

Agri award renamed Bangabandhu Krishi Padak

The Council of Ministers yesterday approved the proposal for renaming the agriculture award given for contribution to agricultural development as 'Bangabandhu Krishi Padak' (Bangabandhu Agriculture Award), reports UNB.

The approval was given at a Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office.

Bangabandhu Krishi Padak was first introduced in 1973. Later the name at the medal was changed as President's medal.

The Cabinet also approved the proposal for appointing sons and daughters of freedom fighters and martyred freedom fighters in government, autonomous and corporation offices against 30 per cent quota for freedom fighters and in case of non-availability of freedom fighter candidates.

It also approved in principle the proposal for signing of an agreement between Bangladesh and India to run passenger buses between the two countries for Bangladeshi citizens to visit various places of pilgrimage in India, including Azmir Sharif.

The Cabinet meeting also approved the programme to observe the birthday of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at national level on March 17.

All khas lands to be recovered from illegal occupants

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday that the government would ensure proper use of every inch of land in the country, reports BSS.

The Prime Minister said government would recover all khas land from the illegal occupants and these lands would be used for the people's welfare.

She was reviewing an interim task force report of the Ministry of Land at her office. Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Dr S A Samad and Land Secretary Syed Margub Murshed attended the meeting.

The task force led by State Minister for Land Alhaj Rashed Mosharrar presented the report to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

The Ministry of Land had constituted a ten-member task force on June 18, last year to assess the actual position of khas lands, vested property, abandoned property and present state of lands on acquisition by

Inside Today

- Article**
- Humanising the Police Station**
Column: As I See It
by Ikram Sehgal
Page 4
- Focus**
- Hyperactivity syndrome: At Home and Abroad; and Green is greying fast**
Page 5
- International**
- UNHCR dismisses Zairean govt's allegations over deaths of 25,000 Rwandan refugees**
- Rival Afghan factions set up military base in Tajikistan**
Page 8
- Business**
- Focus on consumer credit: Banks tapping opportunity, middle-class finding comfort**
- DSE indicators post massive gains**
Pages 6, 7

Hasina rules out scrapping of Special Powers Act



Prime Minister replying to questions in JS yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday rules out the possibility of scrapping the Special Powers Act, saying the act had been identified by the previous government as an essential law to run the state, reports UNB.

"Question does not arise to abrogate the act during our rule as all the three past governments viewed that it is a necessary law to run the state," she said in Parliament.

Replying to Gazi Mohammad Shahjahan of BNP, who called the Act as a "jungle law" framed by the previous Awami League government in 1975, Hasina pointed out that no successive government had repealed the law.

"There was a parliament during the rule of General Ziaur Rahman, why that parliament did not rescind the act if it is at all a jungle law. At that time, his Home Minister said that it was not possible to run the state without the act," she said.

Hasina said the BNP government which ruled the country from 1991 to 1996 also did not abrogate the law as the then home minister said that scrapping of the act is not possible for the sake of running the state.

Judiciary bill

Responding to another supplementary from Abdul Latif Mirza of AL, the Prime Minister said the bill for separation of judiciary from the executive would be placed in Parliament in its next session.

Opinion has been mobilised in all the bar councils, including the Supreme Court Bar Association, while the Law Commission has already given its suggestion on the draft bill, she said.

The present government is firmly committed to ensure independence of judiciary and establish justice and rule of law in the country," she said amidst desk thumping by her deputies.

War memorials

Sheikh Hasina said the government has a plan to erect liberation war memorials at different places of the country.

Directives have been given to enlist the names of martyred freedom fighters and plans taken up to engrave their names on stone plaques at every union and thana.

"We have taken steps to acknowledge the real history of the Liberation War, people will no more remain in darkness," she said replying to a question from Prof Panna Kaiser.

Work on constructing Independence Monument, Liberation Museum and Flame Eternal has been started at Suhrawardy Uddyan, where Bangabandhu delivered his historic March 7 speech and Pakistani occupation army surrendered after the nine-month war, Hasina said.

The Prime Minister said a

CHT talks resume in city today

Talks aimed at making a breakthrough in ending decades-old bush-war in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) will begin in the city today between the National Committee on Chittagong Hill Tracts (NCCHT) and the Parbatya Chattagram Janasanghati Samity (PCJSS), political wing of the Shantibahini.

The talks are expected to begin in the afternoon at state guest house Meghna after arrival of the PCJSS delegation from Dudukhara along the Bangladesh-India border by a Mi-17 military helicopter.

The meeting is expected to pick up the unresolved issues of land rights and expulsion of settlers on which the talks bogged down on January 25-27 at Dhaka.

These were included in the five-point demand containing 49 issues tabled earlier by the PCJSS delegation which also demands a regional assembly for the CHT having an area of 14,200 sq km in the three hill districts.

Today's talks will be the fourth between the Awami League government and the PCJSS, since the first round of negotiations at Khagrachhari on November 21, followed by another in December-January. The talks in January had brought the guerrilla leaders from their hideouts to the capital.

Steps to control use of power during 'peak hours' in city

A high-level official meeting yesterday took several decisions to control use of electricity in the city during the 'peak hours' for the next one month from March 15, reports UNB.

The meeting was held in the wake of the city dwellers' sufferings, particularly the SSC examinees, caused by the persisting loadshedding in the city due to shortfall in power generation.

Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Minister M Noor Uddin Khan and Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Hanif attended the meeting at Nagar Bhaban in the morning.

The meeting suggested to gear up the drive to immediately disconnect all the illegal power lines, shut down the city markets, shops and commercial establishments — except medicine shops, food shops and kutchha bazar — after 7 pm, stop all kinds of lighting except the government announced special ceremonial days, and keep the lights of one side of the roads

AL blasts BNP stand on transit issue

The ruling Awami League lawmakers made frontal attacks on the opposition BNP's stand on the transit issue, proposed sub-regional grouping and for playing a 'double role to mislead the people', report BSS, UNB.

Taking part in the debate over the thanks-giving motion to the President for his address to Parliament, the Treasury Bench members severely criticised Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia for making 'irresponsible' statements recently. It was the BNP government of Begum Zia and the late President Ziaur Rahman that had signed the 'SAPTA' providing for transit facilities among the SAARC countries and for handing over the South Talpatty island to India, they asserted.

"If giving transit is an act of sedition, then Zia should be tried posthumously on charges of treason," State Minister for Information Abu Sayeed told Parliament.

Sayed said Ziaur Rahman signed a trade agreement with India in 1981 where he had agreed to give rail, water and land transit to New Delhi for the transport of commodities.

"Then, how Begum Zia could issue irresponsible statements that independence will be at stake if transit is given," he questioned.

Yesterday's discussion was participated by LGRD State Minister Syed Abul Hossain, Adv Rahmat Ali, Col (Rtd) Shawkat Ali, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and SM Firoz of Awami League.

From Opposition side, Barrister Zainurruddin Sircar,

Seeds (amend) Bill passed

Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed the Seeds (amendments) Bill, 1997 by voice vote.

Arguing for passage of the bill, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury said that passage of the proposed legislation would help ensure import of quality seeds.

With the passage of the bill, the members of National Seeds Boards will be increased from 15 to 25.

A total of 28 BNP legislators including M K Anwar, Abdul Mannan, Shahidul Islam, Mashur Rahman and Major (Retd) Akhtuzzaman moved a number of amendments to the bill. The minister only accepted the amendment proposed by Abdul Mannan.

The bill was placed in the Jatiya Sangsad on March 3 and was sent to the parliamentary special committee, headed by Rahmat Ali, for scrutiny. The special committee placed its report in the House on Monday.



Digging of roads by various agencies has started again in different areas of the city causing traffic jam. The picture was taken from the Elephant Road area yesterday.

Bangabandhu murder Trial of 6 accused begins today

The six arrested accused in Bangabandhu murder case will be produced in the court of the District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka today.

Earlier, the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) had transferred the case to the court of the Judge, Kazi Golam Rasul, on March 1.

Hearing of the case will, however, be held in a building at Nazimuddin road. Earlier, Trial of the cases against former president HM Ershad was also held there.

Officials said that the government decision with regard to shifting of the court for this particular case was taken so that the court could carry out its business conveniently and smoothly.

The chargesheet in the case was submitted to the CMM's court by the CID on January 15 last.

Of the 24 accused in the case, 14 have been absconding, six are facing trial, while the names of four others were not sent up for their trial as they were dead.

Following the submission of the chargesheet, the six accused facing trial were produced before the CMM's court on three occasions before the case was transferred to the judge's court.

The six accused are: former

Three mugged, stabbed in city

Muggers stabbed three persons and took away money and goods worth about Tk 2.27 lakh in separate incidents in the city during the last two days.

A gang of four muggers entered the house of one Sohrab Hossain in South Jatrahari Monday night and took away gold ornaments and electronic goods worth about Tk 1.92 lakh, said police. The attackers tied

Tax-free import of generators allowed

The government has decided to allow tax-free import of generators to minimise power crisis in the country, reports UNB.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria said this while exchanging views at a meeting with the leaders of Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) at the conference room of the ministry.

Citing various initiatives of the government to strengthen the loan realisation process, Kibria said the country's present credit expansion situation is satisfactory.

He told the business leaders that a committee, comprising the government and chamber representatives, has been constituted to regenerate the sick industries economically.

Kibria emphasised the syndication process for disbursing credit to bigger projects and open exchange of views between the government and business leaders on financial matters.

FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun assured the minister of all possible cooperation in different economic efforts of the government.

Acid throwing DMP announces reward for arrest of two

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) yesterday announced a Tk 30,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of two persons who threw acid on two young girls in the city recently.

The wanted two are: Chan Miah alias Chandu, son of Abul Hashem of Chankharpu Lane under Kotwali thana and Abdul Qudus, son of Abdul Kader of Meradia Bhuiyanpara in Shahjibagh.

At about 9:30 pm on Saturday, Chan Miah, after entering a house at Abul Hasnat Road threw acid on Sonia, 13, burning her eyes and other portion of her face. Daughter of Md Firoz, she was watching television with her parents at the time, said police. She was under treatment at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) till last night.

On Monday night, Abdul Qudus threw acid on Sathi, 10, daughter of Abdul Khaleq of Meradia Bhuiyanpara when she was taking her meal, according to police. Qudus followed Sathi when she was returning home after watching television at a neighbour's house. The attacker threw acid on Sathi's face using a piece of bamboo fence, police said. She was taken to the DMCH.

Home Minister Rafiqul Islam visited Sonia at the DMCH yesterday.

'JP won't bear failures of govt' Ershad against pullout of troops from CHT

Former President Hussain Mohammad Ershad brushed aside the notion he is a partner of present government and said he would not bear the failures of the government.

"It's an Awami League government... It's not a coalition government. And failures and successes go with them," he said in an interview with UNB at his Gulshan residence Monday night.

Ershad, whose party supported Awami League to form government on June 23 last year, said: "We have supported Awami League on certain issues which need consensus of all political parties for resolution... We agree to cooperate with them."

Asked about JP Secretary General Anwar Hossain's joining the Awami League cabinet, he said, as per Constitution, the Prime Minister can pick up any MP to become part of the cabinet. "It does not mean that we are coalition or part of the government."

Asked for his view about the present political situation, he said it is too early to make a comment.

BB plan to salvage capital market

The central bank yesterday announced a contingency plan to salvage the crisis-ridden capital market after the price index of the Dhaka Stock Exchange continued to slide.

Bangladesh Bank Governor Lutfur Rahman Sarkar told UNB last night that the steps were taken to protect the interest of small investors and bring back stability in the market.

The amount of loans for the small investors have been doubled to Tk 20 lakh from Tk 10 lakh while the amount of loan which was 40 per cent of the market value of share increased to 50 per cent.

For the first time, the licensed brokers of the stock market will be given loans upto Tk 50 lakh from the banks so that they could purchase shares and thereby help check the continued slide of share prices.

The Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB) will raise its loan ratio to 1:3 from the present rate of 1:2. That means an investor will get Tk 300 as loan against his deposit of Tk 100.

From now on, the commercial banks can put 10 per cent of their loanable fund in the capital market which will increase transaction in the market.

The central bank yesterday informed all the commercial banks of the government steps through a circular asking them to implement the decisions.

"Stability will prevail in the market following the steps," hoped the BB Governor, saying that the bank would take further steps, if necessary, for morale-boosting in the market.

He said the all share-price index should not be allowed to fall further. The steps have been

5-yr plan to stop child trafficking underway

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs in collaboration with UNICEF and ILO, is drawing up a five-year plan to check child trafficking from Bangladesh, according to official sources.

A government announcement in this regard is likely to be made within a couple of days, the sources added.

The Ministry already held separate meetings with officials of other relevant ministries, donor agencies and NGOs last month for preparing plan.

Strategies chalked out during the meetings include collection of detailed information about child trafficking and extensive study of the problem; campaign across the country to create awareness; measures for increasing the capability of agencies dealing with the problem and opening rehabilitation centres for repatriated and rescued children.

The Directorate of Women and Children Affairs will implement the plan under the supervision of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs. A project office, to be headed by a project director, will be set up in the Directorate.

An operational committee will also be formed with representatives from the agencies concerned. The director of Women and Children Affairs will oversee the implementation of the plan.

A national committee has also been proposed to be set up. The national committee will be headed by the Minister for Women and Children Affairs as the chairman, the sources said.

Other members of the national committee will be secretaries of the ministries of education, law, justice and parliamentary affairs, information, home affairs, local government and rural development, foreign affairs, labour and manpower, social welfare, and representatives of the planning commission, IMED, ERD, NGO community ILO and the UNICEF. The secretary of the ministry of women and children affairs will act as the member secretary.

There will be district coordination committees headed by the Deputy Commissioner to implement the plan.

The district committee will also include the SP, Civil Surgeon

Further trade reform needed to remove anti-export bias: WB

Further reform in Bangladesh's trade policy was needed for removing the existing anti-export bias and allowing more efficient allocation of resources to encourage innovation and development of export, a World Bank study said, reports BSS.

Lauding Bangladesh for its "good programme in trade policy reform," the study paper, "World Bank Action Note," said, accelerating trade policy reform as proposed by the bank will support the country's export-oriented growth strategy. It further said adherence to bank's prescription would encourage much needed investment—both domestic and foreign—in the export-oriented sector.

Expressing the bank's optimism of realizing the goal after trade policy reform takes place, the World Bank report for the month of January states that such objective would be achieved if quality goods are available at reasonable prices.

The result of the trade reform effort has brought about statutory level of protection—closer to the observed level as indicated by the narrowing difference between world and domestic prices. Smuggling gets incentive if there is a great difference between world and domestic prices, it said.

The bank said average effective protection rates indicate that trade policy reform has not shifted incentives fully towards the production of exportables. It said so far export success in Bangladesh is confined to special environment which is insulated from the prevailing trade regime.

The bank observed that the impressive success of the garments industry could be replicated in other industries by making the special environment the rule rather than the exception. It cautioned to reverse the current declining trend of Bangladesh's share in world export and asked removal of incentives for smuggling and duty evasion through the underpricing of imports from the current trade regime.

Bangladesh whose share of world exports shrunk from .09 per cent in 1972 to .06 in 1994 must take advantage of the reforms already underway to maximise export-oriented growth and realise a greater vision for trade, the bank said. It said the country should adopt many provisions of the recently concluded Uruguay Round agreement to signal private investors of Bangladesh's steadfast commitment to a liberalised trade regime.

Of the measures to be taken, import liberalisation—the most effective way to promote trade and especially exports—and tariff reform are critical first steps.

The bank said the govern-

DSE MARKET	
DSE price index	1473.84(-2.76%)
Market capital Tk	11431.61cr
Transactions in volume	781822
Transactions in value Tk	23.05cr
CSE MARKET	
CSE price index	673.98(-4.53%)
Market capital Tk	9184.38cr
Transactions in volume	125170
Transactions in value Tk	25149000