

Tofael meets WTO DG

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed, now in Geneva, Friday had a meeting with Rubens Renato Ruggerio, Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), reports UNB.

Tofael is attending a meeting of ministers from the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) sponsored by the WTO.

During the meeting, the Bangladesh minister briefed the Director-General on the measures adopted by the present government to promote trade, export in particular, and to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).

These measures, he said, were intended to bring about an improvement in the quality and content of life of the people, and also to integrate Bangladesh into the mainstream of the global trade and economy.

The Director General commended the initiatives and steps, taken by the Bangladesh government to liberalise the economy, expand trade and attract FDI.

The visiting minister and the DG also exchanged views on trade related issues of interest and concern to LDCs. The preparatory work pertaining to the first ministerial conference of WTO to be held in Singapore next month figured prominently in their discussions.

They made a positive evaluation of the initiatives taken so far to contribute to the success of the Singapore ministerial conference and underlined the need for further intensification of efforts with this objective in mind.

The DG expressed deep appreciation for the active and constructive role of Bangladesh as the coordinator of the LSC group. In turn, the visiting minister emphasised on the importance Bangladesh attached to its cooperation with WTO and assured the DG of his government's continued cooperation and support for the organisation.

The meeting was attended, among others, by ambassador M Anwar Hashim, permanent representative of Bangladesh to the UN office in Geneva, and ambassador Jesus Seade, Deputy Director-General of WTO.

President of Nat'l Bank of Pakistan arrested

KARACHI (Pakistan), Nov 16: Pakistani police on Friday arrested MB Abbasi, President of the country's largest state-run bank National Bank of Pakistan (NBP), police sources said, reports Reuter.

They declined to give reasons for the arrest of Abbasi, who they said was picked up from his home in Karachi on government orders.

It was not immediately known if the arrest was linked with the sacking of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto by President Farooq Leghari on November 5 on disputed charges of corruption and misuse.

BR signs contract with Cementation Railways

Bangladesh Railway signed a contract with Cementation Railways of South Africa in the recently for the supply of 50,000 Broad Gauge steel sleepers and 210,000 Pandrol Elastic clips (Pittings), says a press release.

The steel sleepers will be used for the rehabilitation of the main line section of the western zone of Bangladesh.

This is expected to contribute to the safety of the Railway system.

Steel Sleepers have been found to be competitively priced and to last longer and give better service.

Cementation Railways has further awarded the steel sleeper contract against keen competition from India, Australia, Japan, China, Romania and Germany.

Cementation Railways of South Africa is the most renowned manufacturer of railway products in Africa.

IMF team calls on jute minister

A six-member delegation of International Monetary Fund (IMF) called on State Minister for Jute and Textiles A K Fazlul Huq at his office here yesterday, reports BSS.

The advisor, South-East Asia and Pacific department of IMF, Margaret B Keane, headed the delegation, said a PID handout here yesterday.

They discussed various issues covering problems and prospect of jute and textiles sectors, progress of jute sector adjustment credit programme in particular.

Appreciating the assistance and support received from IMF, the State Minister urged IMF to further increased support and cooperation to implement the programmes in the jute and textiles sectors.

The delegation assured the State Minister that IMF always shows its interests for the development of the jute and textiles sectors in Bangladesh.

Textiles Secretary K M Ezzaul Huq and Joint Secretary of the Jute Ministry A K M Rezaul Rahman were present.

Experts' recommendation at a seminar

Expand future scope of poverty monitoring in Bangladesh

Experts of a seminar have recommended expanding and sharpening the future scope of poverty monitoring system in Bangladesh and for the institutionalisation of urban poverty monitoring, reports BSS.

The Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the joint sponsors of the second national seminar on Poverty Monitoring held in August, have just brought out their report containing the recommendations.

The seminar recommended expansion of the sample size and carrying out of several rounds of survey during the lean periods for studying changes in poverty over a period.

The project on monitoring, adjustment and poverty MAP in Bangladesh was initiated in Bangladesh in 1992 by the CIRDAP as part of its mandate to assist national action in policy making.

CIRDAP initiated the project with assistance from the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The seminar called for expanding the design of the

poverty monitoring system to cover poverty information at the regional levels.

In the estimation of poverty, it recommended, along with the head count ratio, other measures of poverty, such as poverty gap ratio and said gini co-efficient should be computed and compared.

Poverty analysis in Bangladesh, it suggested, should be graduated from the head count ratio to generation of poverty profiles and detailed classification of poverty by occupation, wage labour, and other socio-economic characteristics of the poor.

The seminar called for cross classification of poverty groups to analyse poverty co-relates and changes in poverty profile of specific groups.

For a better comprehension of the poverty scenario, it suggested, poverty levels of small and large households should be presented separately due to the correlation of poverty with the size of the households.

Emphasis should be given, it said, on crisis-coping behaviour of the poor and environmental and ecological issues related to poverty.

The prime objective of the poverty monitoring system should be to analyse the dynamics of poverty involving both state and process dimen-

sions of poverty and issues of policy concern.

In calculating per capita consumption, it suggested that adult equivalent scales should be devised with separate weights attached to males, females and children within a household.

To supplement the household expenditure survey (HES) and other sources of poverty data, it suggested that key variables should be identified with a more frequent updating of the data and here the focus should be on the flow variables to provide trends within a smaller time frame.

If necessary, it called for, the setting up of a technical committee for periodic review of the poverty monitoring project.

The poverty monitoring system (PMS), findings, the seminar suggested, should be highlighted and appropriately used in developing a comprehensive picture of poverty in the country and widely disseminated.

It called for linking poverty analysis under the PMS with national account statistics and changes in environmental-economic factors.

It also called for development of an appropriate methodology to provide employment absorption capacity

in the rural areas.

The major objective of the monitoring adjustment and poverty (MAP) project in Bangladesh is to develop and institutionalise within the relevant national institutions, including the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and the Planning Commission, a regular poverty monitoring system and the analytical capability to evaluate the impact of macro-economic policies at the micro level.

The poverty monitoring system being developed in Bangladesh aims at regularly monitoring the incidence of poverty using multidimensional indicators for providing timely feedback to the policy makers.

The first rural poverty survey in Bangladesh under the PMS was conducted in October 1994, and its findings were discussed at the first national seminar on poverty monitoring held at CIRDAP last year.

The second national seminar on poverty monitoring held in August this year discussed the results of the second survey conducted in April 1995.

CIRDAP said the present design of the poverty monitoring survey generates information on poverty at the national level during the two lean months of April and October each year.

AED programme to boost rabi crops

From Our Correspondent

MAGURA, Nov 16: The Agriculture Extension Department (AED) has set a target to produce three lakh metric tons of rabi crops in 10 South-Western districts during current rabi season.

The crops include wheat, mustard, lentil, peas and gram.

According to AED sources, about 2 lakh 90 thousand hectares of land have been brought under the Rabi Crops Cultivation Programme in the 10 districts. These are: Magura, Jhenidah, Narail, Jessore, Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira,

Kushtia, Chuadanga and Meherpur.

About 1.03660 hectares of land will be brought under wheat cultivation, 93,900 hectares of land under lentil, 53,300 hectares of land under gram, 23,400 hectares of land under khesari pulse, 6,580 hectares of land under pea and 7,770 under maskalai.

Seed, fertilizers, pesticides and other inputs will be supplied to the rabi crops cultivators to achieve the target, the sources said.

Tk 22 cr of Mongla Customs House embezzled

From Staff Correspondent

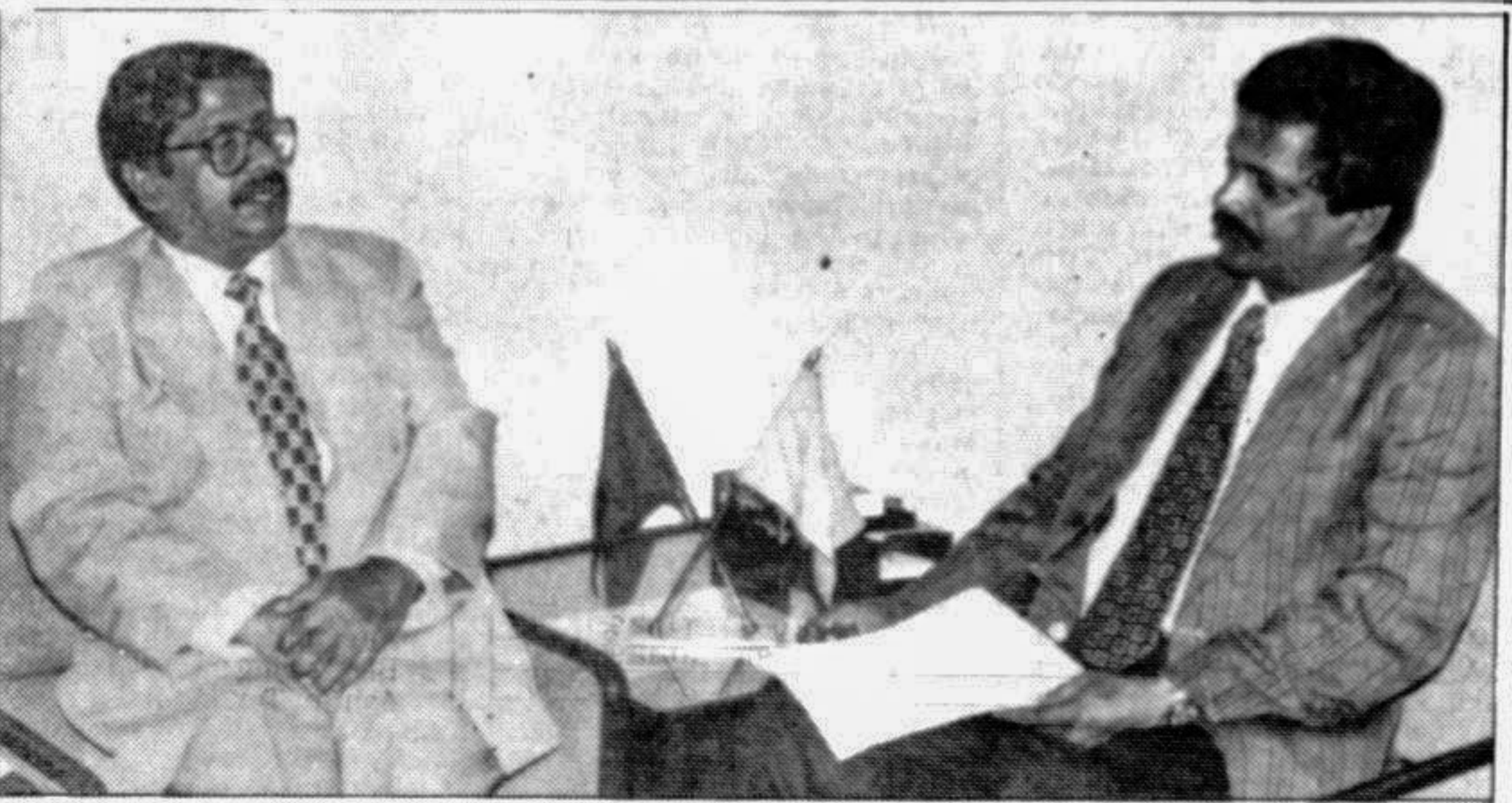
KHULNA, Nov 16: Taka Twenty two crore earned as revenue of Mongla Customs house is allegedly missing from the account.

According to a highly placed source, an inquiry committee formed earlier has started its work.

The source said that as per rule money earned as revenue by Mongla Customs is deposited in the bank. But Taka twenty two crore is allegedly missing from the total amount earned and later deposited during the

last financial year. Customs authorities are reported to have informed the bank of the matter for necessary action. But the bank is yet to reply, the source said.

When this financial bungling was detected by the Audit Committee, a vested interest group is trying out and out to hush up the matter. It is believed that this huge amount of money has been embezzled by forging signature of the Customs Commissioner.



Ambassador of Bangladesh in Thailand Akrameel Qader (left) called on Absar Karim Chowdhury (right), Acting President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry at the DCCI office recently.

'Development of communication network stressed'

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain has stressed the need for development of communication network and said "We do not want to keep Bangladesh an isolated island away from the modern system developed by other countries, reports BSS.

The minister was addressing a seminar on the communication system of "northern region" at the auditorium of Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industries Friday.

The Minister criticised a certain political party which is spreading misleading propaganda among the people to gain personal benefit out of it.

The minister said when the world is developing communication network some elements are creating hindrance against our programmes to implement a modern project.

The minister called upon the people irrespective of political affiliation to foil the conspiracy of these elements in the development of the country.

Anwar Hossain also emphasised the need for increasing internal resources by government and private efforts for the economic emancipation and development of the country.

Rich nations begin working on new debt relief scheme for the poor

PARIS, Nov 16: Rich nations have begun working out the nuts and bolts of a new debt relief scheme designed to lift the burden of debt from some of the world's poorest nations, says Reuter.

A World Bank statement on Friday said representatives from major industrialised countries and multilateral institutions had met in Paris on Thursday to discuss implementing the scheme, agreed in September at the annual IMF/World Bank annual meeting.

Countries which may benefit first include Bolivia, Guyana and Uganda, a source close to the talks said.

Under the scheme, countries which have followed economic policies approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for three years will be eligible for enhanced debt relief from the Paris Club of creditor nations.

The IMF and World Bank will also act at the same time to reduce debt owed to them, with the aim of bringing total debt to all creditors down to sustainable levels.

The talks on Thursday

aimed to decide how to implement the joint effort and ensure that countries gain access to the benefits of the initiative as quickly as possible," the World Bank statement said.

World Bank and IMF experts have so far begun so-called "debt sustainability analyses" on five countries which have completed a three-year IMF programme and therefore could be eligible for the enhanced debt relief.

These five are Bolivia, Guyana, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Mali. The last two, however, were judged in a preliminary assessment earlier this year to have sustainable levels of debt, suggesting only the first three would be eligible.

The debt sustainability analyses are likely to be completed in the next few months, the source said. If these proved that certain countries did indeed face unsustainable levels of debt, they would then get enhanced debt relief from the Paris Club, World Bank and IMF, provided they continued to follow IMF-backed economic policies.

Fish cultivation in Dhaka city's filthy sewage!

At Pagla on the bank of Buriganga river they not only treat Dhaka city's filthy sewage, but also cultivate fish.

Concern is growing that the fish from the plant may not be fit for human consumption because they are produced in contaminated water. Residents in and around the plant certainly do not eat the fish which are sold in markets in Dhaka and Narayanganj.

Experts say, fish from the Sewage Treatment Plant at Pagla near the capital may prove harmful for human body. There is however no definite proof as yet because the Department of Fisheries has no facility to determine the presence of any chemicals in fish.

The modern Pagla plant was constructed in 1992 at a cost of 156 crore taka with financial help from Japan. There are four large lagoons or water bodies on an area of 236 acres of land divided into 16 small sections.

The plant treat sewage water from all parts of the city except Mirpur. The sewage system which brings the water also contains industrial waste. These are being treated in natural process and left to the Buriganga.

Everyday, 50 to 60 cubic metres of waste water are being treated here against the capacity of 120 cubic metres.

All the 16 parts of the plant are leased out to Consumer Goods Cooperative Society of Dhaka WASA without proper and legal authority.

The society with the support from local influential has been using the water bodies for pisciculture for the last four years. African catfish, Tilapia and Silver Carp are the most common species of fish cultivated in these water bodies.

There is allegation that corpses of dead dogs are thrown into the water as fish-feed, but proof in this regard is yet to be found.

The cultivators formally catch fish two times each year, before and after the rainy season. Besides, fish is being caught everyday in small scale to send them to Dhaka markets. Local people said fish worth of over one crore taka was sold by the association from this plant last year.

Deputy Director of the Department of Environment (DOE) Mohammad Riuzzudin told News Network it is not proved that fish product from

Pagla treatment plant is detrimental to human beings.

Assistant Engineer of the plant Shafique Rahman said, the fish product may prove harmful for human body as the water is contaminated.

Dr M A Samad of Dhaka Medical College Hospital said anyone taking infected fish may be attacked with diarrhoeal disease.

But Chairman of Dhaka WASA Azharul Islam said, he came to know about illegal pisciculture there just a few days back.

"I have already taken some steps to stop it," the Chairman said adding that these include cancelling the authority of WASA Consumer Goods Cooperatives Society to lease out the water bodies of the plant and sending the sample of fish product to ICDDR,B for testing.

Attention of LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman was drawn to this matter. The minister told News Network that he is not aware of such illegal pisciculture at a treatment plant of WASA or the presence of any harmful elements in fish.

— Source: News Network



The annual general meeting of Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association was held at BAFEDA office in the city yesterday under the chairmanship of MA Yussouf Khan, President and Managing Director of the United Commercial Bank Ltd.

\$ 1b Myanmar pipeline — a political headache for US, French oil cos

KANBAUK, Myanmar, Nov 16: Along a red clay road in southern Myanmar workers have begun laying the heavy, white steel pipes for one of the most politically controversial infrastructure projects in the world, reports AP.

The one billion dollars pipeline — a joint venture of France's Total, Unocal of the United States, the Petroleum Authority of Thailand and Myanmar's military government — will carry natural gas from an offshore field in the Gulf of Martaban to a power plant in Thailand in 1998.

But it's already delivered a stain as black as an oil spill on the reputations of the companies involved. Earlier this year, protesters converged on both Total's and Unocal's shareholders' meetings demanding they pull out of Myanmar.

The few outsiders who have been able to venture unescorted to Myanmar's forbidding Tenasserim Division — and the thousands of refugees who have fled from the region — tell tales of beatings, rapes and arbitrary executions by Myanmar soldiers, and of forced labour imposed on the local population.

The Myanmar army is trying to wrest control of the area from ethnic insurgents, who, in turn, have vowed to attack the pipeline. In March 1995, rockets killed five Burmese employees of Total.

But ethnic rebels are not the pipeline's only opponents. Myanmar democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi, exile opposition groups and a slew of human

rights organizations have criticised the project for purportedly destroying the lives of local people and filling the coffers of a military regime engaged in massive arms purchases to repress the population.

Unocal President John Imle, however, insists the local people want his company in the area. A one-day, whirlwind press tour of the pipeline route conducted by Total and Unocal officials offered some evidence for his claim.

As a convoy of oil company executives and journalists drove along a dusty road leading to Total's barbed wire rimmed base camp at Kanbauk, three young Buddhist monks walking by broke into smiles and gave the thumbs up sign. Some here apparently welcome big oil.

That's probably because of a two million dollars a year aid programme launched by Total to bring development to the desperately poor villages along the pipeline route. The oil companies expect to share 200 million dollars a year in profits from the pipeline.

Total, with financial contributions from Unocal, has built or is building 30 new schools, health clinics and malaria research centres, plus providing 12 doctors in an area which normally has none.

"We want to create self-sustainable development," said Hervé Madoe, Total's general manager in Myanmar. So the company has also helped villagers set up farming and breeding projects for shrimp, pigs, poultry and cattle.

Poultry and cattle: Madoe says Total has initiated such programmes in other countries, but never on such a massive scale. "We didn't have to do this," Madoe said. "It was not an obligation."

However, Total's vice president for public affairs, Joseph Daniel, said it was. "We had to do it for the survival of the pipeline project," Daniel said. "The villagers had to receive some immediate benefit from our being here. They can't wait for the pipeline to become profitable in 2001 or 2002."

Daniel says that timetable means the regime isn't making any money yet, and there is no guarantee they will be in power when the profits roll in. Total admits, however, to paying the government a 15 million dollar contract signing bonus.

What draws a more angry response from Total executives is the issue of forced labour, which critics link to the pipeline project.

There is no reliable information suggesting the line itself is being built with slave labour. What critics allege is that the Myanmar army is using forced labour to build infrastructure necessary to construct the pipeline. Refugees have reported being forced to work on what they call 'pipeline roads.'

Total's Daniel and Madoe don't deny there are army abuses in Myanmar. But they insist the roads and railways being built with forced labour have nothing to do with

their pipeline. Nearly all supplies arrive by sea, they said.

Total admits, however, that pipeline security is provided by the Myanmar army. United Nations human rights investigators have said that the presence of the Myanmar army and human rights violations against civilians go hand in hand.

The military's widespread use of civilian porters — sometimes given a choice to buy their way out of work, sometimes not — is well documented by such organisations as Amnesty International.

It was clear from the beginning that the project would bring in export earnings for the military government, since it would not be economical for the relatively low demands of the domestic market.

Critics say a partnership with Myanmar military government makes Total, Unocal and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand complicit in the army's campaign to control the area.

"But if we weren't there, what would be the advantage?" Daniel fires back. "Do you really think there would be more development, more human rights, more democracy?"

Some of the project's opponents already have an answer to that — "yes." They say that without the financial support of foreign investors such as the oil companies, the cash-starved regime might have collapsed, and democracy might have come to Myanmar long ago.

IPDC okays investment of Tk 65m

Industrial Promotion and Development Company (IPDC) at the 48th meeting of its Board of Directors on Thursday approved investment of Taka 45 million for setting up a high value and top fashion ready-made garment manufacturing unit at Dhaka EPZ and Taka 20 million for setting up a textile auxiliary formulation unit.

Industry Secretary M Akter Ali presided over the meeting while IPDC directors, among others, attended.

IPDC sources said that the projects when completed will create additional job opportunities for 693 persons.

The board also gave clearance in principle to IPDC management to examine investment proposals involving a possible investment of Taka 125 million in the printing and packaging sector, cement paper sacks, textile spinning, herbal medicine, food and cosmetics.

The board also reviewed the progress made by the IPDC management in various areas including collection of dues from the projects.

Excelsior Shoes to float shares

Excelsior Shoes Limited (ESL) is going to float shares worth Taka 10 crore by the last week of this month, says a press release.

This follows the approval of the prospectus by the Securities and Exchange Commission. The company is the country's first 100 per cent export-oriented industry and the largest exporter of shoes.

The subscription of the issue will be opened on November 23, and be closed on November 30. Company executives said.

It will offer 10 lakh shares of Taka 100 each at par. Of the total Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), 1,50,000 will be reserved for ICB and 50,000 for the employees of the company. While the rest eight lakh shares will be earmarked for general public.

Deputy Managing Director of Excelsior Shoes Limited, Ruhul Ameen, FCMA said on Thursday that the money would be raised for utilising the maximum production capacity, purchasing balancing machinery and working capital.

He said Excelsior Shoes Ltd is the licensee of "Corofin" brand shoes of USA, member of SATRA-UK and manufacturer of world famous brands like BROOKS-Canada, LOTTO-Italy, DONNAY-Germany, HITEC-UK, etc. having an installed capacity of 60 lakh pairs per year with the roll strength of 2500 trained labour force and highly technical professional management.

New executive body of BAFEDA

By Staff Correspondent

M A Yussouf Khan, President and Managing Director of the United Commercial Bank Limited and Kazi Abdul Majid, Managing Director of National Bank Limited have been elected as the chairman and the vice-chairman of the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association (BAFEDA) for 1996-97 period.

According to a press release, the new committee of the BAFEDA was elected at its annual general meeting (AGM), presided over by its chairman MA Yussouf Khan in the city yesterday.

Khan was re-elected as the chairman of the association. The AGM also reviewed the inter-bank foreign exchange market. Inter-bank transaction in the year of 1995-96 stood at 4.7 billion US dollars, the press release added.

BTMC union leaders meet minister

State Minister for Jute and Textile AK Faizul Haq yesterday called upon all concerned to make the country self-reliant through increasing production in factories, reports UNB.

He gave the call when he was holding a discussion meeting with the union leaders of Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation at the BTMC Bhavan.

The manpower-based textiles played a vital role in boosting economy and developing self-employment opportunities," the minister observed.

He also held an elaborate discussion on the present problems related to textile industries and assured the workers to help resolve their problems.

Islami Bank meeting held

Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited has reviewed its overall performance.

The review was made at the two-day meeting of the Board of Directors of the bank recently with its Chairman Commodore (ret'd) M Hammed Ataur Rahman presiding.

The meeting expressed satisfaction over the success so far achieved by the bank. Local and foreign directors including Yousif Abudullah Al-Rajhi of Al-Rajhi Co for industry and Trade of Saudi Arabia and Korkut Ozal of Islamic Development Bank were present.