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# The Daily Star

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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Hasina leaves for Jeddah June 5

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka for Jeddah on June 5 (Friday) to perform holy hajj. She sought blessings from all, reports UNB.

### Grand confice on CHT by monthend

Chittagong Hill Tracts National Coordination and Peace Council will hold a grand conference in Dhaka in the last week of the month. Representatives of tribals and non-tribals from each union and upazilas of Rangamati, Khagrachhari and Bandarban are expected to attend the conference, reports UNB.

### Advice for Saudi visa seekers

Bangladeshi citizens who applied to Saudi embassy in Dhaka for individual visa have been requested to collect their passports from the embassy counters during delivery hours on any working day. The concerned passport holders have been advised to collect their passports immediately as the delay may result in the expiry of the validity of visa, reports BSS.

## Drastic cut in savings interests

# Bank rate reduced

By Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday announced a one-half percentage point cut in the Bank Rate from the existing nine per cent and sharp reductions in the interest rates on both Savings Accounts and savings certificates.

Briefing newsmen on the wide-ranging changes in the financial sector, in the conference room of the Ministry, the Finance Minister said that new laws would soon be formulated to regulate the capital issues market and non-banking financial sectors. He also said that both the Banking Companies Act and the Commercial Court Act would be amended.

He said that effective 'with-out further delay' the Bangladesh Bank commercial lending interest rate (Bank Rate) would be reduced to 8.5 per cent and the 'yield rate' on all

types of savings certificates, except the Wage Earners Bond, would be 'rationalised' downwards.

Saying that the interest rate on savings accounts was 'high', he said, it would be lowered by 1.5 percentage points from 7.5 to 6 per cent while the rate on fixed deposit accounts (up to six months) would be reduced from 8.5 per cent to 7.5 per cent.

The various steps were in line with the government's financial sector reform programme, Saifur Rahman said, adding that they were designed to 'activate the economy, develop capital markets and facilitate the release of funds for investments.'

He also announced the introduction of open market auction sale of the 91-day term Treasury Bills 'to foster free-

market economy' and the government decision to release a new three-year-term National Investment Bond soon.

The new bonds would be of two separate types. One with a predetermined annual interest rate averaging 12 per cent while the yield of the other would be on a 'floating or profit sharing basis' which would be determined by adding the annual inflation rate and the growth rate in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The second type would also be consistent with the Islamic policy of non-interest saving, he added.

The export sector-lending rate would also be reduced from 7.5-11 per cent to 7.5-10.5 per cent while the government subsidy would be reduced from one per cent to 0.75 per cent.

Describing it 'one of the most important elements to develop the capital markets' he said that a Securities and Exchange Authority would be appointed soon. Securities and exchange laws had already been formulated and would be sent for review to the Law Ministry.

Saifur Rahman said that the Non-Banking Financial Institution Act was in the process of formulation to define 'functions and parameters' and for more 'effective' regulation.

The Banking Companies Act would also be amended to provide an 'increased supervisory and inspection' role for the regulators, he said.

The Commercial Court Act had already been amended under a presidential ordinance issued on the day for 'quick

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Dhaka University students demonstrating in front of Vice-Chancellor's residence yesterday demanding shifting of examination date. — Star photo

## \$13.5m UNHCR grant : 5 more camps soon Repatriation talks uncertain

By Farid Hossain

The government has decided to open five more camps to deal with the growing influx of Rohingya refugees amidst doubts that this week's repatriation talks between Bangladesh and Myanmar may not take place.

An average of 300 refugees are arriving everyday swelling the official number to 2 lakh 74 thousand. The unofficial estimate has been put at more than 3 lakh.

Officials at Cox's Bazar reached by telephone said about 88,000 refugees are now living in the rugged Cox's Bazar-Teknaf region without any proper shelter. The new camps that will raise the number of shelters to 18 are designed to provide shelter to at least 70,000 more refugees.

Meanwhile, the prospects of repatriation under the April 28 agreement have become slimmer as Myanmar remains silent about another round of talks planned at Teknaf this week.

"We have got no response from Myanmar side about the meeting. The process of repatriation seems to have plunged into a new uncertainty," said a relief official at Cox's Bazar.

The repatriation due to begin from May 15 has already been postponed twice for lack of preparations and more importantly the refugees' reluctance to return home until human rights situation improves in Burma.

The refugees insist that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees must be involved in the process to oversee their repatriation and rehabilitation. Myanmar has rejected the idea.

The UNHCR has geared up its relief operation in cooperation with Bangladesh government.

The Dhaka office of UNHCR said on Tuesday that it had raised 13.9 million dollars in response to an appeal for 27.5 million dollars made in last March by UNHCR chief Sadako

Ogata.

The UNHCR officially granted the package of aid (13.5 million dollars) to Bangladesh under an agreement signed in Dhaka on Tuesday. The money will be used for erecting shelters and providing water, sanitation, health and nutritional facilities for the refugees. Much of the aid has already been disbursed to Bangladesh since last March, when the UNHCR got involved into the refugee situation in response to Dhaka's call for international help.

The agreement which brings the UNHCR assistance under formal coverage was signed by UNHCR Bangladesh Mission chief Dariusch Bayandor and relief secretary M A Hakim.

Under the agreement the UNHCR will provide 8.4 million dollars directly to the government through the Relief Ministry to fund supply of water, sanitation, health, nutri-

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## DU decides on exams tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

A meeting of the Deans and Chairmen of the Faculties and Departments of Dhaka University will take place tomorrow to consider the shifting of the Honours and Master Degree Examinations scheduled to begin from June 30.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor Prof Wakil Ahmed will preside over the meeting.

The move came as the examinees demanded the shifting of exam dates against the backdrop of uneasy situation prevailing on the campus following feuds between two rival factions of Awami League-backed Chhatra League.

The three residential halls of the university, where the feuding groups are staying, have in the meantime, took a desolate look as most of the residents left their rooms fearing fierce gunbattle between the groups.

## Earth Summit begins in Rio today

By Mahfuz Ullah

With the growing concern for 'Mother Earth' and actions to arrest the degradation of the environment, the nations of the world are meeting today in the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro.

Officially called United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the conference has taken on the popular name 'Earth Summit'.

It has been 20 years since the world community met in Stockholm, Sweden, on Jun 5, 1972, under the watchful banner 'Only One Earth.' Over the last 20 years the environmental agenda has undergone remarkable progress.

Once viewed as a secondary issue, today, it has moved to

the forefront of political, economic and national security concerns.

Nevertheless, the Rio Conference begins with a big question on its outcome. Moves by developed countries, especially the United States have questioned the pious wishes of the organisers and the poverty-stricken countries of the world are feeling hurt as the question of poverty is being pushed into backstage.

President Bush has already said 'no' to the bio-diversity agreement proposed for signature during the conference.

Environmentalists are of the opinion that if the agreement is not signed one-third of the species on earth will be

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## Children's problems need urgent solution : PM

By Staff Correspondent

"We must remember that in our lives, quite a few things can wait, but the needs of children cannot. Their needs are so urgent that these cannot be left to be fulfilled tomorrow, because that tomorrow belongs to children."

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said this while launching the National Programme of Action for Children, as chief guest at the International Conference Centre in the city yesterday. The programme was organised by the Joint Government-UNICEF Advisory Group (JGUAG).

Presided over by Planning Minister A M Zahiruddin Khan, the meeting was addressed by Minister for Education Jamiruddin Sircar, Minister for Information Nazmul Huda, Minister for Health and Family Planning Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, LGRD Minister Abdus Salam Talukdar and State Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Affairs Sarwar Rahman.

The Prime Minister said that by one estimate, nearly

half of the country's total population was under 16 years of age.

Every year, 37 lakh babies are born in the country, that is, one hundred every hour, but their future, even the next moment after birth, is uncertain. Out of every 1000 children born alive, 110 die prematurely every year, she added.

"What is needed for child development is well-coordinated programmes. It is in response to this need that the National Programme of Action (NPA) has been prepared. It has been named 'Progoti', meaning progress. Not only in its literal meaning, but also symbolically, the name is appropriate because, in the final analysis, the progress of the country lies in the development of children," said Begum Khaleda Zia. She extended her gratitude to UNICEF for its co-operation and contribution.

The Prime Minister also appealed to all professional organisations, non-government

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## OIC FMs' meeting on Bosnia-Herzegovina soon

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) member nations are likely to attend a special session later this month to discuss the situation in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Muslim-majority breakaway republic of former Yugoslavia, diplomatic sources in Dhaka said yesterday.

The proposed meeting, at the initiative of Turkey with active support of some other OIC countries, is to take place in Istanbul.

Member countries including Bangladesh have already been contacted, said a senior Dhaka-based diplomat adding that 'it is almost certain to materialise as opposition to the initiative is highly unlikely.'

The move coincides with UN sanctions imposed on Saturday, similar to the one slapped on Iraq after its swallowing Kuwait, on the new two-republic Yugoslavia, comprising Serbia and Montenegro, in a bid to end the fighting that has killed some 2300

people and left nearly a million homeless in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Bosnia-Herzegovina's Muslim and Croat communities proclaimed independence in March, amid opposition from Serbia, leading to the devastating fighting.

Muslim nations including Bangladesh have called for complete withdrawal of troops from the republic.

The sponsors of the OIC move include Morocco, a Security Council member that voted for the sanctions.

Bangladesh is complying with the UNSC resolution, banning trade and air traffic to and from the republics except on humanitarian causes.

The sanctions also stipulate suspension of sports and cultural links, scientific and technical exchanges.

Dhaka is winding up its mission in Belgrade and at present only one diplomat is posted there.

Bangladesh has also recognised Bosnia-Herzegovina.

## Fierce fighting erupts in Kabul

KABUL, June 2: The wounded continued pouring into Kabul's several hospitals today as fighting between rival Mujahideen groups spread to at least four districts, doctors and witnesses said, reports AFP.

Pro-Iranian Shi'ite and Mujahideen factions backed by Saudi Arabia were clashing in the city's southern areas of Chehalsatoon and elsewhere in the capital, including Aliabad near Kabul University, Kote Sanghi and the troubled district of Karte Naw, reports said.

"We have so far received 45 people with gunshot and shell wounds and six fighters have crossed our doors dead," said International Red Cross Hospital administrator Dominique Vuichard.

The hospital's four expatriate and two Afghan surgeons were working non-stop as the wounded kept pouring in with injuries ranging from minor to severe.

Vuichard said many patients had been taken to Aliabad's 400-bed hospital because transportation had become a problem in Kabul due to the fighting, in which cannons and tanks were also used.

"Injured people are going to the closest hospitals," he said several hours after fighting first flared in the northeastern district of Kote Sanghi.

An AFP reporter caught in the skirmish zone saw close combat and random firing

across roads filled with fleeing civilians.

Details of exact casualties were not known as some other hospitals would not respond to phone calls. Operators from telex and telephone departments fled their offices, leading to virtual communication chaos in the city.

Hundreds of women and children were seen fleeing the area along the main roads as guns fired in the close quarter combat that flared early in the morning.

Residents said the fighting appeared to be concentrated around a main intersection in Kote Sanghi, and that several people, apparently wounded, were seen being carried away by the combatants.

About 5,000 people a day are flooding back from neighbouring Pakistan and Iran, said Charles-Henry Bazoché, chief of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' mission in Kabul, according to Reuters.

An estimated three million Afghans live in refugee camps in Pakistan and about two million in Iran. Many have been refugees from most of Afghanistan's 14-year war or were born in the camps.

Many families send one member back to discover whether their house still exists and whether they can make a living in their ancestral villages before deciding whether to go back for good.

## Janata Tower case PW denies amassing wealth since '82

Chief defence counsel of deposed president Ershad Tuesday completed cross-examination of the No 1 prosecution witness without raising a question on the charges against the accused, reports UNB.

The counsel Khandokar Mahbub Hossain during his four-hour cross-examination over two days endeavoured to show that K Z Islam is a man without integrity and that he stood witness against Ershad to safeguard his fortunes, billions of Taka he was favoured to make during 1982-90.

"It's a total lie," replied K Z Islam when the defence counsel suggested that his fortune opened up since 1982 and started earning hundreds of crores of Taka, visited abroad hundreds of times to transfer the money, stood as witness to safeguard the wealth he piled up, used as political pawn in this case and taking the advantage of making white his illegal black money.

"Every bit of my wealth has been declared in my wealth statement and I've no property within and without the

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## Rio meet may witness a N-S battle

RIO DE JANEIRO, June 2: On the eve of the world's biggest meeting on the environment, rich and poor nations clashed over key treaties and diplomats fretted over whether the event would end in triumph or tragedy, reports Reuter.

The two-week United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), starting Wednesday, will bring together around 100 heads of state or government to find ways of boosting growth without wrecking the planet.

Billed as a new chance for North and South to come together after the cold war, diplomats say the Rio meeting could turn instead into a new battleground over controversial issues such as debt, trade, forest exploitation and the price of economic progress.

As delegations prepared for the pre-summit skirmishing Tuesday, the United States was taking most of the flak.

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## Eid-ul-Azha June 12

With the appearance of the Zilhaj moon Tuesday the holy Eid-ul-Azha will be observed in the country on June 12 (Friday), according to an Islamic Foundation Bangladesh press release, reports BSS.

The National Moon Sighting Committee which met in Dhaka Tuesday evening reviewed the reports of different district administrations, met office and offices of Islamic Foundation at the district and the divisional levels about the appearance of the Zilhaj moon. These reports confirmed that the Zilhaj moon appeared Tuesday.

Abdul Awal, Secretary, Ministry of Religious Affairs and Vice-President, National Moon Sighting Committee, presided over the meeting.

## BTC strike on, cigarette price up

By Staff Correspondent

The strike of the workers of the Bangladesh Tobacco Company Ltd (BTC) went into the second day Tuesday.

The factory remained closed as announced earlier by the Management.

Sources said the Combined Bargaining Agents (CBAs) of BTC held talks with the management today to resolve the crisis.

BTC sources said the outcome of the talks was 'positive', and the crisis may be over very soon. They said the factory may resume operation by next week.

As a result of the strike, prices of BTC brand cigarettes shot up in the market. Prices of smuggled foreign cigarettes also recorded a sharp rise.

State Express 555 brand cigarette packets are being sold at Taka 60 each while the price of a packet of Gold Leaf is Taka 45. The previous price of 555 was Taka 45 a packet and that of Gold Leaf Taka 40.

Benson and Hedges (though illegal) is being sold at Taka 90 a packet. The previous price was about Taka 80 a packet.

Traders said prices may go up further if the strike continues.

## JUCSU polls today

By JU Correspondent

Elections to the Jahangirnagar University Central Students Union (JUCSU) and hall unions will be held today (Wednesday).

Four student organisations are vying for 16 posts of JUCSU and 91 posts of seven hall unions.

Four panels -- Liton-Mithu-Badal of Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Mahibullah-Mitu-Sarwar of Bangladesh Chhatra League (M-I), Shyamol-Kapil-Mukta of Ganotantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO) and Syed Asad-Shamim of Jatitya Chhatra Dal - are contesting the election.

All the panels are optimistic about their victory in the polls. However, campus sources predict that the fight is likely to be confined among the JCD, BCL(M-I) and GCO.

The incumbent JCD has apparently overcome their internal problems and is expected to sweep the ninth JUCSU polls.

JCD which earlier faced a

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