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#### - Inside Today -

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SAPTA and the Role of Entrepreneurs for Fostering Regional Trade

by Munim Kumar Barai

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#### **Business**

Women entrepreneurs demand separate credit facility

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#### Notice

Today's The Baile Star contains a 4-page December '93 'Star Computer Special.'

We are, therefore, obliged to either reduce or drop some of our regular features. We sincerely regret the inconvenience to our valued readers.

#### **NEWS BRIEFS**

#### Hasina shocked

Chief of the Bangladesh Awami League and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her deep shock at the death of Mrs Kohinoor Nizam, wife of Shaheed journalist Nizamuddin Ahmad. In a condolence message, Sheikh Hasina prayed for the peace of the departed soul and expressed her sympathy for the members of the bereaved family. In another condolence message, Sheikh Hasina expressed her deep grief at the sudden death of freedom fighter Noor Hossain Khan alias Babul Banerjee in a road accident on the Victory

#### Postal stamps on SAF Games

release a set of commemorative stamps of Taka two and four fices, reports UNB.

#### Vehicles checking starts today

The Metropolitan Traffic Department (MTD) will check the registration, licence and related papers of Rickshaw and other motor vehicles of the city from today. MTD requested all vehicle drivers, rickshaw owners and pullers to keep related papers with them. Check posts will be set up at some important places of the city and mobile squad will conduct the operation. The special drive will continue until further instruction.

# NCBs given Tk 3330 crore

Since 1990 the government has injected over Tk 3330 crore as fresh capital to bail out the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs). Questions are being raised in the recent times in the Finance Ministry itself about whether such capital infusion to keep the NCBs afloat should

According to a Finance Ministry source, there is an increasing anxiety among senior officials that continuous infusion of funds to meet capital adequacy and bad debt provisioning standards could be encouraging laxity on the part of the bank management.

The government has also come to realise that unless the public sector debt overhang is cleared, the NCBs will never be able to stand on their feet.

The recently concluded agreement with the World Bank about a jute sector restructuring operation will clean the state for the NCBs so far as the jute sector is concerned. Experts are hoping that this will be followed up by steps to relieve the banks-of the textile sector debts gone bad.

Under the Banking Compa-

1991, the capital base of the commercial banks was doubled to a minimum of Taka 20 crore. Banks are required to account for bad debt and to make appropriate allowances for this in

The process of cleaning up of the NCB's investment portfolio led to classification of 25 per cent of loans as bad debt. According to a senior Finance Ministry official, this had gone upto 30 per cent as of June 30

The official explained that this increase has occurred because loans which were of marginal quality had become bad during the last two years as the debtors failed to service

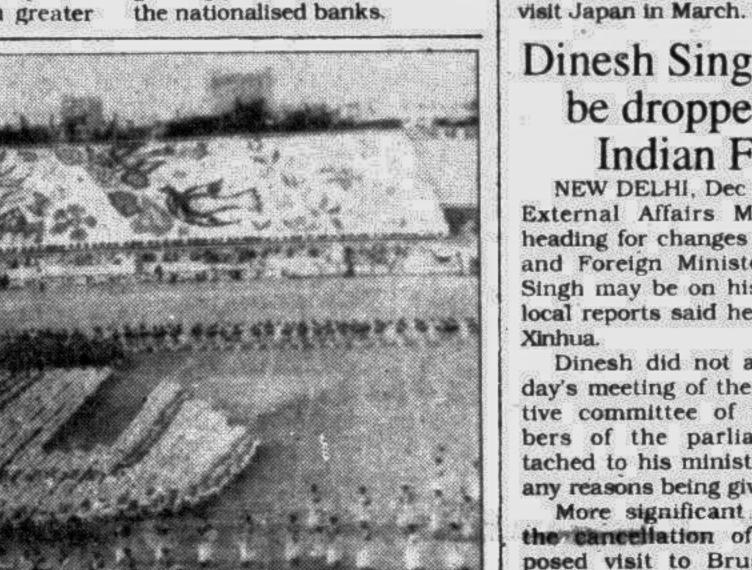
With the recent steps to provide the NCBs with greater autonomy, the government has

been beefed up., The central

According to a senior NCB official, the BB is not very happy with the results of recent

Senior Finance Ministry officials refused to comment on this but said that the private banks, which command a 25 per cent market share, are inexplicably staying away from term lending.

happy with the recent assessment of the private banks as garding privatization of some of the nationalised banks.



Participating schoolchildren form the logo of the VI South Asian Federation (SAF) Games at a dress rehearsal yesterday at the Dhaka National Stadium. The meet begins tomorrow.

#### News Analysis

### Jamuna Bridge project in a limbo

By S Y Bakht

Is Japan going to co-finance the Jamuna Multi-Purpose Bridge (JMB) project ? That is the 200 million US dollar question of the moment.

And even if Japan does decide to fund the 700 million dollar mega project, would it be made in time before the bid validity periods, of various components of the project, expire?

According to all available indications the verdict is still hanging in the balance. Wellknown for its methodical and unorthodox style of conducting negotiations. Japan is yet to provide any clue about its intentions of whether or not to cofinance the JMB project alongwith the World Bank and the

Asian Development Bank(ADB). All three are expected to provide 200 million dollars each for the project while the government would come up with the remaining 100 million dol-

However, officials here sounded optimistic about a positive response from Japan, after a 13-member Japanese evaluation team concluded a 5-

Finance Minister M Saifur

Rahman on yesterday said the

idea of an Islamic Common

Market could not be materi-

alised without effective coopera-

tion among the Muslim coun-

frustrated after attending a

number of Islamic conferences

and government-level meetings

because in most cases the de-

liberations ended without any

Americans are today better

treated in the Muslim world,

particularly in the oil-rich Arab

countries, but the people from

the poor Muslim countries are

neglected", he lamented while,

addressing the inaugural func-

tion of the seminar on "Islamic

Common Market" at the Inter-

"The Europeans and the

tangible outcome.

He said that he had become

day visit to the capital earlier this month. Government officials, who

dealt with the evaluation team, insisted that the team left Dhaka 'completely satisfied' They are now predicting that Japan would most likely finalise the commitment well before Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Tokyo in March next.

Until a positive indication from Japan is available, and soon, the future progress of the entire project appears to be in a

The government has already completed negotiations with the World Bank, the coordinating donor agency for the project. but the bank is unwilling to conclude it before the Japanese commitment is firmed up.

The Manila-based ADB, on the other hand, is even reluctant to complete the negotiations before Tokyo's green sig-

So, by all accounts, a positive response from Japan is being eagerly awaited here. Meanwhile, the bid validity

national Conference Centre in

getting involved in the affairs of

the Islamic world, the more

and more I am being disen-

chanted. I don't want any

Saifur said with a deep sense of

institution of the Islamic world

is the Islamic Development

that starts with the name of Is-

lamic Ummah is a failure, he

Muslim countries are putting

trade barriers on imports from

the poor Muslim countries.

These trade barriers are more

rigid than those imposed by

other countries. There is a lack

Saifur Rahman, said, rich

Bank(IDB). Otherwise, anything

He said, the only successful

rhetorics. I believe in action",

"The more and more I am

the city yesterday.

disappointment.

and the river training works respectively - ends on January 26 next. Bids for contracts 3 and 4 — the east and west approach roads - remain valid up to December 29. The Jamuna Multi-Purpose Bridge Authority is contemplating to extend the validity periods of the contracts.

period of contracts 1 and 2 -

construction of the main bridge

According to an official source, if the bid validity periods of the project expine, the total cost of the project is likely to escalate by another 200 to 300 million dollars and would also cause a delay of nearly two years. And if this happens, he added, the project may not be economically viable anymore.

· But what transpired during the visit by the Japanese evaluation team? What kind of clarifications, about the project, did

it seek? The Japanese team, according to official sources, raised a large number of questions, relating to both the technical and economic viability of the project.

The queries ranged from See Page 8 Col 1 Islamic Common Market : Saifur speaks

of faith and firm commitment

towards cooperation among the

Besides, there are some

Muslim countries, he pointed

other Muslim countries which

are committed somewhere else,

he said, referring to Malaysia

and Indonesia. The Islamic

Common Market may conflict

with the ASEAN if the two

South East Asian countries get

insurance schemes were taken

up in the last few years under

the OIC, but nothing had been

don't have any cooperative en-

deavours. We are not faithful in

our commitment . . . Unless we

overcome the one-eyed attitude

and take a regional vision, we

Saifur said, some credit and

"We (the Muslim countries)

involved in it, he observed.

achieved. -

some home truths

By Staff Correspondent

#### CEC meets BNP, some other MPs

By Staff Correspondent

The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice Abdur Rouf yesterday met some leaders of the BNP and some other parties, having representation in Parliament. to exchange views on the ensuing city corporation elections.\*

The BNP delegation comprising Works Minister Barrister Rafigul Islam, Food Minister Lt Gen (retd) Mir Shawkat Ali, BU, Major (retd) Quamrul Islam, MP and Salahuddin Ahmed, MP called on the CEC at his office at 11

Another delegation of some parties led by Rashed Khan Menon. MP of the Workers' Sec Page 8 Col 7

#### PM may visit Malaysia in Apr

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to pay a visit to Malaysia sometime in next April, reports UNB.

The two governments have been working out the details of the proposed visit, diplomatic sources here said yesterday. The visit will take place at

the invitation of her Malaysian counterpart Dr Mahathir Mohammad. Khaleda is also scheduled to

#### Dinesh Singh may be dropped as Indian FM

NEW DELHI, Dec 18: India's External Affairs Ministry is heading for changes at the top and Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh may be on his way out. local reports said here, reports Xinhua.

Dinesh did not attend Friday's meeting of the consultative committee of the members of the parliament at tached to his ministry without any reasons being given. More significant has been

the cancellation of his proposed visit to Brussels next week to meet the EC troika of Foreign Ministers of past, present and future EC president.

Officials here said that the Prime Minister has now begun to think of relieving Dinesh Singh of his responsibilities in See Page 8 Col 1

#### Tax lawyers deplore Saifur's call

By Staff Correspondent The Bangladesh Tax Lawyets' Association (BTLA) yesterday said that the Finance Minister's assessment of minimum income tax at Tk. 1500 was contrary to the prevailing

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, the lawyers said that the low income group among the traders would be seriously affected by the decision and many of them would even be unable to run their businesses.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, addressing the income tax officials at the NEC committee room on November 9, asked tax officials to assess the minimum income tax at Tk. 1500.

The press conference was addressed by the BTLA president M A Salam Talukder, BTLA secretary general Syed Ahmed, deputy secretary of the association Sarder Jinnat Ali and its organising secretary Mosharraf Hossain.

"There is no term called a 'minimum tax' in the Income Tax Laws .. the Finance Minister is either ignorant of the law See Page 8 Col 6

won't be able to solve our prob-

discourage you, but to make

you understand the reality so

that we can remove our earlier

misgivings and become open-

operation in the economic and

trade fields in various parts of

the world, he said, these trade

arrangements would give im-

mense opportunities to the

member countries for their

Muslim countries to translate

the common market concept

into reality through increased

the seminar, organised jointly

See Page 8 Col 8

cooperation among themselves.

He, however, called upon the

The inaugural function of

Pointing to the growing co-

"I am saying all their not to

lems", he pointed out.

hearted," he added.

progress and prosperity.

### Adulterated paracetamol syrup

## 4 drug co. men sent to jail

By Staff Correspondent

City Special Branch (SB) of police yesterday arrested four top executives of three pharmaceutical companies and sent them to the Dhaka Central Jail. 120 days' detention orders under the Special Powers Act (SPA), 1974.

The arrested persons are Alhaj Monir Hossain and Mohammad Shahjahan Sarker-Managing Director and a director of the BCI Pharma Bangladesh Limited, respectively. - Shudhir Chandra Bhawmik, a chemist of Rex Pharma Bangladesh Limited and Mizanur Rahman, a director of Ad-Flame Pharmaceutical Limited.

A top level source of the Health Ministry, on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that the ministry had lodged cases against several pharmaceutical companies. including the above-named three, under the SPA, 1974, for using diethylene glycol as a solvent in paracetamol syrup.

prescribed by doctors for voung children. Earlier, a research by two doctors at the Shishu Hospital indicated that diethyelne gly-All of them were slapped with , col was responsible for causing renal failure among children

> leading to many deaths. Later a special Jatiya Sangsad body including the Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali and Deputy Leader of the House Badruddoza Chowdhury rec ommended legal measures against the companies respon-

given paracetamol syrup, even

Last year a widespread outcry was made by the media and the public against paracetamol syrup containing diethylene

The four persons were ar rested vesterday morning by a special team of city SB led by an assistant superintendent of police. They were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail in the evening.

The cases lodged by the See Page 8 Col 7

### CJ repeats call for an independent judiciary

By Staff Correspondent

The Chief Justice, Shahabuddin Ahmed has reiterated the need for the independence of the Judiciary to ensure fair and equitable justice. He was speaking as chief

guest at the inaugural ceremony of a training course on legal education organised by the Bangladesh Bar Council at the Supreme Court Bar Association Building premises yesterday. "The quality, standard and

independence is undermined unless the judiciary is made separate from the executive," Justice Shahabuddin empha-

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed also underlined the need for the training of judges. While he was

the acting President, he said, he had recommended setting up a training institute for judges and also for four law colleges in the then four divisions of the coun-

Barrister Amirul Islam. Chairman of the Legal Education Committee of the Bangladesh Bar Council. in his speech, made a plea for developing the standard of legal education under the auspices of the Bar.

He said that in order to bring efficiency and competitiveness in our economic development, we should have a legal order. "Delay in getting speedy justice is one of the causes of inertia in

provide Bangladesh with a 250 See Page 8 Col 6 See Page 8 Col 1

### Women must play due role in business: PM

By Staff Correspondent

Khaleda Zia vesterday said the government considers greater role of the women in business and industrialisation as one of its main development strategies.

She was speaking at a twoday seminar on "Women Entrepreneurship Development: Women in Business" organised by the Bangladesh Employers' Association (BEA) at the National Economic Council (NEC) auditorium.

"The government would consider the recommendations put forward by the seminar in removing the obstacles to women's participation in business and industry," Begum Zia announced.

She observed that the private sector has a major role to play in the development of women and pointed out that the women are not behind their male counterparts in terms of productivity.

"There is ample scope of establishing women-based projects, activities and institutions," the Prime Minister said, urging the private sector

Prime Minister Begum to provide increased facilities to women in industry and business.

"We must remove all obsta-

cles in giving equal rights to the women in development process," Begum Zia said. "The government believes in expanding the industries

based on female labour," she maintained. President of BEA Syed Manzur Elahi, while addressing the inaugural ceremony,

insisted that women's participation in business and trade would help solve the alarming unemployment situation in the country. The BEA chief observed that the government policy for

promotion of women entrepreneurs is "too general and lacks specific focus." He said lack of requisite funding facili ties is a major constraint for women entrepreneurs. He proposed forming

committee representing both the government and women entrepreneurs to consider the measures necessary to help women entrepreneurs take See Page 8 Col 8

### AL to ensure people's representation in dist level admn: Hasina

JAMALPUR, Dec 18: Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina today said her party will ensure people's representation in the district and thana level administration if it returns to power, reports UNB.

"Awami League introduced District Governors to ensure people's representation in the district administration," she told a huge public gathering at Balijury High School ground in Madargani thana here this afternoon.

Criticizing the ruling BNP, Hasina said it has failed to keep its election pledges and implement joint declaration of the three alliances. Besides, she said, the Indemnity Ordenance has not yet been repealed and

demands of workers and students were ignored.

"During its two and a half years of rule, the BNP government could not set up a single mill or factory. On the contrary, thousands of workers and employees lost their jobs," she ob-

served. Turning to the country's agriculture sector, the AL President accused BNP of destroying the country's agroeconomy. The prices of agri-inputs like fertilizers and pesticides were raised several times but fair prices of agri-produces were not ensured, she said.

"Time and again we brought proposals in Parliament to bring down the prices of agri-inputs

See Page 8 Col 6



## One more day

to go Sports Reporter Dhaka Stadium yesterday

epitomised the mood of a country entering a week-long sporting carnival as the full dress rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the Sixth SAF Games was carried out 48 hours before the actual meet.

The biennial miniscule Olympics of the seven member nations of the regional body SAARC will be formally declared open by President Abdur Rahman Biswas tomorrow after-

The official announcement will be followed by a splendid pageantry highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the country.

Meanwhile all but the Nepalese contingent are in the city. India, the traditional force in the regional meet, has sent the largest contingent compris-See Page 8 Col 7

#### MOU with WB: Jute workers demonstrate today

Patkal Sramik Karmachari Action Council yesterday criticised the government for signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank saying that the accord tantamounts to a severe blow on the country's jute sector, reports

It called for rallies and demonstration in nationalised jute mills today to protest the MOU. The action council will declare its next programme at its sit-in demonstration in Dhaka on December 29. Under the MOU signed on

million US dollar jute sector ad-

December 15, World Bank will

#### Prokrichi leaders review situation

By Staff Correspondent

There was no further negoti-

ation between the government and the leaders of the professionals yesterday, sources said. On the day, the leaders of the Prokrichi-BCS Central Action Council held a meeting to review their on-going en

masse resignation programme.

The meeting also discussed the

points that came up in their talks with the government on Friday. The holding of a meeting with the members of the opposition in Parliament were also

#### Bangladeshi shot dead by BSF

mooted.

SHERPUR, Dec 18: A Bangladeshi citizen was shot dead and four others were kidnapped by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) from a village in Jhenaigathi thana here today, reports UNB. Police and witnesses said

BSF men fired on a group of people near border pillar number 1108 in village Nakshi at about 5 pm without any provocation. killing Abdul Halim, 30, on the spot. The BSF members later entered the Bangladesh territory

and took away the body. They

also abducted four others

whose names could not be

#### known. President, PM greet Yeltsin

President Abdur Rahman Biswas and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia have felicitated Boris Yeltsin, President of the Russian Federation, on the successful adoption of the new constitution for the federation and for holding free and fair parliamentary elections, reports

In a message of congratulations, President Abdur Rahman Biswas said, "Excellency, on behalf of the government and the people of Bangladesh and on my own behalf I convey to your excellency our heartiest congratulations on the occasion of introduction of the new constitution for the Russian Federation and for the success

See Page 8 Col 2

## Day, reports BSS.

The Postal Department will today on the occasion of the 6th SAF Games '93. A Taka five inaugural stamp and a special cancellor would be used. The commemorative stamps and inaugural envelope will be available in all main post offices including four GPO's. Later on, these postal stamps would also be available in other post of-

reports UNB.

### as fresh capital since '90 By A Special Correspondent flies Act which was amended in

their loan pricing and financial statements

· Bangladesh Bank sources said that this problem is limited to loans made before the financial sector reform programme was launched. New loans made after the reform programme was begun in 1991 are performing and the recovery target for these loans are being met, the source

moved to greater reliance on supervision of banks by the Bangladesh Bank(BB).

The BB's power to supervise and discipline the banks has bank can undertake special audit whenever it wants to and is empowered to impose penalty for breach of banking rules and regulations.

inspection of some private banks either. The source said that a significant number of ir-"regularities were discovered. The banks have been instructed by the BB to correct them.

The source also added that the government is not very well as its past experience re-