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Inside Today

Article

Terrorism bill and
 its opponents
 Page 4

International



Bush has won prima-
 ries but feels sting of
 economic protests
 Page 5

Business

China to buy Tk 16
 crore jute and
 jute goods
 Page 7

Feature

Banking and
 Finance

Streamlining loan-loss
 provisioning
 Page 8

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day



Struggle begins at 58
 Page 3

NEWS BRIEFS

Ramzan moon expected today

The Ramzan moon is expected to be sighted today (Thursday). The National Moon Sighting Committee will meet today at 6.45 pm to collect information on the sighting of moon. People have been requested to inform the committee about sighting of moon by telephone No. 239493, 230280, 236407, 254457, 239643 and 259631 or by any other means by 6.30 pm today reports BSS.

Committee for bank pay scale

The government has formed a four-member committee with Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Establishment as its convener to examine the proposal submitted to the Finance Ministry by Bangladesh Bank Authority on introduction of new pay scale for the officials of Bangladesh Bank. The committee will submit its report to the Finance Ministry within six weeks, reports BSS.

Japan to build cyclone shelters

Japan has decided to build some multi-purpose cyclone shelters in response to a call from the Bangladesh government to construct shelters in 100 sites, a press release of Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) said. A five-member location survey team of JICA will arrive Dhaka on this purpose today (Thursday). Seventeen more members of the agency will arrive here by March 15, reports BSS.

Hasina to address in Sonargaon today

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina will address a public meeting at Sonargaon in Narayanganj today (Thursday). The meeting is organised to commemorate the death of Chhatra League leader Miznur Rahman Mizan who was killed in the campus violence in Dhaka last year, reports UNB.

"Education Statistics -1991" published

Bangladesh Statistical Bureau has published "Bangladesh, Education Statistics-1991," an official handout said in Dhaka Wednesday, reports BSS.

Influx reaching crisis proportions : UNHCR EC asks Myanmar to stop persecution of Rohingyas



MOTHER AND CHILD AS REFUGEES: A Rohingya family at Kutupalong camp near Teknaf. —Star photo

The European Community (EC) has expressed concern over the influx of Myanmar refugees into Bangladesh and urged the Myanmar government to refrain from "further military action" against minorities, according to diplomatic sources in Dhaka, reports BSS.

British Ambassador to Myanmar Julian D N Harland Swan, who represents the presidency of the EC formally conveyed its reaction to the Myanmar foreign office in Yangon Tuesday, the sources said.

The 12-member states of EC in its reaction said the growing number of refugees in Bangladesh "is a subject of international concern and can become a threat to regional stability." The EC in its reaction said that its concern was basically humanitarian.

The EC, in its note to the Myanmar government, stressed the need for "some public assurance and a public statement about the guarantee of civil and human rights for the refugees about peacefully resolving the issue." The EC said that the refugees had alleged persecution and discrimination on ethnic and religious grounds.

The note also mentioned the hardships suffered by the refugees now numbering over one lakh. The "appalling hardships they appear to have suffered has created a sense of horror among the international community and growing burdens on both host countries and others who are involved in necessary humanitarian assistance," the note said.

It called for the protection of human and civil rights of the people in Myanmar and pleaded for solution to all ethnic conflicts "which will benefit all those living in the union."

Meanwhile AFP adds from Geneva: The flight of mainly Muslim Myanmar refugees to Bangladesh, continuing at a

KAFCO fallout : WB meet on Jamuna bridge postponed

Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Bangladesh government will incur a direct cost of Taka 600 crore (approximately) and a direct loss of Taka 57 crore annually if the Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company gets through with the gas pricing formula dictated by the foreign shareholders.

The state-owned Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation will be burdened with a loss of Tk 57 crore annually if gas is supplied to KAFCO at the rate of \$ 1.00 per thousand cubic feet, according to official estimates.

These issues figured prominently in recent Cabinet meetings on KAFCO.

Most ministers are of the opinion 'KAFCO' is the most sensitive issue that the BNP government — past and present — has ever faced, sources said.

With the realisation of 'real national loss,' if the project gets through, as it is uniform among the Cabinet members, the government is finding it difficult to take a strong position against pressures from foreign governments.

The statement over the 475-million dollar fertilizer project has threatened 'bilateral economic relations' between Japan and Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the scheduled meeting on March 16, on financing of Jamuna bridge project in Washington has been postponed reportedly at the insistence of Japan, official sources said.

Observers say they also dread the political cost of acceding to the foreign pressure, thus delaying the decision.

One fact that has received serious attention in the series of Cabinet meetings is that the project is at best a 'marginal' one in terms of economic return.

On project's viability a BCIC source says the estimated rate of return on the investment is only 3 to 4 per cent.

The World Bank insists a 10 to 12 per cent rate of return as a modest one.

According to a senior Cabinet member, there are two

main weaknesses of the project. First, there is not enough gas in the Bakhrabad Gas Field. As it is, there are difficulties with gas supply in Chittagong area and according to official sources a silent 'gas load shedding' is already on.

When KAFCO comes into production — if government ultimately succumbs to foreign pressure — it will tap the Bakhrabad Gas Field for its annual need of 24 million MCF. To meet this projected increase in demand, the government will have to link up KAFCO with the gas field in the Surma basin by setting up pipelines costing \$150 million.

The government would not have incurred this large investment under normal circumstances. So this 150 million dollar investment is a direct cost of the KAFCO project which all the different calculations of the project's rate of return have not taken into account, an official at Economic Relations Division points out.

The second point is that the Cabinet members find most difficult to accept is that the whole project is overpriced by at least 80 million dollars. This figure was arrived at by comparing cost of the more 'recently-built fertilizer factories using comparable or even similar technology and processes.'

According to sources this estimate of overpricing was also confirmed recently by foreign experts who were engaged by the government. This means that the project is heavily over-capitalised, says another official.

With urea price projected to remain at its current low for the medium-term future, even the entire proceeds from sale of KAFCO production may not be adequate to service and repay its debt.

Thus, the foreign exchange earning for Bangladesh that KAFCO's foreign shareholders are attempting to entice the government into signing on the dotted lines will always remain a distant dream," says the official who

See Page 12 Col 4

Exchequer faces loss of Tk. two crore a month Sweetmeat shop owners evade VAT

By Masud Hasan Khan

Sweetmeat shop owners are not paying Value Added Tax (VAT) causing the national exchequer a loss about Taka two crore every month.

The government, has so far not taken any action to realise the arrears VAT from this sector, official sources said.

The sources said that some 5000 sweetmeat shop owners across the country have vehemently opposed the new system of taxation since its introduction eight months ago and stayed away from paying VAT.

National Board of Revenue (NBR) sources told The Daily Star that the annual turnover from the sweetmeat shops was about Taka 300 crore. On this amount, 15 per cent of VAT totals to Taka 45 crore. According to a conservative count, an estimated Taka two crore is not being realised from the industry each month, the source said.

The government initially withdrew VAT from several sectors after review. But the sweetmeat industry did not come under exemption and the government repeatedly said that the tax would remain.

After six months of its introduction, the government last year fined a number of

sweetmeat shop owners Taka 75,000 each for not paying the tax and not taking the VAT registration.

"We have tried to avoid enforcement of law... but the government cannot be careless for a long time," said the NBR source.

Soon after introduction of VAT, the shop owners appealed to the Collectorate for exemption which was turned down. The shop owners again sought revision from the NBR but no hearing was held. Instead the NBR imposed penalty on the shopowners for

Office timing for Ramadan

By Staff Correspondent

The Government has announced office time for the month of Ramadan.

In Dhaka, the timing for all offices of government, autonomous bodies and sector corporations will be from 9 am to 3 pm with a break from 1-15 pm to 1-30 pm for Zohr prayers, according to an official handout.

See Page 12 Col 3

tax evasion.

In December, the sweetmeat shop owners filed a Writ petition in the High Court challenging the penalty. After a three-week hearing the Court ruled out exemption of VAT. However, it said that the NBR could not penalize before the holding of the hearing for revision.

Leaders of the Dhaka Mahanagar Mishtannya Baboshal Kalyan Samity said that at the moment, they were not paying VAT. Instead they were paying only the income tax, municipal and other taxes.

"The NBR will have to take the total responsibility for the loss of revenue during these eight months," said Amir Hossain, a leader of the Association.

When contacted, Member (Revenue) of NBR Shah Abdul Hannan said that the sweetmeat shop owners were not obeying the rules and not paying VAT. "We have tried to explain to them that sweetmeat is an item which should not be out of VAT when restaurants are under the VAT system and items like pharmaceutical products, biscuits and other consumer goods are under the tax too."

Dhaka to take Rohingya issue to world forums, says Mostafiz

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 4 : Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman yesterday said Bangladesh would take the Rohingya issue to the international forum if Myanmar delays repatriation of its nationals, reports UNB.

Rahman who flew in here from the capital was talking to reporters at the Circuit House after visiting the Desua Palang refugee camp.

The Foreign Minister said Bangladesh still believed that the problem arising out of the influx of refugees, officially estimated at more than 85 thousand, could be resolved across the table. "We want to maintain friendly relation with the neighbours," he added.

"We shall have no alternative but to take the matter to various international fora if Myanmar delays in taking back their people," he asserted.

Bangladesh has already started giving the list of refugees to Myanmar, Rahman said.

Bangladesh demonstrated restraint and patience in the face of Myanmar provocation, he said adding that this was acclaimed in the comity of nations.

Agricultural policy being worked out: PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here Wednesday that the government was working to introduce a national agricultural policy to bring momentum in the agricultural sector of the country, reports BSS.

"The fate of people of this country is dependent on the improvement of the agriculture and we want to achieve progress and prosperity through the development of the agricultural sector," Begum Khaleda Zia told the inaugural session of the two-day grand national convention of Krishibid Institution, Bangladesh.

Begum Zia urged the agriculturists particularly those who were involved in agricultural research to work actively for finding out ways to continue agricultural production during the floods and drought.

She said the agriculturists would have to take up new research projects to bring positive change in the cropping pattern in the areas which are regularly affected by natural calamities.

The Prime Minister called upon the agriculturists to utilise their merit and talent for evolving a new variety of crop which could sustain the onslaught of floods and

drought. Terming the agriculturists as the vital force in the movement for bringing development of the rural people Begum Zia said they could help in reaching the new technology to the backward people.

There are still some rural areas where the modern technologies are yet to be reached and this situation could not be allowed to continue any more, she said.

"We want to bring momentum in the agricultural sector and agriculturists can ensure the success in our programme," she added.

Begum Zia said the government was aware of the problems of the agricultural cadres including their promotions. She assured that the government would give due considerations to solve their problems gradually.

While listing the various uplift projects taken for the development of the farming community she said the present government had attached top most priority to the development of agriculture sector.

The Prime Minister said the problems in handing over the land, which was given by Ziaur Rahman, for the Krishibid Institution would be



Historic March

A Star Commentary

March 5, 1971 turned out to be an extraordinary day, even by the standards of the previous four days.

Bangla Desh observed a total hartal for the third day running, while it was a fourth consecutive day of general strike and incessant processions and demonstrations for Dhaka.

Most remarkable however, was the fact that government and semi-government offices opened for two hours between 2.30pm and 4.30 pm to disburse salaries to their staff, while banks opened for business during those two hours, in compliance with a directive issued by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman the previous

See Page 12 Col 7



India's first win at Pakistan's cost

SYDNEY, Mar 4 : India stunned Pakistan with a 43-run victory in the first World Cup meeting between the sub-continent arch rivals at the Sydney Cricket Ground on Wednesday, reports AP.

A late-innings rush, brilliant bowling by paceman Manoj Prabhakar and strong fielding set up India's second win of the tournament and kept them in semifinal calculations.

India reached 216 for seven wickets off their 49 overs then pounced on a lethargic Pakistan batting lineup to restrict their neighbour to 173

See Page 12 Col 5

UNHCR official meets PM today

By Staff Correspondent

Jamshid Anvar, a representative from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), will call on the Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today (Thursday). Anvar, who arrived in the country Tuesday, is likely to discuss with the Prime Minister UNHCR's assistance programme for the Rohingya refugees amassed on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

UNHCR sources said that Anvar is likely to present a cheque for the refugees to the Prime Minister during the meeting.

The issues to be discussed by Anvar includes, sites for camps, which is the most pressing problem at the moment. Anvar, chief of Asia and Oceania Bureau of UNHCR, and his colleagues depart for Cox's Bazar district this afternoon to visit the camps.

The UN agency has been in the field in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban for nearly three weeks.

Private sector lobby gets stronger in AL

By Nurul Kabir

The Awami League (AL), in a major policy shift, is considering a proposition of strongly upholding private initiatives in the economy of the country.

According to sources, the AL Central Working Committee which met last morning following a three-day extended meeting of the party began deliberation on a draft resolution on the party's economic policy.

See Page 12 Col 1

End of Cold War era to benefit Asia, Chinese expert says

By Staff Correspondent

The end of the Cold War era will have a positive impact on Asia and a negative one on Europe, according to a visiting international relations expert from China.

President of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies Professor Chen Peiyao, speaking at a discussion meeting on 'China and South Asia in the post Cold War era' Wednesday emphasised that under a changing global scenario it was important for Asian nations to strengthen unity and develop mutual support among themselves.

Organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic (BIISS) at the institute auditorium, the meeting was presided over by A K H Moshed, Chairman, Board of Governors of BIISS.

Wang Hongyu, also from the Shanghai Institute, translated Professor Chen's presentation while it was followed by questions and comments by other participants.

Professor Chen pointed out that the unification of Germany and the 'dismemberment' of CEATO and the Soviet Union were the three primary factors

symbolising the end of the Cold War era.

Terming the collapse of the Soviet Union as the biggest event after the Second World War, he said, it indicated the end to conflict between the two superpowers and also the end of the Cold War era.

Noting that the main reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union were domestic political and economic problems, he said the crises resulted from the model of socialism adopted and the failure of the 'so-called' economic reforms to produce positive re-

sults.

He said that due to the end of the Cold War the opposing sides in the hot-spots of Asia — in the Korean peninsula, in Indo-China and in Afghanistan — were now negotiating political settlements to their respective conflicts.

Identifying northeast Asia as the only bi-polar region in Asia in the recent past, he noted that since the beginning of 1982 there appeared a multipolar system when China began to readjust its foreign policy.

Professor Chen observed

that the economic situation was getting better in most Asian countries and most governments were maintaining their original foreign policies. "The positive impact of the end of the Cold War era on Asia is evidenced on the one hand by the stability and development in the region and by the disappearance of conflicts between nations of the other," he said, adding "the important task we are confronted with is to develop our economy and maintain peace and stability in the region."

He also observed that the

end of the Cold War era had unleashed an 'era of turbulence' in Europe. He pointed out that ethnic, religious and territorial conflicts were rising in Europe and the internal wars in Yugoslavia were the symbols of these conflicts.

"I think the former Soviet states and Europe will remain in turbulence for quite a long time in the future," he noted.

Professor Chen warned that the regional conflicts along ethnic and religious lines could be detrimental to peace in Asia. He urged for joint ef-

See Page 12 Col 6