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NEWS BRIEFS

Ennals accorded reception

Former British Foreign Office Minister Lord Ennals was accorded a reception by the United Nations Association of Bangladesh (UNAB) at the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) here Tuesday evening. Ennals, who is also the Chairman of the British Association of United Nations, spoke briefly on different issues relating to the global political scenario. Professor Innas Ali and Syed Ahmad Hossain, President and General Secretary respectively of the UNAB spoke on the occasion.

Times-Bangla trustees meet

A meeting of the Times-Bangla Trustee Board was held at the Dainik Bangla Bhaban Monday. The meeting took a number of measures to solve the problems faced by the dailies and periodicals under the trust, after its formulation, reports BSS.

CPB central body meet begins today

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) begins its three-day central committee meeting today, a party press release said yesterday. The meeting will be held at the party central office, reports BSS.

Journalists rally today

The President of the Dhaka Union of Journalists Shahjahan Mian and General Secretary Altaz Mahmood Tuesday requested the members of the union to attend today's rally at 11 am at the Dainik Bangla-Times crossing at the call of the three federations of the newspaper industry and the DUJ, reports BSS.

Transport workers block Dhaka-Aricha Highway Road link with northern, southern parts snapped

Direct road communication between the capital and northern and southwestern part of the country remained cut off on Tuesday as the transport workers blocked the Dhaka-Aricha Highway. Their move came as sequel to Monday's clash between transport workers and the students of Jahangirnagar University. Transport workers barricaded the roads from Mirpur Technical Institute Square to Aminbazar with trucks and minibuses in the morning to realise their three-point demand release of four detained truck workers from JU, compensation for damaged trucks and construction of diversion roads near JU to link Dhaka with Aricha. JU Vice Chancellor, leaders of Central Students Union and transport workers' leaders held a meeting on Tuesday with the Home Minister at his residence which continued till writing of this report at 11-45 pm. The university authorities postponed the ongoing first year admission test. The fresh dates would be announced later. Dhaka-Aricha road maintains the only direct road communication with 16 northern districts and as many southwestern districts. Our Manikganj correspondent adds: Barricades were also placed near Nayarhat bridge as some buses tried to operate through Nabinagar-Kaliakayor route. As such a number of young bus passengers were assaulted by the transport workers as



BCI Chairman Mustafizur Rahman being taken to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday. —Star photo

BCI MD arrested, sent to jail

Mustafizur Rahman, Chairman and Managing Director of Bangladesh Commerce and Investment (BCI) was arrested Tuesday and sent to the Dhaka Central Jail. Earlier, Mustafiz, an Awami League Member of Parliament, had surrendered in the High Court. A bail petition for Mustafiz had been filed May 10. A Division Bench of the High Court rejected the bail petition and sent him to jail. Our Supreme Court Correspondent adds: The petition for Mustafiz's anticipatory bail was heard and disposed of by the bench comprising Justice Habibur Rahman and Justice Md Abdul Mannan. Mustafiz was taken to jail at around 3.30 pm in his own car under police protection. He was accorded the dignity of an MP and awarded Division One status in jail. Rakanuddin Mahmud assisted by Murad Beg moved the bail petition while Aminul Haq, Attorney General assisted by A F M Shaheed, DAG, and Obaidur Rahman Mustafa, AAG appeared for the state. Our Staff Correspondent picks up: Mustafiz had been absconding since April 28 after the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Court issued warrants of arrest against him and 19 other directors of the BCI for squandering public money. BCI, a non-banking investment company, had been established in 1983. —Star photo

Remain alert against conspiracy: PM

JHENIDAH, May 12: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that her government would make village the focal point of all development activities since the majority of the people live in the rural areas, reports BSS. "Our avowed policy is to develop the rural areas from where all development activities will start", she told a huge public meeting at Jhenidah Government High School ground here this afternoon. Presided over by local member of parliament Maashur Rahman, the meeting was addressed, among others, by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdus Salam Talukder, Information Minister Nazmul Huda, Women Affairs and Social Welfare Minister Tariqul Islam, Begum Raqshan Elahi MP, AKM Wahab MP, Shahidul Islam MP, Saifuzzaman MP, and local leaders - Munshi Abu Zafar, Abdul Majid, A KM Wadej and Abu Bakar Siddiqui. Begum Zia said maintenance of peace and discipline was essential for attaining self-reliance. "We have already traversed a long way during 20 years of independence and wasted our valuable time. There is no scope for wasting any more time and we have to work untidily sinking all difference to build the nation," she said. She said her government wanted to build a strong Bangladesh where there would be no unemployment and people would enjoy the fruits of democracy. The Prime Minister said the people had reposed their faith in the Nationalist Party since they believe that it was the only party which could protect national independence. —Star photo

Commentary Discard conspiracy theory, it only distorts perspective

By S M Ali

The country seems to have stepped back into the world of conspiracies, a world in which dark plots are hatched by nameless, faceless villains. One such conspiracy robbed Awami League (AL) of its victory in the last parliamentary polls, so said Sheikh Hasina, the opposition leader on Monday at the national conference of the AL's student wing, Bangladesh Chhatra League. On the other hand, leaders of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), starting with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, also see conspiracies to destabilise the government, thwart the development process or even take the country back to anarchy and chaos. In due course, other political parties will start propagating their own conspiracy theories. Since sources of these conspiracies are seldom identified, but only hinted, we have endless speculation on the subject, resulting in a breakdown of communication among political parties and even among individuals within the government and the administration. In the process, the atmosphere becomes vitiated, with the attention of political parties and people at large getting diverted from real challenges facing the country to imaginary fears and convenient myths. In such a situation, prospects of creating an open democratic system, promoting healthy interaction among political groupings and seeking a national consensus on vital issues continue to suffer severe setbacks. True, much of it is part of the legacy of the past, when conspiracies and plots, often leading to great tragedies, marred our history. The failure of our politicians of both the ruling party and the opposition lies in their inability to rise above this dismal legacy of the past and, what's worse, in their unwillingness — so it seems — to think seriously about what the country wants — and needs. —Star photo

Earth summit: Dhaka likely to propose for special fund

By Mahfuz Ullah

Bangladesh is expected to press forward the demand for transfer of environment-friendly technology to the developing countries and the formation of a special environment fund during the coming Earth Summit to be held in the Brazilian capital Rio from June 3 to 16. In what has been called 'the most expensive adult-education enterprise in recent history', the Earth Summit officially called United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) is expected to draw as many as 50,000 delegates from 160 countries. Delegates are expected to approve Rio declaration, a non-binding embrace of environmental principles besides discussing specific issues. Referring to the composition of the conference will be led by Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, who will be in Rio around June 7 to participate in the summit scheduled for June 14 to June 16. Earlier it was indicated that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia would lead the Bangladesh delegation to the conference. —Star photo

Rohingya repatriation Ennals pleads for UN involvement

By Staff Correspondent

Lord David Ennals, the former British Foreign Office minister, has suggested further steps to 'reassure' the

IS THE GOVERNMENT SERIOUS ABOUT THE JUTE INDUSTRY AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR ?

Jute has traditionally been the most important industrial sector of Bangladesh. Even in 1992 almost 3 crore people are directly or indirectly dependent on jute. From the time of inception of the industry, the Government has deliberately given an artificially reduced amount of local currency (Rs. or Taka) to this major exporting industry in exchange for the foreign currency earned by it. This low rate of exchange was maintained to keep the cost of imports down. However the Government compensated the jute industry through the Bonus Voucher system which yielded a benefit of Tk. 63/- for every Tk. 100/- worth of foreign exchange earned. Unfortunately this substantial compensation was totally withdrawn after liberation, causing artificial loss for the industry since then, while the industry was also nationalized. Because of inefficiency and unbearable loss, Bangladeshi owned mills were denationalized in 1982-83. The owners took back the mills with staggering liabilities of Tk. 330 crores accumulated during the nationalised period, but nevertheless accepted the challenge of achieving better performance while the Government accorded equal treatment to both BJMA (private) & BJMC (public) mills to ensure fair and healthy competition. From 1983-84 to 1988-89, the Government compensated all jute mills equally for the Government induced artificial loss, as noted earlier, through segregation of losses and subsidies. The present Government has however changed the policy and withdrawn all support to the private mills while infusing cash as required into the BJMC mills despite the private mills' far better performance as shown below :

	BJMC (Public)			BJMA (Private)			TOTAL
	Hessian	Sacking	C B C	Hessian	Sacking	C B C	
(1) Loomage	65%			35%			100%
(2) Cost of Production Per Ton (taka) 1991-92 (July—February)	42111	26911	41105	33051	20765	35130	
(3) Loss (In Crore Taka) 1991-92 (July—February)	(—)192 (81%)			(—)46 (19%)			(—)238

Due to the losses since July 1989, not compensated by the Government as before, the private jute mills today have no working capital left to run. The public mills, however, are continuing as usual with the Government financial support of Tk. 360 crore, as stated by the Jute Minister in the New Nation on 31.3.1992 and a fresh allocation of Tk. 37 crore as approved by the Cabinet Sub-Committee on 7th May 1992. The Jute Minister also admitted that it would be difficult for the private jute mills to continue and therefore recommended that the subsidy already provided for in the 1991-92 budget be released along with other financial supports. However, despite the recommendation of the Jute Ministry and the decision of 29th August 1991 taken by the high level Cabinet Sub-Committee for Jute to continue the segregation and subsidy policies for the jute industry as a whole, the Finance Ministry has not implemented the same. Meanwhile, the World Bank's comprehensive studies on the jute sector confirm that Bangladesh enjoys long term international comparative advantage in jute goods manufacturing and so it should remain in the business after restoring viability/profitability to the industry through appropriate corrective measures including, of course, devaluation of the Taka. It is unfortunate that the Government's budgetary provisions for subsidy duly approved by the highest representative body, the Parliament, is still not being implemented. The policy decision taken by Cabinet Sub-Committee for jute, for segregation of losses and subsidy is being ignored and not implemented. Furthermore, the present Government was elected on a clear-cut platform of a market economy where the private sector would flourish and play the leading role. The Government with such discriminatory policy against the private jute mills does not live upto that promise. The mills closing down are more efficient and productive than BJMC jute mills which are being sustained by cash infusion from the public funds with no accountability whatsoever. The private jute mills cannot accept the onerous burden of responsibility for unemployment of thousands of workers, the disastrous impact on the national economy, and the permanent loss of international markets mainly to India, brought on by the Government's discriminatory policy. The BJMC mills are receiving cash infusions from the Government as needed while the more efficient private mills are not receiving any support whatsoever. Under such circumstances the owners can no longer financially sustain operations and have no alternative left but to offer the mills to the Government with effect from 30th May 1992 in the interest of workers, staff, jute growers and all others connected with the jute industry.

BANGLADESH JUTE MILLS ASSOCIATION