Palestinian government had been chosen.

"This an over-hasty decision and they should at least wait until a Palestinian cabinet has been declared," Nabil Abu Rudeina told AFP.

The spokesman said that Abbas was due to travel to Hamas's Gaza Strip stronghold from his base