

Tribal affairs ministry likely next week

By Special Correspondent

A high-level meeting yesterday decided to expedite formation of a tribal affairs ministry, which is likely to be created next week, highly placed sources said.

Chaired by the Cabinet Secretary, the meeting directed the Establishment Division to raise the number of officials and personnel of the Special Affairs Division under the Prime Minister's Office.

The Special Affairs Division which looks after Chittagong Hill Tracts affairs would be converted into tribal affairs ministry, which is outlined in the CHT accord signed last month.

Kalparanjan Chakma, MP, who took oath as a minister on December 31, is tipped to become the minister for tribal affairs. He is yet to be given any portfolio.

See Page 12 Col 5

IFIC clarifies

The following clarification from IFIC Bank was received by The Daily Star yesterday. It is reproduced below in full:

"Our attention has been drawn to a news item, 'biggest bank fraud unearthed', published in your esteemed daily on January 04, 1998 alleging that 261 Cheques and Pay Orders were purchased by IFIC Bank during the period from 01.01.96 to 04.08.97 covering an amount of Tk 153.83 crore."

Although it has been mentioned that the Cheques/Pay Orders were purchased over a period of time, information that not a single IBP is outstanding is conspicuously missing giving an impression that the entire amount has been defrauded.

The actual fact is that out of 261 Cheques/Pay Orders, 56 were Pay Orders covering an amount of Tk 41.30 crore and the rest were Cheques. No IBP was outstanding for more than a number of days and the entire amount on account of both Cheques/Pay Orders was fully adjusted.

The Bank did not sustain any loss whatsoever on this account.

"Moreover, it earned usual interest and commission on these transactions. The matter relating to alleged irregularity See Page 12 Col 2

Inside Today

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The Asian Currency Crisis: Lessons for Bangladesh
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Supplement

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Sehri, Iftar timings

Ramadan	Jan	Sehri	Iftar
7	7	5:19	5:30
8	8	5:19	5:31
9	9	5:19	5:32

Traders take up hockey sticks to fight toll collectors in Ctg

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Jan 6: Detention of law and order in the port city with the increase in incidents of killing, abduction, mugging and illegal toll collection has prompted the city dwellers, mainly businessmen, to prepare for self-defence.

Hardly any day passes in the city now without such incidents involving various groups of youths belonging to organised 'crime syndicates' backed by a handful of political 'godfathers'.

The traders association at Terry Bazar, an old commercial hub, located within a quarter mile from the Chittagong Metropolitan Police headquarters, yesterday distributed

hockey sticks and whistles among the traders and businessmen in the area to resist the terrorists and toll collectors unitedly, association sources said.

The association has decided to fight the terrorists and toll collectors themselves after failing to get any remedial measure from police despite repeated complaints, association sources said.

The association recently held a meeting of all its members and took the decision for self-defence as all the businessmen at Terry Bazar were allegedly harassed by the toll collectors and armed terrorists, they said.

In other city markets and

places also, businessmen and residents are forming associations to face the toll collectors and terrorists without depending on police.

Police hardly go for action against the toll collectors and terrorists because of 'connivance' between the two, they alleged.

Many business houses, shops and factories came under attack in the past one month because the owners refused to pay toll to the terrorists.

One businessman named Mujibul Rahman was abducted yesterday evening from his shop at Baluadighi near Khatungonj, a business hub, as he refused to pay a huge amount of toll demanded by terrorists.

Police said the victim could not be rescued yet but drive was on.

The toll collectors have even started knocking the door at residential areas during day time to realise money, sources said.

Another businessman was robbed of Taka 3.50 lakh on Sunday from in front of his house at Lalkhan Bazar area.

Police is yet to go for any action despite a complaint lodged with them.

A garments factory at Dewanhat crossing came under attack on December 30 as its owner declined to pay toll, police said.

On December 29, six shops were looted from Anderkilla See Page 12 Col 1

Romano Prodi due in city tomorrow Italy may propose relocation of its textile, leather units

By M Anwarul Haq

Exploring areas of economic cooperation for setting up joint venture linkages, seeking scope for investment and expansion of bilateral trade in diverse fields will be the main focus of talks during Italian Prime Minister Prof Romano Prodi's visit to Bangladesh.

Rome may also request Dhaka for a 'country-specific economic zone' for re-locating some of its textile and leather industries.

The Italian prime minister arrives in the city tomorrow on a two-day official visit.

His 30-member entourage will include representatives of internationally renowned Italian companies including FIAT

automobiles, telecommunications giant Italtel and leading communication technology company Nuava Telspazio.

Foreign Trade Minister Augusto Fantozi, Diplomatic Adviser to the Prime Minister Roberto Nigido and Diplomatic Adviser on External Trade and economic cooperation D Volpelli and eight other key policy officials will also accompany him.

The visit of Prodi is being viewed as very crucial for attracting Italian investment in Bangladesh and setting up small and medium joint venture industries.

Diplomatic observers said See Page 12 Col 2



Romano Prodi

Cold wave claims 18 more lives

The cold wave that has been sweeping the country since Saturday claimed 18 more lives in the last 24 hours, reports UNB.

Of them, 6 died in Pabna, 4 each in Sirajganj and Kurigram, and 2 each in Sherpur and Lalmonirhat districts.

With this, the total death toll rose to 100 from cold and cold-related diseases across the country.

The badly-hit areas are the northern and western districts. Mercury dipped to 7.8 degrees Celsius at Ishwardi yesterday.

The weather is improving gradually. Met Office director Sazedur Rahman told the news agency last night.

Meanwhile, cold weather with thick fog has badly disrupted the communication between the capital and the northern districts.

Ferry services at Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia ghats remained suspended for long hours due to heavy fog. The traffic congestion at the three ghats worsened further yesterday.

Five ferries with about 9,000 See Page 12 Col 5

The Daily Star appeal to govt

In view of the cold wave, The Daily Star appeals to the government to open temporary shelters for the homeless in the urban areas and the extremely poor in the rural areas.

The centres can be opened in not-so-important government buildings, high schools, community centres or any other public facility.

The shelters can be opened for the night so that the homeless can be protected from cold.

We also suggest that the Army set up tents and supply blankets where facilities are not available.

This suggestion came from a Daily Star reader over telephone, whose advice we gratefully acknowledge.

Decision on PSC with Occidental likely today

Star Report

The government is likely to take a decision on extension of the term of Production Sharing Contract (PSC) with US company Occidental for blocks 13 and 14 in a couple of days, sources said.

The PSC is supposed to be terminated on January 11 as the company has failed to fulfil its work commitment in the initial exploration period.

A move to extend the term of the PSC is now on under an article of the PSC. As per this article, some officials argued, if any work remained incomplete in any exploration period, completion of it could be allowed in the extension period.

Some other sources, however, asserted that this was a misinterpretation of the PSC See Page 12 Col 6

Negotiation on Block-9 today

By Staff Correspondent

The government will mediate between Irish company Tullow Oil and American joint venture Chevron-Texaco in a negotiation today for exploration of oil and gas in Block-9. The negotiation will be followed by a similar one in favour of Tullow for Block-11 with Malaysian company Petronas and US company Mobil on January 10.

Sources said that the negotiators were now given mandate to find a partner for Tullow first and move to negotiations with other companies later.

The sources further said it was obvious that the negotiators would fail to achieve anything by the middle of this month — the re-scheduled deadline See Page 12 Col 7

CB publishes 2394 withheld results of HSC

COMILLA, Jan 6: Comilla Education Board today published the withheld results of the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) of 1997, reports UNB. The results of 2394 withheld candidates out of 3911 were sent to 33 respective colleges, officials here said.

Admin cadres demonstrate in Sectt

By Special Correspondent

At least 250 members of BCS (Administration) cadre staged a demonstration at the Finance Ministry in the Secretariat yesterday to press their seven-point demand including immediate implementation of the upgradation of 321 posts in their cadre.

They expressed their resentment against the Finance Ministry, accusing it of putting on hold a December 21 order, approved by the Prime Minister, upgrading 321 posts. They also resented that some 250 deputy secretaries were yet to be upgraded to the pay scale of Tk 7,100 which is one of the core grievances of the civil servants.

Earlier on Monday, they staged protests at the Finance Ministry and formed a 31- See Page 12 Col 5

Liquor poisoning kills 5 at Tejgaon

By Staff Correspondent

At least five persons were killed and an unspecified number of others fell sick till yesterday allegedly after taking adulterated liquor in Tejgaon area in the city on Sunday night.

Police said last night that they had information about the deaths of three — identified as Ismail Hossain, Rawshan Ali and Nurul Islam — all aged between 35 and 40. They used to live in a slum in Tejgaon area.

Sources at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) said two others from Tejgaon area, identified as Tofazzal, 40, and Abdur Rob, 38, succumbed reportedly due to liquor poisoning in the early hours of yesterday. They came to the hospital late Monday night.

Local people alleged that at least 10 others died in the

liquor poisoning. But they could not give identity of the 10 people. All of them were buried in different places in the city, they claimed.

Meanwhile, police said they raided almost all the slums in Tejgaon rail gate area since Monday and arrested three persons in connection with the illegal trade on liquor. They also recovered the body of Nurul Islam yesterday morning.

The reported death of several people due to liquor poisoning in Tejgaon area on Sunday night prompted police to search different city clinics and hospitals till yesterday.

At least 50 people had drunk the home made liquor sold from three makeshift shops allegedly run by two persons — Tuku and Dulal — at a slum See Page 12 Col 1

Body to set new service rules for BIRDEM meets soon

By Staff Correspondent

The five-member committee formed earlier to prepare new service rules for BIRDEM is expected to meet by Thursday. Kabirul Alam, president of BIRDEM's Employees Welfare Association (EWA) said yesterday.

The committee is headed by Maj Gen (rtd) AR Khan. Alam said he had talks with one of the members of the committee regarding the meeting.

A five-member team of the EWA will assist the committee in preparing the service rules, he said.

Meanwhile, the Officers' Association of BIRDEM in a letter to the Diabetic Association of Bangladesh (DAB) has urged in See Page 12 Col 6

Non-implementation of TF report Edn ministry won't give written assurance

By Staff Correspondent

The Ministry of Education yesterday said it will not give any written assurance to the Inter-education Board Employees Federation that the Task Force (TF) report will not be implemented.

The decision was conveyed to the Federation through a delegation of top officials of education boards which met the ministry officials yesterday, official sources said.

The ministry officials offered 'direct talks' with the Federation leaders and also asked for detailed comments of the Federation and the authorities of the education boards on the Task Force report, the sources said.

When contacted, leaders of the Federation told The Daily

Star yesterday that they will meet the ministry officials only if a written invitation is sent to them. They also questioned the sincerity of the ministry to resolve the crisis.

A member of the boards' delegation told this correspondent that they were trying their best to end the crisis and that they will meet the ministry officials again this morning.

A ten-member delegation comprising top officials of the eight boards are mediating between the Education Ministry and the Federation to resolve the crisis arising out of the indefinite strike by employees of eight education boards to realise their four-point demand which includes cancellation of See Page 12 Col 1

No trace yet of TCs worth \$11 lakh missing from ZIA

By Rafiq Hasan

Biman's Security Department is yet to find any clue to the missing of a packet reportedly containing traveller's cheques worth 11 lakh US dollars, sent by a foreign bank in favour of four local commercial banks on December 14 last year.

The packet was sent by Mashreq Bank of Dubai in favour of the National Bank, Eastern Bank, Prime Bank and the National Credit and Commerce Bank.

But the packet was missing from the strongroom of Biman's cargo terminal at Zia International Airport when an official of one of the banks went to take delivery of it after getting

a fax message from Mashreq Bank.

After preliminary investigation, officials of the Biman's cargo terminal had informed the banks concerned that a consignment of Bank Security Items arrived on December 14, last year in flight No. EK 062/141297 of the Emirates Airline. But later it was not found and probably it was missing from the strongroom of the cargo terminal, they had said. They had said that it might have been stolen.

The matter was brought to the notice of the cantonment thana.

A high official of Biman's cargo department said the

packet was sent under NDV (Non-Value Declared) system and so it was handled normally, without any extra care.

"We did not know earlier what was in the packet because it was labelled as Bank's Security Item," the official said requesting anonymity.

A high official of Bangladesh Bank's foreign exchange department when contacted said he never heard any such incident in the country earlier. It is the first such incident, he added.

"But it is very difficult for anyone to use those cheques in our country as we immediately alerted all concerned agencies in this regard," he added.

51 killed as Indian trains collide in fog

NEW DELHI, Jan 6: A speeding passenger train jumped a red light on a foggy night and slammed into a parked train in a northern Indian village, killing 51 people and injuring 62 others, United News of India news agency said today, reports AP.

The Bareilly Passenger train struck the Varanasi-bound Kasi Viswanath Express train late Monday night, said the news agency, quoting a railroad ministry press statement.

Sixteen passengers were hospitalised, six of them in serious condition. Another 46 people were treated for minor injuries and sent home, the statement said.

The ministry said the death toll could rise further as some bodies were feared trapped in the debris.

Federal Railroad Minister Ram Bilas Paswan and top ministry officials have reached the accident site and were supervising rescue work, UNI said.

The Bareilly Passenger train jumped the red light and collided with the Varanasi-bound Kasi Viswanath Express, UNI said.

The visibility was poor because of a thick fog in the area.

The two drivers of the passenger train were seriously injured. The express had halted after it hit a deer near Karna railroad station, 600 kilometres (400 miles) southeast of New Delhi, UNI reported quoting a railroad spokesman.

Train services in the area were disrupted by the accident and these were likely to be restored early Wednesday. Railroad workers have started clearing the debris and repairing the damaged track, UNI said.

India has one of the largest rail networks in the world and accidents are frequent, often due to poor enforcement of safety norms.

Heartiest Congratulations To

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For his recent achievement, being elected as a "Director of the Board of Directors of the Chittagong Stock Exchange (Un Opposed)" and as a "Director of the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce & Industries".

He is the "Chairman of Frank Group of Companies"; "Managing Director of Kishwar Securities & Investment Ltd"; Member of the "Bangladesh Steamer Agents Association"; Ex-President of "Bangladesh Master Stevedore Association" and Advisor to the BGMEA.

Mr. Chowdhury is a dynamic personality in business.

We wish him further success.

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