

Move to disinvest 16 sugar mills underway

A move is underway to sell out the country's 16 sugar mills under Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation (BSFIC) to the private sector as prescribed by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, reports UNB.

Official sources said that as part of the disinvestment programme, the banks have suggested abolition of the corporation's cane development and expansion programme.

The state-owned mills are already threatened with closure due to liberalisation of sugar import. Some 57,000 tons of imported sugar are reportedly in the market and Letters of Credit have been opened for import of another two lakh tons.

The mills should be denationalised as the government has to bear the staggering losses incurred by them due to increase in production cost, the banks said.

BSFIC had undertaken the cane development and re-

search programme to solve the problem of non-availability of adequate sugarcane for the mills. Production of sugarcane has doubled to 20 metric tons per acre last fiscal (1991-92) from 10 metric tons in 1972-73.

After the expansion programme was undertaken, some 257 lakh metric tons of sugarcane worth about Tk 3,600 crore was produced. But this aspect was completely ignored in the Morris report that suggested that the expansion programme be withdrawn and the mills denationalised, the sources said.

Patrick Morris, a foreign consultant was appointed by the government according to an agreement it signed with ADB last year.

Implementation of the report will lead to the closure of 16 public sector sugar mills, rendering 30,000 people jobless. Over five lakh farmers' families and thousands of farm labourers are directly dependent on the sugar industry.

JS: Matin's remark

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ch, JP leader Moudud took the floor to say, "Time is not far away when the Home Minister will require a Barrister for himself."

Moudud, supporting the Speaker's view on the matter, said that the Home Minister had already given his verdict before the court came out with its judgement.

Moudud went on to say, "The controversial letter that was reportedly found in the possession of the JP leaders on the eve of their departure for Saudi Arabia was not a signed one."

The Speaker, however, told the JP leader at this stage that parliament was not the place for argument and counter-argument over a matter that was subjudice.

The House, immediately after the Mizan Chowdhury issue was over, entered a noisy state again over Majid-ul-Hoque's comment that the front benchers of the ruling party sometimes remained silent, even in the face of provocation from the Opposition bench, only because they did not want parliament to turn into a mere jatra or theatre stage.

Majid-ul-Hoque, the Acting Deputy Leader of the House and a minister, made this comment following an allegation of Tofael Ahmed of the Awami League that it was not the front benchers but the back benchers like Mashhur Rahaman of the Treasury bench who came out with replies to queries of the front benchers in the Opposition.

The Acting Deputy Leader, replying to the AL MP, also said that the Treasury bench MPs felt that every member voted to parliament had equal rights and status in the House.

Besides, some were trying to disrupt the peaceful atmo-

sphere of the House, the Acting Deputy Leader said adding, "I request the Opposition bench not to create unnecessary tension in the House."

Refuting another allegation of Tofael Ahmed that the Treasury bench leaders had developed a tendency of not implementing any of their commitments in the House, Majid-ul-Hoque said that the government was pledge-bound to implement what it promised.

The moment the Acting Deputy Leader took his seat amidst shouts from the Opposition bench, Mohammad Nasim of the Awami League, Chief Whip of the Opposition, took the floor to officially register an Opposition protest relating to what he termed the Treasury bench allegation that the Opposition was trying to turn parliament into a jatra stage.

Nasim said that those who had first opposed introduction of a parliamentary system and wanted to make parliament a rubber stamp one were now trying to turn it into a jatra stage.

The Opposition Chief Whip also demanded that the remark of the Acting Deputy Leader be expunged.

Majid-ul-Hoque, at this stage, stood for a while to tell the chair that he did not claim that the Opposition was trying to turn parliament into a jatra or theatre stage. "I said that since the Treasury bench had no intention to turn parliament into a jatra stage, it refrained from giving in to Opposition provocations on many issues."

The Speaker assured the Opposition that he would check the text of Majid-ul-Hoque's speech and would expunge the unparliamentary words, if any.

Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda also stood on a point of order but was not heard amidst the noise. Speaker Sheikh Razaque Ali adjourned the House till 2 pm today.

Women's Day

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and dignity of the womenfolk in the society.

Gender Relations and Development Forum (GDF), Dhaka celebrated the day with due enthusiasm with the participation of both men and women.

The representatives of the member organisations of GDF assembled at the National Museum area with banners and festoons.

Later, they joined the rally with the combined committee in observing the day.

The Ministry of Social Welfare and Women Affairs organised a seminar on the occasion where speakers called for creating social awareness to bring an end to all kinds of crime against women.

Speaking at the seminar Social Welfare and Women Affairs Minister Tariqul Islam reiterated the present democratic government's commitment to ensure equal rights for all irrespective of male or female.

Bangladesh Women Forum (BWF) in a declaration yesterday called for uniting the women to make them a social force against all kinds of injustices and inequalities.

The Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) held a seminar on the occasion.



The Bangladesh SAAF Games logo 'Mishuk' finds a befitting resting place at the entrance of the Shishu Park in city. —Star photo

Sharee traders want tough action against smugglers

By Staff Correspondent

The Bangladesh Sharee Businessmen Association has urged the government to take immediate steps against smugglers to protect the country's powerloom sector.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, the leaders of the association threatened to take to the streets if the authorities did not take measures against the smugglers in a week.

"If the government fails to halt smuggling, our movement will take political shape... we will take to the streets... we will wage movement against the government," said General Secretary M Kaikobad Bhuiya.

"Every year, during Eid, smugglers become more active... and this year it has gone beyond all proportions," they said calling for immediate government intervention.

Dwelling upon various problems including the duty structure that affect the raw materials, the sharee producers alleged that "mysterious" inactivity of the concerned government departments and law enforcing agencies had made Bangladesh an "open market" of smuggled Indian sharee.

"If this goes on, about one crore people directly or indirectly involved with this sector will bear the brunt," they said. They suggested enactment of tougher laws such as the anti-terrorism act to deal with the spate of smuggling, saying that the existing ones had proved ineffective.

"None has been punished, even though goods worth Tk 3.36 crore were recovered from shopping centres and different places in and around Dhaka since last July," Bhuiya alleged.

High rates of duty on raw materials, they said, had led to high production cost, making local sharees, although better in quality, uncompetitive.

"If tax is withdrawn right now, we will be able to create two million new jobs in next two years," they claimed.

The sharee producers gave a list of major shopping centres across the country where smuggled Indian sharees are found in abundance.

The list included several Dhaka centres such as Fulbaria Super Market, Bangabazar Municipal Hawkers' Market, Railway Supermarket, Khaddar Market, Dhanmondi Hawkers' Market, Dhaka Corner Market, Govt New Market, Gausia Market, Mouchak Market.

They also named several major entry points for smuggled goods.

"Different border areas especially Rajshahi, Nababganj, Comilla, Laksham, Akhaura and Brahmanbaria have turned into wholesale markets of Indian sharees," they said.

Bosnian commander

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Defence Secretary Les Aspin, speaking on the same programme, said US policy was to commit American troops only after a peace accord is signed. But he said if all non-military efforts to end the fighting fail, "You have to look at the issue again."

Boutros-Ghali said he was "not a technician" and couldn't estimate how many troops might be necessary to drive the Serbs back. But "certainly it will be a major operation. And this is one of the difficulties because without the agreement of the member states and without participation of the United States, it will be very difficult to have this enforcement."

The UN chief has backed proposals to send UN or NATO troops to Bosnia as peacekeepers following the signing of an agreement among the warring parties in the former Yugoslav states. But Sunday's statement is thought to be the first time he has proposed sending ground troops to force Serbs out of disputed territory.

Boutros-Ghali also said he continues to support the peace plan mediated by former US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and Britain's Lord Owen. That

plan would divide Bosnia into 10 large autonomous regions based on ethnic balances.

The European Community on Monday gave Serb leaders an ultimatum: sign a peace plan for Bosnia within two weeks or face more sanctions.

EC foreign ministers said they would step up diplomatic pressure and close loopholes in a trade embargo against Serbia to force it to sign the UN peace plan.

"The parties to the conflict in Bosnia must sign now. There really is no alternative," said Danish Foreign Minister Niels Helveg Petersen, who chaired the meeting. He said the EC nations would use "all possible pressure to make the parties understand this."

British Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd said, "The economic pressure on Serbia must be maximized at this time if it is to make the right choices."

If the Serbs refuse to heed the warnings, Helveg Petersen said the EC could impose "new and strengthened sanctions," pointing out "the next couple of weeks will be absolutely decisive."

French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas called on Russia and the United States to exert more pressure.

Janata Tower Case

'Several officers signed allotment file'

The deposition of Rajuk employee Md Shahidur Rahman in the Janata Tower Case continued for the second day yesterday and he will be cross-examined today, reports BSS.

Rahman, the prosecution witness No 20, a dealing assistant of Rajuk's Estate Section, was deposing before the Special Judge's Court trying former President H M Ershad and 19 others.

Ershad is charged of misuse of power and corruption in the allotment of land and later construction of the multi-storied Janata Tower at Kawran Bazar area of the city.

Begum Raushan Ershad, former Jute Minister M A Sattar and former Rajuk Chairman M Rahmatullah are co-accused in this case.

During a brief deposition yesterday, PW-20 told the court that Chairman Rahmatullah used to maintain the file relating to the allotment of Rajuk's Kawran Bazar plot. He said before the directives from the former President Ershad began in respect of Kawran Bazar plot, the particular file used to move normally.

Rahman during his deposition Sunday corroborated with the statements of Abdur Rahman Bhuiyan, Director of Estate, Rajuk relating to 'im-

proper' allotment. Yesterday he confirmed the signatures of several officers made before the chairman in respect of the said allotment.

When Attorney General Aminul Haq showed him some handwritings to testify, the PW-20 said he wrote those notes as was asked by the chairman. Such notes were later registered as exhibit by the prosecution. When defence counsels were objecting to the manner the deposition was being taken, Attorney General argued that it was needed to show in what circumstances he (Shahidur Rahman) put his signature and obtained signature of others.

Iftar

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per time frame set by renowned Islamic scholar Moulana Aminul Islam which is also being followed in India and Pakistan.

Awami League member Skeikh Fazul Karim Selim on February 3 drew the attention of the House on fixing of iftar time five minutes after the sun-set terming it violation of the provisions of Islam.

Prof Mannan quoted Hadith to conform that fixing of iftar five minutes after the sun-set has also been suggested by Islamic thinkers.

Asafuddowla tipped as Home Secy

Star Report

Asafuddowla, the Secretary at the Ministry of Irrigation and Water Development, is being tipped as the new Home Secretary.

The post has been vacant since Lutfulahil Majid left to take over as the Economic Relations Division Secretary.

Additional Home Secretary Shaifur Rahman has been performing the duties of Home Secretary since Majid's departure weeks ago.

However, it could not be known who would replace Asafuddowla at the crucial Irrigation Ministry that deals with Indo-Bangladesh water sharing disputes.

Bank manager jailed for defalcation

Manager of the Begum Bazar Branch of Pubali Bank M A Khaleque (52) was sentenced yesterday to three years rigorous imprisonment for misappropriating bank money amounting to Tk 7,08,943, reports UNB.

Divisional Special Judge Mohammad Ali Khan also fined him to pay Tk 4 lakh or serve another six months in jail in default.

A co-accused, Ram Narayan Saha (50), proprietor of M/s Saha Brothers of Jigatola in the city, was also sentenced to two years RI and pay a fine of Tk 4 lakh or serve another six months in jail in default.

According to prosecution, Chowdhury M Tofael Sami, DGM of Pubali Bank, Dhaka, lodged FIR against M A Khaleque of Birpasha in Baulal thana of Patakhali alleging that the accused in collusion with the party and some bank staffers irregularly opened L/C in the name of Saha Brothers and illegally sanctioned huge amount of loan and misappropriated it.

Probe body on Banani road accident

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority yesterday constituted a three-member inquiry committee to investigate Sunday's road accident at Banani which left seven people killed, reports UNB.

The accident occurred when a minibus and a BRTC bus crashed head on near the Dhaka gate on the airport killing seven including six women and injuring 61 others.

The committee will find out the causes of the accident and determine the responsibility of concerned persons and take measures to prevent such accidents.

The Committee will also submit a recommendation on the issues to the Chairman of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority within ten days.

Cabinet okays

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The approval was given at the regular weekly meeting of the cabinet held at Bangabhaban yesterday with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The proposal is aimed at the removal of complications and confusion which have so long been creating hindrances in the smooth and proper functioning of these three organisations.

According to the proposals, the REB and the DESA will also generate electricity to meet the requirements for their respective areas, which is now done by BPDB only.

A report on the development made in the management of orphanages and various rehabilitation programmes for the orphans, taken by the Ministry of Social Welfare, was also placed before the cabinet.

The Ministry of Commerce also placed a report on the outcome of the visit of Bangladesh delegation to China to sign Sino-Bangladesh trade agreement.

Ministers, State Ministers-in-Charge of different ministries and divisions attended the meeting. Cabinet Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and secretaries concerned were present.

Diarrhoea

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nearly 5,68,000 afflicted patients last year.

Doctors said one of the reasons of this year's untimely epidemic was contaminated water. The epidemic had broken out in the city and elsewhere in the country due to presence of bacteria in the drinking water.

Officials said more than 692 medical teams, one in every union of the affected districts, and 169 temporary centres has also been working round-the-clock to combat the disease.

The Midnight File

Pakistan, Italy to sign accord for installation of radar in aircraft

ISLAMABAD, Mar 8: Pakistan and Italy are to sign an agreement for the installation of the 'air-borne radar in the F-7 aircraft of Pakistan Air Force, according to Minister for Defence Production Mir Hazar Khan Bijarani, reports Xinhua.

OIC to meet Afghan leaders

DUBAI, Mar 8: The leading international grouping of Muslim states said today it would meet Afghan leaders to discuss how to implement a ceasefire to end fighting in Kabul. The 51-member Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) also said in a statement it was greatly honoured by Afghan leaders who signed a peace accord on Sunday entrusting it with helping to monitor a ceasefire taking immediate effect, reports Reuters.

UK to resume top-level contacts with PLO

LONDON, Mar 8: Britain will resume top-level contacts with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) on Tuesday, Sky Television reported today, reports Reuters.

Girl succumbs to injuries, housewife commits suicide

By DMCH Correspondent

A grievously injured minor girl died at the hospital and a body of a housewife was recovered from Mohakhali in the capital Monday.

The 10-year-old girl Sanjida who was admitted to the Suhrawardy Hospital died at the hospital Monday.

Tejgaon police recovered the body of Sanjida and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy. An unnatural death (UD) case was lodged with Tejgaon police, said police.

One of Sanjida's cousin who brought the body to the DMCH along with police alleged that Sanjida was severely beaten by her mother. But he failed to give any detail.

In another incident police recovered the body of one Sufia Khatun from a residence at Mohakhali.

It was reported to police that Sufia committed suicide following a row over a family feud. But her husband Abul Hossain was absconding, said a police who brought the body to the DMCH morgue.

Jute spinners

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annual general meeting of the association held here yesterday.

Mahmud said the demand was being made in view of the recent Indian budgetary announcement of allowing the exporters to convert cent per cent of their export earnings at the prevalent market rate. This, he said, would help improve the financial position of the export-oriented industries of India and at the same time India would emerge as a strong competitor in the international market.

In this connection, the Spinners Association chief pointed out that Bangladesh was facing strong competition from Indian exporters in the international jute market.

Presenting an overall picture of the jute sector, Mahmud said during 1991-92 the country's total earnings from jute export stood at Taka 220.29 crore, 8.1 per cent more than that of 1990-91.

He, however, pointed out that the export of jute yarn and twine had gone down by 22 per cent during the first seven months of the current financial year. The export price also came down significantly, Mahmud added.

He said during the first seven months of the current financial year 42,141 metric tons of jute yarn and twine valued at Taka 113.49 crore were exported as against 52,606.06 metric tons of jute yarn and twine worth Taka 152.54 crore exported during the corresponding period of the previous year.

From quantitative point of view, the export figure reflected a reduction of 21.70 per cent while price-wise it had gone down by 25.60 per cent.

AJM loss

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1,400 to Tk 1,500 crore since independence could make profit if government allows its export earnings at secondary exchange rate.

"There would not be any loss in books of account if the year wise loss on exports would be compensated by appropriate authority," he maintained.

The mills executive stressed the need for increased use of jute products in the local markets instead of synthetics.

When asked about the reason behind the loss Latif said the price in world market only increased by five per cent whereas production cost rose by a big volume.

Baby roasted alive, 30 houses gutted in Feni

FENI, Mar 8: A baby boy was roasted alive and at least 30 houses were gutted in a devastating fire that raged through a village in Sadar thana today, witnesses said, reports UNB.

The fire, originating from piled up ashes at the house of one Majid Mia in village Modhuyi, engulfed neighbouring houses affecting 200 people of 28 families.

Roni (1), son of Kala Mia, was burned alive when his parents failed to enter their house on fire. The villagers, however, rescued their son Rubel (3) who suffered burn injury.

WB accords

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refund the Bangladesh government Tk 18 crore while the PDB would not be needing the rest of the allocated fund of the government.

Since the suspension had been imposed, the WB had been pressing Bangladesh to improve the systems loss situation, better the management of the PDB and privatise the sector as conditions for the withdrawal of the decision.

The suspension of the credit at that moment stopped fund flow in the 16 town project worth US \$6 million dollar, besides the signing of the three projects.

Following pressure from the WB the systems loss was lessened to 34 per cent from 40 per cent last December. Reduction of one per cent systems loss can save about Tk 20 crore.

The PDB had, meantime, improved its production of power during the time. The PDB was able to produce 1,500 megawatts of power in the last dry season, sources informed adding that it would be able to produce 1,700 megawatts this dry season.

The WB after reviewing the performance of the power sector lifted its suspension on February 9.

The annual budget for the power sector is roughly Tk 1,141 crore while only 7.5 per cent people enjoy its benefits.

The 16 town project is a part of the Third Five Year Plan in which the government had aimed at electrification of 57 selected towns.

The completion of the 16 town project would leave only 9 towns for electrification.

Sandwip

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In Sandwip, such is the case for many others. Of an estimated three lakh population on the island, about one third is homeless mainly due to the land erosion.

Like Braja Hari, many of these homeless have changed their professions after losing all their belongings to the sea.

Azmat Ali, a rickshawpuller in his forties also talked about his change of profession from that of a farmer to the present one.

Most of these islanders have now become accustomed to the erosion. Over the years of experience, their feelings have become blunt — they have witnessed too many calamities.

Kripa Sindhuj Majumder, a labourer of Chauria village of Amanullal union of the island said he had faced seven 'naras' (shifting of houses due to erosion) in his 36 years of life.

Roushan (45) faced four 'naras' and has finally ended up beside the embankment on the island. "I am tired of the uncertainty," she said, "I hate this tossing and tumbling."

But Junaet Choudhury of Harishpur has taken his fate more calmly. One reason for his calmness, maybe, is that his economic condition is good. He had served as a supervisor in Kuwait and made quite a fortune. Junaet's house is standing at the edge of the shore.

"In the coming season (April-September), my house is sure to be washed away into the sea," he said, "I will then move out to my other house two miles inside the island."

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