

## Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS



Rafiqul Islam, a member of the BNP and Minister for Housing and Public Works, thinks that a dialogue among the parties is the way out of the present political situation. He feels that the main demand of the opposition parties has already been fulfilled when Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia expressed her readiness to resign 30 days before the elections. The BNP leader also believes that there is no need for any constitutional amendment since, according to him, "A solution is possible within the framework of the Constitution."

Full text of the interview appears on Page 4.

Tomorrow: Interview of Rashed Khan Menon, General Secretary, Workers Party of Bangladesh.

## World leaders focus on needs of the poor

From Masud Hasan Khan

COPENHAGEN, Mar 11: For the first time in the history of mankind, the world poor is placed at the centre of the global agenda as the apex meeting of the World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) began here today.

Leaders from 118 states and governments across the globe gathered in the Danish capital to formally seal the Copenhagen Declaration, and a Plan of Action that promises to fight poverty, increase the opportunities for employment and narrow down social inequality.

UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali escorted the Queen of Denmark Margrethe

COPENHAGEN, Mar 11: Austria said today it was writing off one billion schillings (100 million dollars) in government loans to poor countries as part of a new push for global development. Addressing the United Nations social summit, convened to fight poverty, unemployment and social inequality, Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky said the debt burden was strangling the development of many countries, reports Reuters.

and 118 heads of state and government to the high-level segment of the WSSD.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia was among the dignitaries who attended the summit-level meeting held at the plenary hall of the Bella Centre, the seat for social summit.

All nations share the concern over poverty, jobs and social integration, the UN Secretary General said in his opening remarks. The potential for cooperation to solve the world's social ills has never

See Page 12 Col 4



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia (L) is greeted by United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his wife Leila Maria upon her arrival at the Bella Centre conference hall for the opening of the high level segment of the UN-sponsored World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen yesterday. — AFP/UNB photo

## Flawed distribution creates artificial fertiliser crisis

By Krishna P Roy & Morshed A Khan

Flaws in the distribution system have helped the dealers create an artificial crisis of fertiliser throughout the country, experts and government sources said.

The much-touted free market economy for which the distribution system went to the private sector provided ample opportunity to the traders to create a monopoly in the marketing of fertiliser. According to reports, an acute fertiliser crisis has been created at places in the country during the last few weeks. In some places, clashes between police and farmers over fertiliser were also reported.

Peasants staged demonstrations and looted fertiliser from trucks in Sirajganj and Gaibandha. At most places

farmers had to pay even double the price to buy fertiliser.

Non-availability of fertiliser at this time of the year would affect the rice production badly which may result in another food shortage in the coming days, experts predicted.

Ironically, the production capacity of the mills of the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) is, however, higher than that of the requirement of the country.

According to Agriculture Ministry sources, the yearly fertiliser requirement, particularly of urea, in the country is nearly 16 lakh tonnes, while the BCIC produced over 21 lakh tonnes during the last fiscal year.

"This year, we shall also reach the target in terms of production and, theoretically, there should not be any fertiliser crisis in the country," said a BCIC official.

He said the distribution system of fertiliser was completely decontrolled two years ago, giving private dealers a free hand in place of the Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation (BADC).

However, when a serious scarcity of fertiliser was created in the local markets, the government recently involved the deputy commissioners (DCs) in the distribution system, he pointed out.

The government has also formed an inter-ministerial committee, comprising the

See Page 12 Col 1

## Farmers demonstrate for urea at fair price

SHERPUR, Mar 11: Thousands of farmers demonstrated in the town and gheraoed the Deputy Commissioner's office for four hours today demanding immediate supply of urea at fair price, reports UNB.

The protesters withdrew at 2 pm when the Assistant District Magistrate, Matiar Rahman, in absence of the DC came out and assured them of meeting their demand immediately.

Earlier, a large procession of farmers demonstrated in the district headquarters. It was rated as the biggest ever peasant rally in the town.

The local Awami League also held a separate peasants' gathering in front of the DC office.

The farmers, who came from different thanas, told the UNB correspondent that at present per 50-kg bag of urea fertiliser was being sold at Tk 425 to Tk 450 in different hats and bazars.

Moreover, they alleged, there is no fertiliser in some remote places.

The growers demanded immediate supply of fertiliser to save their crops.

The district administration sources said they had received

See Page 12 Col 3

## SKOP leaders asked to resolve crisis thru' discussion

Labour and Manpower Minister Mir Shawkat Ali yesterday appealed to SKOP leaders to resolve the present impasse in private sector jute and textile mills on minimum wage through open and honest discussion with all the parties concerned, reports UNB.

He made the appeal when the leaders met him at his office.

The minister said the crisis should be resolved in the interest of sustaining the development programme of the present government.

The SKOP leaders reiterated their demand for imple-

See Page 12 Col 2

## Khaleda invites Dutch investors

COPENHAGEN, Mar 11: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia said here today that Bangladesh encourages foreign investment, inviting Dutch investors to come forward to invest in Bangladesh, reports BSS.

The Bangladesh leader said this during her meeting with Prime Minister of the Netherlands Wim Kok at the Bella Centre.

During the meeting, the two leaders underlined the need for strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries.

Highlighting Bangladesh's policies of free market economy and other socio-economic development programmes, Begum Zia said Bangladesh is now pursuing a liberal economic policy to encourage

See Page 12 Col 7

## SEC may reconsider lock-in rule

By Sohel Manzur

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) is examining the possibility of withdrawing the lock-in period for liquidation of shares by foreign investors, SEC Chairman Sultan-uz-Zaman Khan said.

Re-examination of the regulation, imposed early last month, was prompted by a letter from five leading global firms to the SEC and the Finance Ministry a few days ago, requesting withdrawal of the lock-in restriction.

The SEC Chairman said, "We imposed the restriction for protecting the bourse from events like the Mexican stock crash. For the good of the market, we are also re-examin-

ing the regulation." He said the SEC had clarified its position with regard to the newly imposed regulations and it still held the same view. "Let the regulations be reviewed. Either we stick to the position or devise an alternative," he added.

Shamsul Huda, Banking Division Secretary of the Finance Ministry, said the regulations were imposed after carefully examining the pros and cons of the market. There is little scope for re-examination of the decision so soon, he said. "Let us wait and see how the bourse runs. If necessary changes can be made at a later stage," he added.

See Page 12 Col 7

## Emdad's lawyers may move for bail today

By Staff Correspondent

Lawyers defending Major (Retd) Kazi Emdadul Huq, now in the Dhaka Central Jail, are to move the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate today seeking bail for their client.

The court will also hear another petition submitted by the wife of the accused praying for a court order enabling her to see her husband in jail.

Nazreen Haq, wife of the retired major, yesterday filed a petition with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate saying that she would like to visit her husband on Tuesday.

The CMM yesterday asked the lawyers to put up her petition alongwith necessary documents today.

Major Emdad is so far the only accused arrested in connection with the case of Major General Manzur's death in

See Page 12 Col 5

## WB memo says pace of reforms too slow

Star Report

The slow pace of the ongoing economic reform process came under critical review in the draft country economic memorandum (CEM) prepared by the World Bank ahead of the annual Paris Aid Consortium meeting next month.

According to official sources, completed late last month, the draft CEM, entitled "Recent economic developments and priority reform agenda for rapid growth," has been forwarded to the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Finance Ministry. The ERD has distributed copies of the draft to various line ministries seeking comments on it.

Noting the slow pace of the reform programme, the draft CEM raises questions about the political commitment for measures like administrative re-

form, privatisation, activating the private sector, financial sector reform and about other structural adjustment initiatives.

An interministerial meeting, chaired by the ERD Secretary, is scheduled to be held on Tuesday next to review the draft. The meeting, official sources said, is expected to formulate the government's response to the draft while the country position paper, to be presented in Paris would also be discussed and finalised.

Meanwhile, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman is scheduled to leave for the US capital Washington on March 21 for a consultative meeting with World Bank officials ahead of the two-day Paris meet starting on April 25.

The failure to make

See Page 12 Col 4

## Inside Today

### Article

#### Privatization and Foreign Investment

Column: Window On Asia  
by Shahed Latif  
Page 4

### International

Shoot-on sight order in Bihar



Benazir holds emergency talks to stop Karachi violence  
Page 5

### Business

Bangladesh Railway to import diesel electric locomotives from India

US, China sign accord on copyright  
Pages 6,7

### STOCK MARKET

DSE Index 626.25 (+0.69%)  
Market capitalisation Tk 42.71 billion  
Turnover in volume 90338  
Turnover in value Tk 15.85 million

### Travel & Tourism

Sylhet: A sleepy town full of surprises  
Page 8

## NEWS BRIEFS

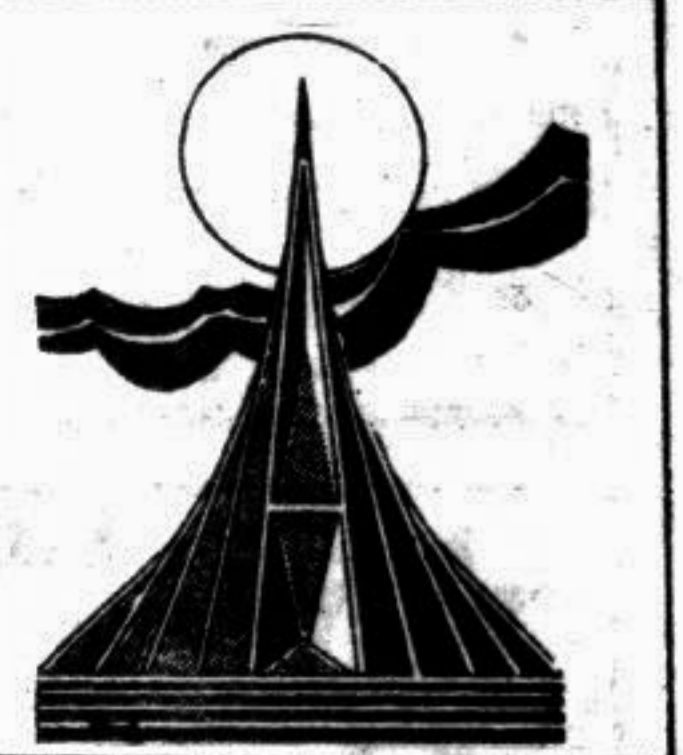
### Sculpture of Surya Sen at DU soon

By Staff Correspondent

The Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University yesterday said a sculpture of Masterda Surya Sen would be built on the university campus. He gave the assurance when a delegation of the Masterda Surya Sen Parishad met him and submitted a memorandum containing the demand for building a sculpture of Sen. Justice Kamal Uddin Hossain, convener of the parishad, led the delegation. Justice Debesh Battacharya, Syed Hasan Imam, Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, MA Qudus and Harisadhan Dev Brahma accompanied him.

### 35 houses gutted in Fouzderhat

CHITTAGONG, Mar 11: At least 35 small dwelling houses were completely gutted in a fire which broke out at the sramik colony of the National Cotton Mill, Fouzderhat here today, reports BSS.



## Looking Back at

### March towards Independence

On this day in 1971, Tagore's *Amar Sonar Bangla* was declared the national anthem of Bangladesh by the Swadhin Bangla Chhatra Sangram Parishad. As many as 127 processions, with one of their predominant slogans being "Bangladesh belongs to the Bengalees", proceeded towards the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. A 'Sangram Parishad' was formed with the leading painters of the country, and film-actors and actresses including a considerable number of civil servants identified themselves with, and lent whole-hearted support to, the struggle for independence which was thus increasingly gathering its momentum.

More on Page 4

### Opposition's 48-hr hartal from today

By Staff Correspondent

The major opposition parties planned 48-hour hartal across the country begins at six this morning.

The Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami have called the two-day shutdown to press their demands.

See Page 12 Col 3

### College teachers strike work

Teachers of 249 government colleges of the country observed a two-hour work stoppage yesterday to press home their 12-point demand, reports UNB.

Nearly 12,000 teachers abstained from work from 10 am to 12 noon. They said this would continue till March 16.

The Government College Professors and Lecturers' Association

See Page 12 Col 3

### 2000 deportees from S Arabia arrive Mar 14

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 11: Nearly 2,000 Bangladeshi workers out of 20,000 declared illegal by the Saudi government, will arrive here on March 14 by a Panama flag carrying vessel 'MV Mecca-1', official sources said.

They had sailed from Jeddah on February 28.

The rest of the Bangladeshi expatriates will be sent back in phases.

### Armed clash leaves 15 hurt in city

By DMCH Correspondent

At least fifteen persons, including a baby, were injured during an armed clash between two groups of terrorists at Golapbagh in the city yesterday afternoon.

The trouble began when the two groups tried to loot a shop at a local market, according to sources.

Of the the injured, six were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

### Stevedore held with 240 tolas of gold in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 11: Chittagong port security personnel last night caught a stevedore, Abdul Jalil red-handed with 240 tolas of smuggled gold in his possession at the multipurpose berth jettty gate.

They handed over him to Port Thana police and filed a case today.

Port sources said, Jalil, an employee of a shipping company, was nabbed while he was carrying the gold from a Bangladeshi flag carrying vessel 'Banglar Moni'.

The gold was reportedly smuggled here from abroad by the crew of Banglar Moni

## Fertility level of arable land drops alarmingly

By Sharier Khan

A continuing trend towards decreasing fertility of arable land in Bangladesh may lead to a catastrophe by 2010, a top scientist of the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC) said.

A recent report of the FAO revealed that in Bangladesh, food production in 75 per cent of agricultural land was being severely affected due to land degradation or erosion by water and wind and reduction of soil fertility.

In Bangladesh, the fertility level of more than 70 per cent

of the 14.04 million hectares of arable land has been dropping alarmingly for the last 12 years, the BARC scientist, quoting data compiled by the organisation over the years, told this correspondent.

According to his figures, the presence of organic matter in arable land should be at least 3 per cent for a healthy crop. But presently it is below 1 per cent, the scientist told this correspondent, requesting anonymity.

Despite such an alarming state of affairs, the crop yield

is being steadily increased with the use of more and more fertiliser and raising the production input, he said.

The cost of rice production per hectare has increased by 250 per cent in the last ten years. And yet the government has withdrawn subsidy on agriculture. But the selling prices of paddy have not gone up proportionately to benefit the farmer. This means the farmers are suffering need havoc," the scientist said.

According to a 1993 FAO report, the average usage of

nutrients derived from fertiliser in Bangladesh was 43.6 kg per hectare in 1981. This usage has jumped to 110 kg per hectare in 1992 with an average yield of two tonnes of rice.

The total usage of fertiliser in 1981 was 4 lakh tonnes which rose to 10 lakh tonnes in 1991 with an annual growth rate of 8.7 per cent. The FAO report said in 1993-94, the total fertiliser consumption was 21 lakh tonnes, according to the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

"But now, if a farmer uses the same amount of fertiliser he had used in 1979, the yield would drastically fall by almost 50 per cent," the BARC scientist pointed out.

The BARC study found that the fertility level of arable land was over 2.5 per cent sent during 1982-83. This dropped to a mere 1.5 per cent in 1993. It also found acute zinc deficiency in more than 2 million hectares and sulphur deficiency in 5 million hectares.

On an average, all arable

lands in the country lack important soil elements like nitrogen and phosphates. Only land in the active flood plains of the coastal areas are relatively rich in fertile elements.

Lack of nitrogen and sulphur in the soil retards the photosynthesis process of plants and their leaves become grey. Absence of potash and zinc stunt the growth and regeneration of plants while the stalk and roots are affected by the absence of phosphates. Scientists attribute fertility

See Page 12 Col 6