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NEWS BRIEFS

Hasina leaves for Vienna today

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka today for Vienna to attend the World Human Rights Conference. Hasina will address the conference as the special guest on June 10. Former US President Jimmy Carter, African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela and Nobel laureate Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi have also been invited to attend the conference, reports UNB.

BNPPP meets June 12

A meeting of the Parliamentary Party of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will be held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at 4 pm on June 12 to discuss the current political and economic situation and the issues related to the tenth session of the fifth Jatiya Sangsad. Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia will preside over the meeting, reports BSS.

Malaysian trade team due June 13

A Malaysian delegation led by the General Manager of Port Klang Authority will arrive in Dhaka on June 13 to promote trade between the two countries. During its 5-day visit the delegation will meet the leaders of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Shippers Council, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, reports UNB.

Student killed in road accident

JHENIDAH, June 6: A college student was hit and killed by a speeding bus on the Jhenidah-Kushtia road near Arappur bridge in the town this (Sunday) morning. The dead was identified as Benazir (18), a 2nd year student of Jhenidah City College, reports UNB.

On the question of acting President

Lively debate marks opening of JS budget session

By Staff Correspondent

A lengthy debate on a constitutional point whether the Speaker of Parliament should have functioned as the acting head of state in the absence of the President dominated the inaugural sitting of the Jatiya Sangsad's budget session yesterday.

The debate, an unscheduled one, began when Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder of the Awami League (AL) drew the attention of the chair, on a point of order, that Article 54 of the Constitution had been violated because the Speaker did not perform the tasks of the head of state while President Abdur

Rahman Biswas was abroad for the last eleven days. Article 54 of the Constitution reads: If a vacancy occurs in the office of President, or if the President is unable to discharge the functions of his office on account of absence, illness or any other cause, the Speaker shall discharge those functions until a President is elected or until the President resumes the function of his office, as the case may be.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas left the country for Saudi Arabia on May 26 to perform hajj and returned home yesterday morning. The

President, however, did not 'call upon' Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali to perform the functions of the Presidency during his absence in the country.

Halder accused the government of violating the Constitution and sought ruling on the issue.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz, replying to the AL MP, said that there was no violation of the Constitution and Halder's interpretation was not correct.

The Law Minister argued that it was not the question of absence, rather the inability of

the President to perform his tasks that could invoke Article 54.

The Law Minister referred to a ruling delivered by the then Speaker Abdul Malek Ukil on June 5, 1974 that it was not the absence of the President but his inability to function for which the Speaker could act on his behalf.

Mirza Hafiz also argued that in the oath of the Speaker it is mentioned that he would function as the acting President when he is called upon to do so; but the Speaker, in this case, was not called upon, to do so, See Page 12 Col 1



Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali presiding over the inaugural sitting of the Jatiya Sangsad's budget session yesterday. Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mirza Golam Hafiz and the Deputy Leader of the House Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury are seen seated in the front row. — PID photo

Banking Company (Amend) Bill passed Safety of depositors' money ensured, says Saifur

A bill providing measures to stabilise and strengthen the banking sector was passed in parliament last night, giving the central bank more powers to regulate the banks, reports UNB.

The bill, inter alia, provides that none will be allowed to hold more than 5 per cent share in any banking company.

It also provided stringent punishment for violation of the provisions.

Winding up the discussion on the Banking Company (Amendment) Bill 1993, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said amendments to the banking laws were considered essential across the world following the collapse of BCCI in 1991.

BSS adds: Saifur Rahman said it would safeguard the interest of the 112 million people of the country and ensure the safety of the depositors' money.

Spelling out the objectives of the bill, the Finance Minister said it contained belt-tightening provisions to stop bank delinquency and check concentration of the financial control into the hands of a few families.

The bill, Rahman assured the House, aimed at stopping plunder of public money by a few unscrupulous persons.

"We can not let these few and bad guys plunder people's money," he said adding "if we do not control their unscrupulous activities the entire banking sector would be vitiated."

The banking sector, he said, is the lubricant of the economy and if it collapses the economy can not flourish.

But, Rahman regretted, the number of loan defaulters is very large in the country and non performing loans amounts to Taka 8900 crore.

"It has become the hobby of a few persons to take bank money in various ways and have feast at Hotel Sonargaon," the Finance Minister said adding that the government wants to reverse this unhealthy trend for the greater national interest.

The Finance Minister introduced The Bank Company (Amendment) Bill in the House on May 12, 1993 seeking a number of belt-tightening provisions in order to maintain discipline in the country's banking sector.

Imposing restrictions in the purchase of bank shares, the amendment bill passed in the House said the bank shares shall not be concentrated in any way into the hands of a few

family and a family member alone or jointly shall not purchase more than five per cent shares of any bank.

According to the bill, a buyer of share shall have to submit an affidavit before the purchase of any share of a bank that he or she is not purchasing shares as the nominee of anybody else or in fake name and had not purchased any share in fake name in the past.

The bill also redefined the definition of the family and restricted the sanctioning of loans and advances by the directors of the banks in favour of sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law, sisters-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, sons-in-law and daughters-in-law.

As per the provisions of the bill Bangladesh Bank shall not allow any person or group or organisation directly or indirectly to get facilities more than the 100 per cent of the total capital of any bank company.

The bill also restricted the appointment of general directors of any bank saying if the Bangladesh Bank is informed that any person who is not otherwise eligible to become a director of a bank had become a director of a bank had become a

Opposition refuses to stay beyond 9 pm

By Staff Correspondent

The first day of the tenth session of the Fifth Parliament witnessed a stalemate over the duration of the session when opposition members refused to take part in the discussion on a bill sought by the treasury members.

It all started at around 9-15 pm after Irrigation Minister M Majidul Haq placed the Freedom Fighters' Welfare (Amendment) Bill 1993 for consideration. A number of Awami League MPs stood up and pointed to the business advisory committee's decision that the session would continue from 10 am to 9 pm with a break in the afternoon.

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali sought opinion from the Deputy Leader of the House about the opposition's claim. Deputy Leader Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury said that the advisory committee had also decided to clear up all the five bills and ordinances in two days and hence if the discussions did not continue it would be impossible for the House to complete their passage within the stipulated period.

Prime Minister and Leader of the House Begum Khaleda Zia was present during the unusual debate but the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina was conspicuous by her absence. See Page 12 Col 8

22 Pak peacekeepers killed in Mogadishu

MOGADISHU, June 6: The United Nations and foreign aid agencies began evacuating workers Sunday after battles between Somalis and UN peacekeepers killed at least 22 Pakistani troops and as many as 23 Somalis, reports AP.

The fighting crippled humanitarian efforts. Dozens of non-essential UN personnel were told to pack their bags and were waiting at Mogadishu's airport for a cargo plane that was to take them to Nairobi.

Several members of the Irish aid agency Concern also were leaving, and the international agency CARE moved six workers out of the city. Both agencies planned to operate with two people in Mogadishu until tension created by Saturday's eruption of violence subsided.

The fighting, the worst in Mogadishu since anti-American riots erupted in February, showed the tenuous security situation in Mogadishu even after six months of foreign military presence.

In Islamabad, a Pakistani military spokesman said 22 soldiers were killed and 12 were missing after the fighting. The statement reduced the death figure from 28, which the Pakistani Foreign Ministry gave earlier.

Italian Gen Bruno Loy told Italian state television that 50 Pakistani troops were wounded.

Officials at Mogadishu's main hospitals said 15 to 23 Somalis had died and more than 100 were wounded in Saturday's fighting, which lasted from 10 am Saturday until nearly midnight.

UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who was meeting Sunday with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, visited the Pakistani Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia, to express his condolences to the ambassador. See Page 12 Col 2

The fighting would not deter the UN from pursuing its humanitarian effort in Somalia "to promote peace and reconstruction," he said.

He also said he would urge the Security Council to adopt measures that would protect UN troops and other personnel in Somalia and punish those responsible.

The Security Council scheduled an emergency session today to deal with the crisis that killed more peacekeepers in one day than any other UN mission has sustained in memory.

The fate of Pakistani soldiers reported missing and possibly taken hostage remained unclear. Some Somali witnesses claimed that some of the men had been captured, tortured and killed, but there was no confirmation.

Pakistani officials said the country's troops had been woefully ill-equipped to defend themselves against their attackers, who kept them pinned down for hours until Italian troops backed by tanks could rescue them.

"We can't be on trucks and on jeeps and be sitting ducks," said Shaharyar Khan, the No 2 official at Pakistan's Foreign Ministry.

Shaharyar Khan said Islamabad would demand punitive action against Somalia's war lords at an urgent meeting of the UN Security Council called by Pakistan for later today.

"It is up to the UN to decide, but one step could be to arrest them (the attackers) and to hold a trial," he said.

Asked if Pakistan would consider withdrawing its forces from Somalia, he said: "No. We remain committed to the UN peacekeeping role."

Pakistan late last year was the first country to send peacekeeping troops to Somalia and has some 4,750 soldiers serving with the 18,000 strong UN force.

Seen from the Gallery

by Mahfuz Anam

Was the country without a Head of State during President Abdur Rahman Biswas's trip to perform Hajj? The Speaker yesterday did well to permit a discussion on a point-of-order raised by Shudhangshu Shekhar Halder (AL).

The normal practice in a parliamentary system is to nominate the Speaker, in our case Shaikh Razzak Ali, as the acting President during a President's trip abroad. This was obviously not done in this instance, which has given rise to all sorts of confusion. Mr Halder's point was well raised. The explanation of the Law

See Page 12 Col 7

Govt trying to distort history of June 7: Hasina

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday called for forging a greater unity of the pro-liberation political parties and groups to foil the "conspiracy" against the country's independence, reports UNB.

She alleged that the present government, backed by anti-liberation elements, was trying to distort the history of independence, including the 7th June which inspired the people to free Bangladesh from the clutches of the Pakistani junta.

In a statement marking the historic 7th June of 1966, Hasina said the Bengalee nation gave its mandate in favour of six-point demand by observing spontaneous hartal in erstwhile East Pakistan and stepped up the movement for self-determination.

Manu Miah and many others were killed in police firing during the hartal called by Awami League on June 7, 1966.

The Awami League chief described 7th June as a milestone of the movement for country's independence led by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The opposition leader called for observing the day with due patriotic zeal.

In observance of the day, Awami League will hold a discussion at the party's central office at 4 pm today.

4-hr gunbattle in Fatikchhari

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 6: Police today fought a four-hour-long gunbattle with a group of armed people in the Fatikchhari thana area, 30 miles off the city, but no casualty was reported.

The exchange of fire which continued from 8 am to 12 noon today, began when a large contingent of police, on receipt of secret information, raided a hideout of some alleged terrorists in the Edilpur hilly area under Fatikchhari thana.

The armed men, numbering about 50, equipped with sophisticated weapons, fought with the police for four hours before fleeing into the nearby forests.

Police arrested one during the incident which terrified the local inhabitants.

Local sources said the armed men belonged either to the Islami Chhatra Shibir or the National Democratic Party, but both organisations denied any of their cadres were involved.

DCCI chief calls for consistent tariff policy

By Staff Correspondent

President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), A T M Wazulullah, in a pre-budget statement Sunday, said the government should remove inconsistent tariff policy and anomalies in duty structure.

"Inconsistent tariff policy in areas of tariff values and duty rates for output and input goods has already made many domestic market-oriented industries nonviable," the statement said.

"Lower import duty incidence and lower tariff value on finished imported products

WHO expert warns of a Bhopal-like disaster

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladeshi industries using toxic chemicals without any safety measures are running the risk of a Bhopal-like disaster, an expert of the World Health Organisation said Sunday.

The present method of the use of toxic chemicals in Bangladesh is a potential risk to communities and the environment which may cause a disaster if safety measures are not taken immediately," Prof J M Dave, a New Delhi-based WHO consultant, told a workshop at the Sheraton Hotel.

He said some 480 industries in the country are using 40 types of toxic chemicals and some of those factories have 20-

year old obsolete systems aggravating the threat, he said in the workshop where Forests and Environment Minister Abdullah Al-Noman was present as chief guest.

He, however, admitted that his month-long study was based on "available limited information" yet he apprehended a Bhopal like situation.

In Bhopal, India, nearly 4,000 people were killed in a Union Carbide chemical plant explosion in 1984.

The workshop on the Management of Toxic Chemicals and Hazardous Wastes was jointly organised by the Dhaka

WHO office and the Department of Environment.

Prof Dave said that imported highly toxic chemicals were transported through the densely populated cities and localities without any safety measures.

He mentioned that the February 9 chlorine accident in Bangladesh had killed six people and said such risky transportation would not be allowed in the country from where the chemicals were imported.

The consultant said in Bangladesh some 614 registered units produce varieties of wastes containing 62 dangerous substances of both high-risk and low-risk categories.

WB economist due tomorrow

By Sohail Manzur

A World Bank expert is due in the city tomorrow to conduct studies on some sectors and review a number of ongoing projects, according to official sources.

Thampil Pankaj, a Senior Transport Economist of the WB, who will be coming on a month's mission will also upgrade the economic analysis of the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Project.

According to sources, the implementation cost of the Jamuna bridge project will increase by 25 to 30 per cent from the estimated cost of 528 million US dollar because of a hike in the prices of construction materials — particularly, the unavailability of stones — and delay in the launching of the project. This has made it

See Page 12 Col 6

Jamaat memo to JS Take Farakka issue to international fora

Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday submitted a memorandum urging the parliament to take the Farakka issue to all international fora, including United Nations, reports UNB.

The 3-point memorandum was submitted by an eight-member delegation led by senior Naib-e-Ameer Shamsur Rahman. The other members of the delegation are: Mohammad Kamruzzaman, Prof Yusuf Ali, Mujibur Rahman, Mokbul Ahmed, Abdul Kader Mollah, Mohinul Islam Patwari and Jastimuddin Sarkar.

Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panni, on behalf of the Speaker, received the memorandum that called for immediate

steps for solving the 'life-and-death' problem, caused by unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water by India.

Jamaat MP's Maulana Muttur Rahman Nizami, Abdus Sobhan, Latifur Rahman, Enamul Haq and Maulana Sakawat Hossain were present during the submission of the memorandum.

The Jamaat demands are: raising the Farakka issue at all international fora, filing a case with the International Court demanding compensation from India for the loss of crores of taka Bangladesh has been incurring due to Farakka barrage and immediate start of construction of the proposed

See Page 12 Col 3