

On the plea of Eid-ul-Fitr

## Most transport cos allegedly violating govt rules charging excessive fare

Most transport companies are allegedly charging 20-30 per cent extra fare from passengers on the excuse of Eid while long-route bus tickets being blackmarketed at double price.

The government has issued a press note saying that no bus owners should increase transport fare and the Bus Truck Owners Association announced that law enforcing agencies could take any action against those charging extra fare.

Chairman of the Association SM Ziaul Huq told UNB that none, as far they know, was taking extra fare from the passengers.

About extra fare, the Chairman said, there is some relaxation for buses in the one-way route, which will not get passenger while returning to Dhaka.

He, however, admitted that some transport companies were taking advantage of this

relaxation. Though they are running their vehicles in two-way traffic, they are taking the advantage of one-way travel.

"But if we can catch them red handed, we will take action against them. We have requested the law enforcing agencies to take proper action against them," he said.

At Gabtali bus terminal, most transport companies have started taking extra fare since Sunday to cash in the rush of home-bound people.

Chief accountant of a transport company, seeking anonymity, said they were taking 20 per cent extra fare which he claimed to be the lowest at the stand.

He argued that they do not get any passenger when buses return from North Bengal and they have to give bonus to ferry terminal men and helpers of the company on the occasion of Eid.

The accountant said the owners were not getting any benefit from the extra collection. He said they are also compelled to give tolls to different associations at different places.

Gabtali and Saydabad bus stands have already assumed the mood of Eid rush with huge crowds of home-going passengers. But Mahakhali bus stand is still lifeless before three days of Eid festival.

A bus owner of Dhaka-Myensingh route, Sirajul Islam, at Mahakhali bus stand said there would be maddening crowds just a day before Eid-ul-Fitr.

The main gates of Gabtali bus stand have been captured by the vendors and hawkers, and also by the ticket black-marketters. There is no easy way for the passengers into their specific buses.

Lines of fruit vendors, deco-

rating their fruits on baskets, made a human barricade at the gates of Gabtali terminal. Incidents like pickpocketing and defrauding are also happening off and on at the bus stand.

One passenger to Faridpur, Aminul Islam, a student of Economics of Jagannath College, said he paid extra Tk 20 for his ticket without protest for Eid purpose.

RC Rana, a passenger to Khulna, said that the bus company took Tk 30 in addition to normal fare from him. He protested at first, but could not help buying ticket.

Sources said tickets of special buses on different routes to North Bengal, particularly those bound for Rangpur, Dinajpur, Bogra and Faridpur and Khulna, are not available in ticket counters.

Tickets of those routes are available in black market where fare is almost double.

## \$11 lakh earned by exporting flower, software, toys, silk

Bangladesh earned about 11 lakh US dollar by exporting flowers, computer software, toys and silk items from 90 to 94, reports BSS.

This was disclosed at the 36th meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on the Ministry of Commerce held Monday at the Sangsad Bhaban with Commerce and Information Minister M. Shamsul Islam in the chair.

The meeting discussed ways and means for diversifying and expanding exportable goods from Bangladesh and stressed increasing exports of natural and artificial flowers, computer software, data entry services, toys, silk fabrics and jewellery.

Speaking on the occasion, the commerce minister said in the interest of attaining an honourable share in world trade, we must add newer items to our export lists keeping track of the current taste and changing demands.

Referring to the hundreds of non-traditional exportables in addition to the traditional list of items like tea, jute and jute goods, the commerce minister said the government is committed to building up an integrated export sector by extending all possible assistance to the local entrepreneurs for exploring prospective markets.

He hoped that the experiences gathered by the local entrepreneurs about the quality of foreign goods displayed at the international export fair held in Dhaka recently, will play a positive role in the expansion of export from Bangladesh.

It was reiterated in the meeting that surveys would be conducted for identifying land suitable for cultivating flowers, supplying flower seeds and saplings and distributing *khush* land among the nature flower cultivators to increase the export of fresh flowers.

The meeting was also informed of the establishment of two factories for producing artificial flowers at Chittagong and at Sonabari in Dhaka.

The meeting was informed that necessary facilities would be provided for the production, marketing and the import of raw materials in the field of export of items like computer software, toys and jewellery.

Committee members Farida Hasan and Mohammad Ansar Ali Siddiqui and Commerce Secretary A H Mofazzal Karim participated in the discussion.

## Jt venture agreement signed for setting up SSP Fertilizer Plant

A joint venture agreement was signed Saturday between Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) and Swaraj Import & Export Pvt Ltd India and Luna Consultants Jersey Ltd. UK for setting up a SSP plant in Khulna-Jessore region with an annual capacity of 1.32 000 MT of SSP and 6,600 MT of Oleum. The cost of the project has been estimated at Tk. 30 crore. By implementing, the project will create employment opportunity of 217 people and will also save foreign exchange amounting to Tk. 28 crore per annum, says a press release.

The proposed Company named Bangladesh Fertilizers & Agro-Chemicals Ltd will go into production in early 1997 in which BCIC will invest 40 per cent of its equity while Swaraj Import & Export Pvt Ltd India 20pc and Luna Consultants Jersey Ltd, UK 40 pc.

Dr Shafiqur Rahman, Secretary, BCIC, and Asif Usmani, Director, Swaraj Import & Export Pvt Ltd signed the joint venture agreement at a simple ceremony at BCIC Bhaban on behalf of their respective parties.

Dr. Shafiqur Rahman, Secretary, BCIC, and Asif Usmani, Director, Swaraj Import and Export Pvt. Ltd, India, are seen exchanging documents after signing the joint venture accord yesterday.



## G-7 pledges benefits to all in high-tech future

BRUSSELS, Feb 27: The world's top industrialised nations pledged on Sunday to let new technologies flourish in a climate of spirited competition, bring the benefits of the coming information age to all, reports Reuter.

Wrapping up a conference on ways to exploit a world of ever faster and smarter computers, Group of Seven (G7) ministers said they would encourage private investment and competition to promote the so-called information society.

It is a world where television, telephones and computers come together in a revolution of global communication.

The ministers also agreed to set up 11 pilot projects in areas ranging from education to the environment as a way to show their commitment.

"Policies aimed at a rapid and successful transition to the information society must ensure the highest levels of participation and avoid the emergence of two classes of citizens," a statement from the G7 meeting said.

The conference of ministers from Germany, the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Italy and Japan was called to discuss ways to exploit the new technologies that promise to revolutionise the way people live.

Underlining the promise, the conference organisers hosted a glittering trade show of new technology, ranging from virtual reality visits to museums to long distance video links that allow rural school children to be taught by teachers hundreds of kilometres (miles) away.

Much of the discussion at the two-and-a-half day meeting was on freeing up restrictions that business leaders fear will hold back the full potential of the coming age.

US Vice President Al Gore, a longtime enthusiast for the new technologies, told the group on Saturday open markets were essential to allow the information society to flourish.

He backed this up with an announcement that Washington would open its telecommunications services industry to foreign investment — but

only from countries that did likewise.

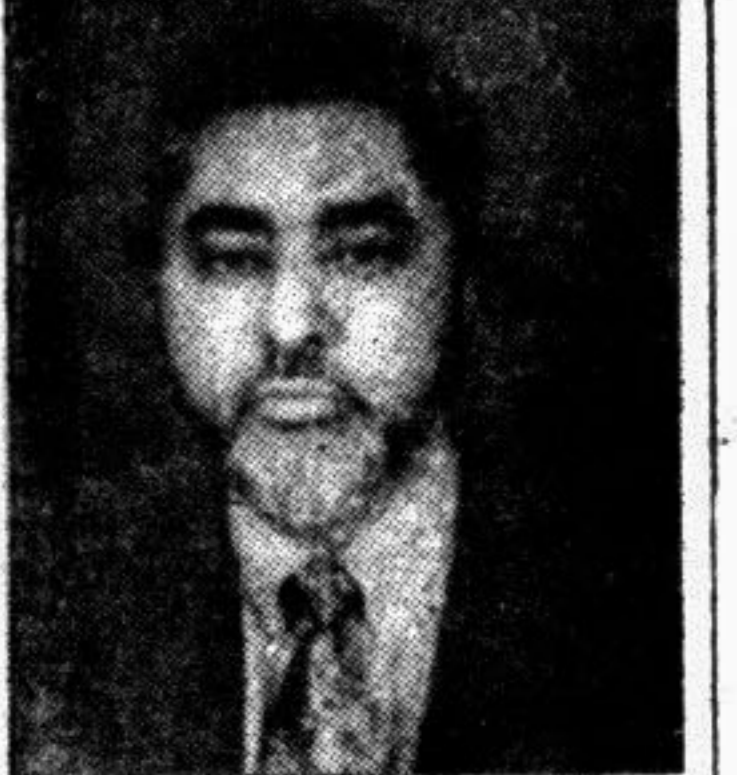
Business leaders, meeting in a round table discussion during the conference, also called for open markets as a way to grow.

The ministers said in their final statement that promoting competition, encouraging private investment and having flexible regulations were essential if the G7 countries were to realise their common vision.

On the issue of culture, they skirted the tricky question of American dominance of the current technology, opting for a statement that the countries would work to promote diversity of content, including in culture and language.

Source said Italy, Canada and France have expressed concern during the weekend meeting about the danger of having the new technology water down national cultures.

The G7 also pledged to study the impact of the new technologies on jobs — many of which may be lost before new ones are created when the full potential of the information society is reached.



## MH Chowdhury new Chairman of T&T Board

MH Chowdhury took over as Chairman of Bangladesh T&T Board yesterday, says a press release.

Prior to this assignment, he was a member (M&O) of the Board.

He started his service career as Assistant Divisional Engineer in the then Pakistan T&T Department. In 1975 while he was General Manager joined service in Sultanate of Oman as ITU expert. After the expiry of his term he again joined as Telecommunication Expert in Sultanate of Oman and served for about 11 years there.

Chowdhury participated in different trainings on telecommunication technology in Pakistan, UK, USA, Canada, Indonesia and Ireland. He also attended and represented Bangladesh in International Conferences/meetings on telecommunication technology held in different times in Switzerland, Nigeria, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Australia, USA, Singapore, UK, China, Thailand and Hawaii.

During his long 33 years of service, he was the Managing Director of Bangladesh Cable Shilpa Limited (Khulna), Director General of Telecom, Staff College (Gazipur) and contributed much in the development of Telecommunication in Bangladesh by holding different responsible posts in T&T Board.

## Jordan sets up 2 customs posts to boost trade with Palestinians

AMMAN, Feb 27: Jordan has set up two customs posts at crossing points with the West Bank to promote trade with the Palestinians, officials said Sunday, reports AFP.

The two posts were opened on the Alenby and Damieh bridges, both North of the Dead Sea and leading into the West Bank.

A third post has also been opened in the Southern Dead Sea Port of Aqaba, 350 kms (210 miles) South of Amman, to develop trade in the free zone there.

Jordan and the self-rule Palestinian Authority signed economic accords on January 26 to boost trade.

Meanwhile, a Jordanian delegation travelled to the self-rule Gaza Strip on Sunday to prepare to open a representation bureau.

The delegation is due to choose a headquarters for the bureau. Once it is opened Jordan will become the third Arab country to be represented in Gaza after Morocco and Egypt.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdel Karim Kabariti is to visit Gaza to attend the official opening at a date yet to be fixed, officials said.

## Arab trade within regional groupings remains low

ABU DHABI, Feb 27: Trade among Arab countries has remained a fraction of their total commercial exchanges despite incentives offered by a regional fund created three years ago to support flagging internal trade, says AFP.

Official figures obtained on Sunday showed exports within the 22-member Arab League stood at around 12.88 billion dollars in 1993, representing nearly nine per cent of total exports, which amounted to 142.3 billion dollars.

Internal imports reached 11.1 billion dollars, accounting for around 8.7 per cent of the total imports of nearly 126.6 billion dollars in 1993, according to the figures compiled by the Abu Dhabi-based Arab Monetary Fund (AMF).

Internal exports were even down from 14.5 billion dollars in 1990, despite the creation of the Arab Trade Financing Programme (ATFP) in that year.

ATFP, set up by the AMF with a capital of 500 million dollars, has provided more than 250 million dollars in credits for trade deals among

Arab nations since it was established.

The figures showed demand was lagging far behind the fund's financing capacity of one billion dollars a year.

"It seems political rifts are still affecting trade among Arab countries. This is one of the main reasons for the low demand," a Gulf official said.

ATFP finances only home-produced goods, with the aim of encouraging Arab exporters and reviving the ailing economies of some Arab League members. Oil is not included.

ATFP has also been involved in setting up a database linking all Arab markets to provide information on prices and products for importers and exporters.

Officials have acknowledged that the programme is not enough to tackle the problem of low inter-Arab trade.

They blame political differences, high customs tariffs, the poor infrastructure of some members and the problems of bureaucracy, communications and storage.

AMF officials said boosting trade among Arab nations was

essential to achieve economic integration and ultimately a common market.

Trade has remained low even within regional groupings, despite measures to remove customs barriers and ease travel for individuals.

In the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), internal exports of 73 billion dollars in 1993 accounted for only 7.1 per cent of their total exports of around 102 billion dollars. Internal imports stood at only 5.1 billion dollars, compared with a total of around 67 billion dollars.

The problem also affects North Africa's Maghreb Union, which groups Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Morocco and Mauritania.

Exports among them were estimated at 819 million dollars compared with total exports of nearly 30 billion dollars. Internal imports stood at around 860 million dollars compared with a total of nearly 29 billion dollars.

In contrast, the European Union accounted for 28.8 per cent of total Arab exports and 41.1 per cent of Arab imports.



Deputy US trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky (L) and Chinese Vice Minister for Foreign Trade Sun Zhenyi shake hands after exchanging an agreement which they signed on the protection of intellectual property rights on Sunday in Beijing as the US and Chinese delegations look on. The last minute agreement averted a trade war between the two countries. — AFP photo

## Clinton hails accord with China

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: The Clinton administration on Sunday hailed a last-minute agreement with China to avert a trade war between the two nations as a victory for US exporters. But American businesses said the real benefits will come only if China enforces the deal, reports AP.

President Clinton said the agreement by the Chinese would eliminate rampant piracy that has cost Americans thousands of jobs and over one billion dollars in high-value exports in such key US industries as computer software, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, books, music and films.

"This is a strong agreement for American companies and American workers," Clinton said in a written statement.

Because of the deal, US Trade Representative Mickey Kantor said the United States was withdrawing trade sanctions which would have imposed punitive, 100 per cent tariffs on 1.08 billion dollars of Chinese products. Scheduled to take effect Sunday, they

were the largest potential trade sanctions in US history.

The United States posted a 29.5 billion dollar trade deficit with China last year, up 30 per cent from the previous year and second only to America's deficit with Japan.

For this reason, the administration views it as critical that China not only halt copyright piracy but also go much further to lower trade barriers to US manufactured goods and farm products.

Kantor was flanked at a Washington news conference by more than a dozen representatives of American companies who have pushed the administration to take a tough line in the negotiations because of their losses from copyright piracy.

"This is not the end. It is a beginning," said Jack Valenti, President of the Motion Picture Association, who said it is critical that the Chinese now enforce the agreements.

"Piracy must be rooted out and a climate established that is congenial to creators of in-

tellectual property," he said.

Robert Holleyman, President of the Business Software Alliance, said his industry views the agreement as critical because the rate of software piracy in China exceeds 98 per cent.

"Although not a quick and easy remedy, the agreement reached today is an important milestone for all industries that rely on the protection of intellectual property," he said.

Rep. Phil Crane, the head of a trade subcommittee in the House of Representatives, said Congress will closely monitor enforcement by the Chinese.

"We will keep a watchful eye on developments in this area," Crane said in a written statement.

The next big trade dispute between the United States and China is likely to be China's request for membership in the World Trade Organisation, the new organization created to govern trade.

Kantor said that while China's entry into the WTO was not directly linked to the piracy issue

## 72nd branch of City Bank Ltd opens at Satkhira

The 72nd branch of The City Bank Limited opened at Satkhira town. Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman inaugurated the branch as Saturday, says a press release.

Mostafizur Rahman, in his speech, said that the overall development and activities of The City Bank Ltd was very positive which could be found true in the pages of stock exchange activities column published by the dailys of the country.

Rahman further mentioning the top most position of The City Bank Ltd among the private banks in the country urged that this name and fame of the bank should be upheld through better customer services.

He also urged the bank officials to discharge their sincere service in such a manner that people of that locality come forward to invest and deposit with The City Bank Ltd.



ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Foreign Minister, inaugurated the 72nd branch of The City Bank Ltd, at Satkhira on Saturday. ABM Feroz, Vice Chairman of City Bank, Md. Abdus Salam, Deputy Commissioner of Satkhira, M Shafiqur Alam and AHM Nazmul Quadir, Senior Vice-presidents of the bank are also seen in the picture.

## Democrats assail budget-cut by Republicans in US

WASHINGTON, Feb 27: Previewing the bitter battle emerging over proposed budget cuts, House Democrats accused Republicans on Sunday of taking food from the mouths of children, reports AP.

Republicans, in turn, told Democrats they have lost touch with the American people.

Republican budget-cutters are "clobbering kids and clobbering seniors in order to pay for tax cuts like the capital gains tax cut for some very high-income people," said Rep David Obey of Wisconsin, ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee.

"My goodness, we're just beginning to trim," replied Rep Bob Livingston, a Republican from Louisiana, the chairman of the committee. They appeared on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Democrats, he said, "lost the election last time, and they can't get used to it. They just can't get over the fact that it's time to stop thinking in terms of increasing the budget."

The Appropriations Committee is slated Thursday to take up a package of 17.5

billion dollars in cuts from this year's budget in housing, nutrition initiatives, peacekeeping and other programs.

Democrats claimed the cuts, approved in subcommittee meetings last week, exposed the Republican hand — that they would target the poor, the young and the elderly in their drive to cut the budget deficit. President Clinton described the cuts as "making war on kids" and threatened a veto.

The clash over Republican efforts to cut the 17.5 billion dollar from this year's 1.5 trillion dollar budget is a prelude to the tougher battle ahead as Republicans rework the Clinton administration's fiscal 1996 budget proposal.

Programs to be trimmed include public housing modernization, rent assistance for the poor, clean water projects, Clinton's national service program, health and nutrition initiatives, high technology grants, mass transit and veterans hospitals. Some of the money would go to pay for federal assistance to victims of the 1994 California earthquake.

## Money laundering Israel police arrest nine Palestinians

JERUSALEM, Feb 27: Police have arrested nine Palestinian money changers and Jewish religious students who together allegedly smuggled more than one billion dollars out of Israel, the authorities said yesterday, reports AFP.

The East Jerusalem money changers would give millions of dollars cash, gold and jewels to students at an orthodox Jewish religious centre who smuggled the money abroad.

Police launched an investigation two months ago after catching David Sterling, an orthodox Jew from Jerusalem with a Belgian passport, carrying 750,000 dollars and one kilo (2.2 pounds) of gold through Ben Gurion Airport.

A Palestinian man was caught with 200,000 dollars trying to cross the Allenby Bridge from the West Bank into Jordan.

Some of the smuggling was to avoid hefty taxation in Israel, and some to skirt exchange controls.

## US won't back Salinas as WTO chief

NEW YORK, Feb 27: The White House has decided to drop its backing for former Mexican President Carlos Salinas as head of the World Trade Organisation, the New York Times reported Sunday, says AFP.

Officially, President Bill Clinton's administration insists it is still supporting its candidate despite overwhelming opposition from European countries, who are backing the European Union's candidate, former Italian Trade Minister Renato Ruggieri.

But the times quoted top administration officials saying the race between Ruggieri, Salinas and South Korean Foreign Trade Minister Kim Chul-su has resulted in a stalemate and that the White House is looking for a graceful way to drop the former Mexican president.

## China plans to build more housing for poor people

BEIJING, Feb 27: China unveiled plans yesterday to build 150 million square metres (1.6 billion square ft) of new housing over the next five years for the poor, the homeless and those living in dangerous accommodation, reports Reuter.

This year China will spend 12.5 billion yuan (1.48 billion dollars) to build 12.5 million square metres (134 million sq ft) in 59 cities, the People's Daily quoted State Councilor Li Tieying as saying.

Li heads a senior committee in charge of housing reform under the State Council (cabinet), which has approved the five-year plan drawn up by the committee, it said.