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- Inside Today**
- Business**
New look Star Business Pages 6,7
 - Star Special**
Implementation of Structural Reforms Pages 8,9
 - Article**
Recent Progress in Trade Liberalization and Industrial Deregulation by Abdur Rab Page 4
 - International**
Fighting in Afghanistan continues
 - Art heist in Sweden** Page 5
 - Metropolitan**
Dhaka Day by Day
 - Birds on Sale — Illegally** Page 3

WB assures Dhaka of continued support

By A Special Correspondent

The visiting World Bank Vice President D Joseph Wood yesterday proclaimed the commendable economic success attained by Bangladesh and assured Dhaka of continued support and assistance.

The WB high official discussed his hopes and concerns for Bangladesh's economic future with Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman over two sittings at the ERD yesterday afternoon, both WB and ERD sources said.

Wood assured he would definitely try to translate the aid pledges made at the Paris Consortium into firm commitments.

Wood, the sources said, had indicated that the WB would proceed promptly to present the jute sector adjustment credit to the executive directors; it would

form and domestic economic liberalisation had been uneven and had yet to generate a strong response in the business community.

In response, Finance Minister Saifur Rahman listed various measures initiated by the present government and said the pace of implementation had also increased significantly.

But, Rahman regretted that the lending of the International Development Agency (IDA), the soft loan affiliated of the WB, had been declining since fiscal 1989-90.

Rahman asked the WB official to expedite the IDA lending operations and not to let down the on going development programmes of the democratic government.

He said the pace of trade re-

Khaleda may seek Nepal's help on water issue

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh will seek Nepal's co-operation in the water-sharing issue when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia visits the Himalayan kingdom on a three-day trip. She will also discuss trade and other bilateral issues.

The Prime Minister, along with her entourage that includes the Foreign Minister, will leave for Kathmandu on November 22. She will return on the evening of November 24.

A Foreign Office spokesman said the Prime Minister will be visiting Nepal not only as head of the government but also as the current Chairperson of SAARC.

"Nepal being an upper riparian country, can play a significant role in the crucial water sharing issue," a spokesman at the PM's Office said without elaborating.

The Prime Minister, during

Opportunities have come to prove our talent, skill: PM

CHITTAGONG, Nov 9: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today the members of the armed forces have a significant role to play along with the people in the development of the country, reports BSS.

"We have attained democracy after great sacrifice and forbearance. Opportunities have now come to prove our talent and skill," Begum Zia said while addressing a function marking the presentation of national standards to the 13th and 14th battalions of the East Bengal Regiment at the Shaheed M R Chowdhury drill square of the East Bengal Regiment Centre (EBRC) at the Chittagong cantonment.

Recalling the tradition of national standards the Prime Minister said the Prophet (SM) used to handover the flag of Islam to the commanders before a war and pray to Almighty Allah for upholding its dignity.

The Prime Minister congratulated the two battalions — nicknamed the Abichaita Tero and the Ferocious Fourteen — for attaining the pride of national standards and hoped that they would maintain the confidence reposed in them by the nation. The national standards were adorned with traditional military decorations along with Arabic inscriptions of Kalima-e-Tayyeba.

The Prime Minister lauded the role of the members of the East Bengal Regiment in protecting the sovereignty of the

Yunus meets Clinton

Star Report

In a display of his support for the radical approach to banking for the poor, American President Bill Clinton Monday met in Washington with the founder and Managing Director of the Grameen Bank, Muhammad Yunus.

Yunus is currently on a visit to the United States at the invitation of US Secretary of State Warren Christopher.

The meeting took place in the Oval Office at the invitation of the White House on Monday last. It was also attended by George Stephanopoulos, senior advisor to the US president. White House official Jan Piercy—who introduced Clinton and Yunus to each other seven years ago—and Sam Harris, executive director of an advocacy group known as Results.

The US president and Yunus talked briefly as photographs were being taken and at one



A historic picture of Noor Hossain taken near the Dainik Bangla crossing on November 10, 1987 during a massive demonstration against the Ershad regime. Moments later the police, mobilised to quell the demonstration, shot Hossain dead for daring to say what was on everyone's lips that day. The slogan on his bare back said, "Let Democracy Reign!" — Photo Pavel Rahman

AL, JP demonstrate in city today

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Party (JP) will lead separate agitations against the government around the Secretariat today to press home their respective demands.

The AL demands include repeal of the indemnity Ordinance, 1975 and the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1992, trial of Jamaat chief Golam, Azam in a special tribunal as a 'war criminal', an end to the alleged 'misrule and corrupt practices' of the BNP and protection of the interests of the peasants and workers.

On the other hand, the JP demands include release of former President Ershad from jail, fresh national-level elections under a care-taker government and restoration of the upazila system.

According to the official announcements of the two parties, the AL will stage a 'peaceful' sit-in while the JP is supposed to bring out a 'peaceful' procession around the Secretariat.

The Awami League procession for the sit-in will proceed towards the Secretariat from the Noor Hossain Square on the Gulistan side while the Jatiya Party will advance from the

Mirza Abbas may replace Shawkat as city BNP chief

By Asiuazzaman

Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mirza Abbas will shortly take over the post of the president of the Dhaka city unit of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), party insiders hinted yesterday.

Abbas, currently holding the post of a vice-president of the city unit, had lobbied vigorously for the post during the August 9 conference in which Lt Gen (Retd) Mir Shawkat was re-elected chief of the city BNP.

Prime Minister Begum

David Merrill likely new US envoy

By M Anwarul Haq

David Nathan Merrill, a top development official, has been proposed as the new US Ambassador to Bangladesh, according to sources close to the US Embassy in Dhaka.

The official announcement of David Merrill's appointment will be made simultaneously in Dhaka and Washington, after the Foreign Relations Committee of the US Senate confirms the nomination. Normally all US ambassadorial appointments are made by the State Department after receiving the tacit consent of the US President.

The Bangladesh government, sources said, has already approved the agreement accepting David Merrill as the new US envoy.

NEWS BRIEFS

BCS (edn) Assoc postpones strike
The BCS General Education Association has deferred its earlier programme of strike from November 16 till December 9 following fruitful discussion with Education Minister Jamrudin Sircar Monday. The association in a press release issued here yesterday evening said the date of the two-day national council of the association which was scheduled to begin on November 11 has also shifted to December 9, reports BSS.

Spurious oil factory unearthed
CHITTAGONG, Nov 9: Police unearthed a spurious perfumed hair oil factory at the Bagghona road in Lalkhan Bazar area of the port city Monday night. Acting on a tip, a squad of the Detective Branch of the Chittagong Metropolitan Police raided the residence of Bahar Mia and recovered huge quantities of hair oil branded with the name of some prominent companies. Police also seized some equipment of the factory. None could be arrested, reports UNB.

Indian 'plastonet' seized
RAJSHAH, Nov 9: Members of the 20 Rifle Battalion seized three thousand metres of Indian 'plastonet' worth about Taka three lakh near the Natore College yesterday. A special squad of BDR led by Adjutant Captain Md Habibur Rahman searched a Rajshahi-Pabna bound bus and seized the material, reports BSS.

DPRK vice premier due tomorrow
The vice-premier of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Chang Chole arrives here tomorrow on a six-day official visit to Bangladesh, an official announcement said here yesterday. Chang Chole, who is in charge of the Ministry of Culture, Education, Public Health and Sports, will lead a five-member high-powered delegation, reports BSS.

Major fire at Pak NA bldg

ISLAMABAD, Nov 9: A major fire struck Pakistan's parliament building Tuesday, only days ahead of the first regular session of the newly-elected house and an upcoming presidential election, reports AFP.

Army, navy and civil fire brigades units were fighting the blaze, which still raged more than four hours after it erupted on the third floor of the seven-year-old concrete structure, witnesses and officials said.

At least four firemen were rushed to hospital by ambulances.

The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but several officials present at the scene said that an electric short circuit could have triggered the blaze.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has ordered unofficial inquiry into the incident, as Interior Minister Babar Ali and senior officials monitored the fire fighting operations.

The building, adjacent to the President's House and only a few blocks away from the Prime Minister's official residence, was empty today, a holiday to observe the birthday of national poet Mohammad Iqbal.

An official said a minimum security staff was present when the fire started and that no one had been trapped inside.

Dense clouds of smoke floated in the air as the four-storey building was cordoned off by riot police and continued to belch out smoke with spectators thronging vantage points nearby.

The first flames were seen on the fourth floor after about three hours, as workers using a ladder tried to salvage the national flag fluttering on top of the building.

"We are mobilising all resources to control the fire," National Assembly Speaker Yusuf Raza Gilani said, calling the fire a "great tragedy."

Gilani said it was 'too early' to say what caused the fire.

A security officer said some 35 vehicles belonging to the National Assembly and Senate had been taken out safely from the basement of the building.

The Interior Minister told reporters that additional fire fighting resources were available. If needed, army helicopters can also be used to spray foam to control the blaze. All said.

Members of parliament were to meet Saturday, along with similar sessions of provincial deputies in four regional capitals to elect the next President in a tough contest between the parties of Bhutto and opposition leader Nawaz Sharif.

However, it was almost certain that the parliament session could not be held in the burned out building, no alternative venue has been announced.

Noor Hossain Day today

By Staff Correspondent

Today is Noor Hossain Day. The day is not officially named after him, but the democratic-minded people of the country will always remember his name, at least on every November 10.

Noor Hossain, a carefree youth in his 20s, sacrificed his life during a massive pro-democracy demonstration in the city on November 10, 1987.

Disgusted with the autocratic regime of General Ershad, the whole nation was desperately trying to establish a democratic policy in the country. Students, workers, professionals as well as the political parties had announced a renewed agitation against the Ershad regime on this day six years ago.

Noor Hossain appeared to embody the national aspirations on that particular day. He joined the processions in his bare torso with two Bangla slogans painted on his chest and back which, respectively, read: 'Let Autocracy Go' and 'Democracy be Emancipated.'

To set up micro industries Loans for voluntarily rtd persons from Jan

By Soheli Manzur

The government is likely to start a credit programme for voluntarily retired persons interested in setting up micro industries from January next, according to officials sources.

Already four banks have been selected through which the loans would be disbursed. The banks are, the Bangladesh Krishi Bank, the Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank, the Eastern Bank Limited (EBL) and the Bank for Small Industries and Commerce (BASIC), the sources said.

The total amount of fund to be disbursed among prospective entrepreneurs accepting the government's 'golden handshake' scheme is Tk 100 crore, which will be provided on very soft terms and conditions.

An official at the Ministry of Finance, when contacted, said the ministry has already finalised the scheme under which the credit programme will be launched. It is now awaiting approval of the Finance Minister, he said.

He, however, refrained from mentioning the interest rate on the loans, but said it would be much lower than the rates normally charged by the banks.

The government may even relax the system of collateral if the project is found viable enough and the management sound, he added. In that case the equity of the investor would be considered a guarantee of the loan, he said.

The Finance Ministry official said the government would also consider the skills of the persons while approving their projects in particular sectors so that the investors can utilise their past experience and expertise for developing their own units.

Individuals or groups, as joint venture, would be eligible for such loans against government-approved projects in specified sectors.

Changes in Foreign Office

By Staff Correspondent

Some changes have been effected in the Foreign Ministry from Monday last.

Rafti Ahmed Khan, who was promoted to the rank of a Director General, has been appointed the Director General for Europe. He was serving as a Director at the East Europe desk.

Mohsin Ali Khan, who was Director Economic Affairs, has taken charge as the DG, Economic Affairs.

Md Saifulah, previously serving as Director West Asia, has taken charge as Director General for West Asia.

Anwarul Alam Shahid, who was holding current charge as the DG for the Far East has retained the charge after promotion as a Director General.

Jahangir Sadat until now serving as Director for South East Asia, has already taken over as the Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta.

Syed Noor Hossain, who served as the Deputy High Commissioner in Calcutta, has assumed his responsibilities in the America/Pacific Desk.

Hussein wins free hand to pursue peace with Israel

AMMAN, Nov 9: King Hussein won a free hand to pursue peace with Israel when Jordan's elections weakened his Muslim fundamentalist and leftist opponents in parliament, reports AP.

Both the king and the fundamentalists sought to turn Monday's parliamentary election into a referendum on the peace plan. Voters shunned the fundamentalists.

Official returns Tuesday showed the Muslim Brotherhood dropped from 22 to 16 seats while its allies retained only three of their 12 seats. Leftists opposed to the peace talks also lost seats.

Although the fundamentalists will continue to form the largest single bloc in the 80-seat lower house, the bulk of the seats went to tribal leaders loyal to the king. The 40-member upper house is appointed by the king.

Voters also sent a woman to parliament. Women have occupied Cabinet posts in the past, but Toujan Faisal, a liberal Muslim who opposes Islamic extremism, is the first to enter parliament.

The election, deemed the freest in the Arab world, was seen as a reflection of Hussein's commitment to political openness. The king last year lifted a 1957 ban on political parties. An outbreak of price riots forced elections in 1989 but those were on a non-party basis.

The king had appealed to voters to give him a parliament

that would back his efforts to make peace with Israel. Tuesday, Hussein said the results would make Jordan stronger, but he declined to characterize them as an endorsement of his peace efforts.

Hussein dismissed speculation that the outcome of the elections would pave the way for a Jordanian-Israeli summit at the highest level. He indicated, however, that his peace efforts were moving ahead behind the scenes.

Now not everything could be put under the flood lights of the cameras in this heated room all the time. But there is an ongoing process and we hope it will succeed, the king said at a news conference.

Israel, Jordan sign 'friendly accord' soon

BRUSSELS, Nov 9: PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat said today Jordan and Israel would sign a "friendly agreement" within the next few days, reports Reuters.

Arafat on a visit to Brussels told a news conference: "Jordan is going to sign within a few days a friendly agreement with Israel."

He gave no further details. Israel and Jordan have been discussing a peace agreement as part of wider efforts to bring peace to the Middle East following the historic deal between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel.

AP from Cairo adds: Palestinian and Israeli negotiators agreed Tuesday to restart their suspended peace talks next week, an official close to the negotiations said.

Resist autocratic forces, Huda asks students

Information Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda yesterday called upon the students to resist the evil forces who want to destroy the spirit of anti-autocracy mass struggle in which many brave sons of the soil including Nur Hossain sacrificed their lives for the establishment of the democratic process in the country, reports BSS.

He made this call at a grand rally of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) at the Democracy Square here.

Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia, Mayor of Dhaka Mirza Abbas and DUCSU VP Amanullah Aman MP also addressed the rally, among others, while JCD president Fazlul Haq Milon was in the chair.

Huda said after nine years of mass struggle people elected the BNP to power but the opposition parties along with the ousted autocracy were now active to disrupt the process of democracy and development with their vested interest.

Strongly criticising the demand of some opposition parties to hold the next election under a caretaker government like the one in the post-autocracy interim period, he said BNP could in no way be compared with the autocratic regime.

He said the autocratic regime had no public base and the judicial and electoral systems were totally damaged during that period.

People had no confidence in election under that regime and the autocracy had to handover power to an interim caretaker

Police rescue held colleagues from city orphanage

By Staff Correspondent

Police rescued several teargas shells to rescue their captive colleagues from the second floor of the Sir Salimullah Muslim Orphanage at Azimpur in the city last night.

On a tip off, a police team comprising eight policemen of the Lalbagh Police Station went to room No-17 on the second floor of the orphanage to search for an illegal revolver at around 8 pm.