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NCST meet held

Setting up of
bio-technology
instt discussed

The fifth meeting of the National Council on Science and Technology (NCST) was held at the international conference centre here yesterday morning, reports BSS.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who is also president of the council presided over the meeting.

The meeting reviewed the activities of the on-going projects on science and technology in the country.

It also discussed future development projects including programmes on genetic engineering and setting up of a biotechnology institute.

The meeting stressed the need for giving priority on the expansion of genetic engineering related research and speedy implementation of genetic engineering technology.

Proceedings of the fourth meeting of NCST was approved and discussion was held on the progress and implementation of the decisions taken in the previous meeting.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria, Education Minister A S H Sadeque, Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed, Energy Minister Noor Uddin Khan, Agriculture Minister Begum Motia Chowdhury, Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yusuf, Environment and Forest Minister Begum Sajeda Chowdhury, State Minister for Science and Technology Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, State Minister for Textiles K M Jahangir, members of parliament secretaries concerned scientists, educationists and researchers were present at the meeting.

Attack on APP's
house at
Narsingdi

From Our Correspondent

NARSINGDI, Feb 3: A group of terrorists attacked the house of an Assistant Public Prosecutor at Maddhaya Kandapara in the town at midnight on Monday night.

The terrorists damaged furniture of the house and looted goods worth about Tk one lakh from the house of Assistant PP Sweaty Shaha, 30.

According to family sources, the attack was sequel to previous enmity, but Sweaty Shaha filed a dacoity case with Narsingdi police.

Peregrine

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A total of 10 local entrepreneurs who include former bureaucrat Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, garment tycoon Nurul Huq Sikder and insurance magnet Nasir Chowdhury have also agreed to "keep the management structure intact", sources close to them said.

The proposed company has already applied for licence as a non-banking financial institution.

Runa Alam, Peregrine CEO in Bangladesh, will retain her position in the new company. Enam Ahmed Chowdhury, a former ERD secretary and until recently the vice-president of the Jeddah-based Islamic Development Bank (IDB), will be the chairman.

The directors of Peregrine Capital Limited have approved the transaction leading to a complete takeover by a group of investors with the authorisation of the liquidator of Peregrine Investment Holdings Limited, the company announced in a press statement yesterday.

Union Capital Limited will carry on the business of investment banking and asset management with particular concentration on infrastructure financing, corporate finance, investment trading, sales and brokerage, project finance, private equity and lease financing. It will also undertake research and advisory activities, the announcement said.

The buy-out deal of the Bangladeshi business and undertakings of Peregrine Capital Limited ends speculation about the collapse of the investment bank, whose Hong Kong and Chinese operations have been bought by a French bank and another partner.

BJP VOWS

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choice is between nationalism and a foreign hand," the BJP said, without naming Sonia Gandhi.

The BJP manifesto also promised to create 10 million jobs a year, double India's food production and achieve full literacy by the year 2010. It also promised to offer free education and set aside a third of parliament seats for women, but set no schedule for those goals.

The BJP criticized the economic reforms started by the Congress Party six years ago. It said domestic industries needed at least seven years of protection from foreign competition, though foreign investment was welcome to help India develop its infrastructure.

A K Khandaker tells trial court

My allegiance to Mushtaque govt was to avert civil war

Former Air Chief A K Khandaker has said that he expressed his allegiance to Mushtaque government to avert a civil war and later resigned driven by conscience, reports UNB.

"I finally made up my mind that it is not possible to keep myself involved in the process of injustice and conspiracy and left Bangabhaban on August 17," he said.

Next day, he said, he went to Bangabhaban and submitted his resignation letter as the country's first Chief of Air Staff to the Principal Secretary to the President, Mahbubul Alam Chashai.

Making his deposition to the trial court yesterday as the 48th prosecution witness in Bangabandhu Murder Case, Khandaker said he along with Army and Naval Chiefs were taken to Bangabhaban after the assassination of Bangabandhu on August 15.

They took us from the radio station to Bangabhaban with escort and kept us confined there on the plea of discussions and meetings.

The witness said some days after he had tendered his resignation Mushtaque called him at Bangabhaban to say that it was accepted. But he would be officially informed of the decision afterwards.

The first Air Vice Marshal of the country also told the court that he was replaced by Group Captain Tawab who was staying in Germany at that time.

Khandaker, who represented Bangladesh government when Pakistan occupation forces surrendered on December 16, 1971, said Tawab had retired from Pakistan Air Force with all benefit during the Liberation War.

Referring to the oath of allegiance to the post-August 15

government by the three services chiefs, the witness said he found Khandaker Mushtaque and Taheruddin Thakur in the radio station.

Besides, the witness said, Major Rashid, accompanied by his wife (Zobaida Rashid), was sitting on the front row during the swearing-in of the cabinet ministers.

"Shah was the lone lady present in the oath taking ceremony," he said. He could not say her name when asked by the judge. "I came to know about her identity from others."

The former air chief said he first learned the news of assassination of Bangabandhu over telephone from Shaifullah on August 15 morning.

"I talked to Bangabandhu last on August 14 night and I was astonished hearing the news. I asked Shaifullah if he was sure and he said yes," the witness recalled.

Elaborating the dismal situation there, Khandaker said most of them were at the age of irreversibility and tension. "A minor confrontation or disagreement could have led to a spray of killings."

Under the circumstances, he said, he was forced to go to the radio station and so was Naval Chief Admiral Khan.

In this respect, the then Air Chief said before he reached the office, Shaifullah was compelled to agree to go to the radio station to express his allegiance to the new government.

"We were taken to the radio station with open-jeep escort by Major Rashid and Major Dalmi who were carrying arms."

A K Khandaker said Khandaker Mushtaque Ahmed and Taheruddin Thakur followed them to Bangabhaban from the radio station with escort.

Court was adjourned till 9:30 am today.

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Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), Chetia now faces charges in three cases. The cases are illegal entry into Bangladesh, procuring Bangladeshi passports under false identity and possessing foreign currency illegally. All these cases were filed by Mohammadpur police on January 5.

In the CMM's court yesterday, lawyers of Chetia prayed for immediate measures for his treatment, permission to visit him in jail and access to legal documents relevant to the cases filed against him. They also prayed for hearing of his bail petition in his presence.

The CMM ordered the jail authorities to take necessary steps for his better treatment and the copy section to provide the lawyers with necessary legal documents.

Since Chetia has been detained under the Special Powers Act, the CMM observed that permission from the Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka was required to visit the accused in jail.

The case under Section 54 of the CrPC under which Chetia was arrested was heard in the court of the Additional CMM. The lawyers pleaded that he should be discharged from this court for signature of the accused.

Advocate A B M Walur Rahman, M Asaduzzaman, Prokash Biswas, Dulal Mitra and Alina Khan appeared for the accused.

During the hearing of the petition, the CMM observed that he will hear only that case for which lawyers have been empowered to represent Chetia.

Later the court heard all the three cases when the lawyers argued that they had forwarded the Vokalatnama through this court for signature of the accused.

It could not be known whether there will be any minimum wages for silk industry workers under the WB-financed project.

In Chittagong, the Railway Market is another centre where wild animals are traded, they said. "Many of these animals like bears and monkeys are bought by foreigners for kitchen delicacies," said a source.

The DCC Chief Vet himself offered these correspondents a pair of bears for Tk 60,000 when he was approached as customers. In a recorded telephone conversation, he said it would take a month for him to procure and supply the animals.

When asked whether it was legal to keep the animals, he replied, "I will issue a certificate so that you may keep it without hassle from the law."

He said it was not illegal to keep those animals as pets. The law is against selling, not keeping them as pets, he said.

He questioned if it was time to needed to change the habit for use of surface water said, "For the sake of safe drinking water we have to choose the option now."

Till date there is no accurate data on the affected people and areas. However, Dr A Z M Iftekhar, project director of the UNDP-funded Arsenic Emergency Programme said, "The entire population could be at risk. As the government has to carefully consider all issues we have not been able to give immediate solution for the problem. We are now conducting an epidemiological survey that will give the illustration of the actual number of patients across the country. Based on the data findings, we will go for mapping and further studies to assess the need to the affected people."

Dr Rahman referring to the time needed to change the habit for use of surface water said, "We made fatal mistakes by opting for use of ground water for drinking water we have to choose the option now."

World Bank representative Babar N Kabir, speaking on the occasion said, "We would recommend that the government give the villagers options on use of safe water. It should be acceptable to them and they should choose what is best for them. We should avoid imposing things. World Bank is designing strategies according to the need of the affected people."

He said, "The problem of ground water contamination is going to stay for a long time. If we have to find ways out, we have to face the reality. According to science, ground water is already contaminated as scientific explanations proved that more we pump out water more it is contaminated by the process of oxidation."

Dr Deepak Bajracharya, representing the UNICEF, said, "We are now at the learning stage. As of today, we have not been able to find out the original cause of the problem." Referring to a data-based map of the country he said, "The field level water sample tests by the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) that largely installs tubewells, shows that a large number of

tubewells are contaminated."

Khushu Kabir of ADAB said,

"There was serious lack of coordination among the organisations doing fact-finding work on the problem. There was shortsightedness in the whole process of planning. A lot more like awareness creating programme and information feeding system at the community level needs to be done."

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Among others who spoke at the Roundtable were Alex Redekopp, WHO Environment and Health Advisor and Mofazzal Hoque, National Field Programme Office of WHO.

Khandaker Mushtaque took oath as President in the afternoon while the cabinet in the evening. The officers who were at the radio station were present on the occasion," he said.

Besides, the witness said, Major Rashid, accompanied by his wife (Zobaida Rashid), was sitting on the front row during the swearing-in of the cabinet ministers.

"Shah was the lone lady present in the oath taking ceremony," he said. He could not say her name when asked by the judge. "I came to know about her identity from others."

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cases have been filed against him.

After examining the documents of the three specific cases, an order regarding the discharge petition will be passed, the court observed.

Chetia, along with two others identified as Lakshmi Prasad Goswami and Babul Sharma, were arrested on December 21 last year from a flat in the city's Mohammadpur thana area. The two others arrested with him, however, were charged for illegal entry and stay in Bangladesh.

Riaz Khan told The Daily Star that though silk products were high value added clothing items and had a huge market abroad, neither the government nor the private sector was making adequate investment in the field. He said BRAC was competing with China to export its products to UK, Canada, France, Japan, and the Netherlands.

Talking to The Daily Star, a group of silk worm farmers and weavers said formation of co-operatives may help them earn higher profit. Silk reeling workers alleged that they were given only Tk 20 to Tk 30 a day for 4 to 5 pm work.

Weavers earn only Tk 12 to Tk 15 for producing one yard of silk cloth. "I can weave two to three yards a day," said one weaver.

BRAC officials, however, said that they maintained about 30 per cent profit margin on the finished products and that the growers and weavers were properly paid.

It could not be known whether there will be any minimum wages for silk industry workers under the WB-financed project.

In the absence of any such action by the Forest Department officials, the trade in wildlife is going on unabated, sources said.

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