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Last batch of tribal refugees returns home today

From Our Correspondent
KHAGRACHARI, Feb 26:
The 12-year-old refugee prob-
lem between Bangladesh and
India comes to an end when the
last batch of 198 tribal people
return home from exile in
Tripura tomorrow.

The refugees are scheduled to
cross the border at Tabalch-
hari, walking across the
make-shift wooden bridge on the
Feni river, separating the two
countries, administration
sources said.

Their arrival will mark the
end of the repatriation of the
refugees who fled their homes
in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)
See Page 12 Col 8

Asaduzzaman MP to appeal against election tribunal verdict

By Staff Correspondent
Awami League MP from
Tangail Khandakar Asaduz-
man has said he will appeal to
the higher court against the
verdict of an election tribunal
cancelling his election as a
member of the Jatiya Sangsad.

The Dhaka Division Elec-
tion Tribunal gave the verdict
on Wednesday in the case filed
by Asaduzzaman's BNP rival in
the 1996 general elections, Ab-
dus Salam Pintu, challenging
the election results in the Tan-
gail-2 JS seat.

Talking to The Daily Star
yesterday, Asaduzzaman said
See Page 12 Col 8

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AL-BNP dialogue today to end JS stand-off

By Nazmul Ashraf

Speaker Humayun Rashid Choudhury has invited the ruling Awami League and the main opposition BNP to a meeting at his Sangsaddhaban office at 2 pm today.

Both the AL and the BNP have confirmed receiving the Speaker's telephonic invitation, extended yesterday.

The crucial meeting, to be held over lunch, has been convened to resolve the long-standing crisis over BNP's boycott of the parliament proceedings for the last six months, sources in both the camps said.

Each of the parties would be

represented at the meeting by a team of five members.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star last night that his party would be represented by Chief Whip of the Opposition in Parliament Khandakar Delwar Hossain, M Saifur Rahman, Col (ret) Oli Ahmed, MK Anwar and he himself.

Asked to comment on the Speaker's initiative, Mannan Bhuiyan said: "We'll attend the meeting... Let's see what happens there."

Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim also

confirmed that his party would be represented in the meeting with similar number of delegates. Talking to The Daily Star last night, he said Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah would finalise the names of the AL delegation in consultation with Prime Minister and party chief Sheikh Hasina before going to the meeting.

Nasim, who admitted receiving telephonic call from the Speaker on the matter, said he would be included in the AL team.

The minister, whose several attempts recently failed to

bring BNP back to the House, said: "I'm happy that the BNP has agreed to sit for dialogue."

The Speaker's move for a negotiated settlement of the parliamentary stand-off is being seen as very significant against the changed political situation when the BNP is facing pressure from amongst its party legislators for ending the indefinite abstention from the House.

The Speaker also mediated a similar negotiation between the AL and the BNP in January last year, resulting in a four-point agreement that ended BNP's Sangsaddhaban boycott at that time.

Transfer of experts & lack of funds cripple BAPEX

By Sharier Khan

BAPEX, the oil and gas exploration unit of the government, is facing severe crisis as the authorities have transferred 27 of its expert level officials on deputation to work in the Petroleum Concessions Division (PCD) of Petrobangla.

This has crippled BAPEX but has brought back life to the PCD — the Petrobangla wing which monitors the activities of foreign oil and gas companies in Bangladesh.

Sources said that the sudden vacuum in the BAPEX, coupled with absence of exploration funds for years, and lack of interest of the authorities in awarding any block or finding any good "carried over" part-

nership for it in the second round block bidding have created an impression among officials of BAPEX and Petrobangla that it would gradually be shut down.

The transferred officials include managers, deputy managers and assistant managers. Qualification-wise, they include 10 geologists, seven geo-physicists and 10 drilling engineers.

"It's true that the PCD badly needed manpower. It had 13 officials when there was a need for at least 60 to carry out its tasks. So instead of hiring officials from BAPEX, there should have been fresh recruitment," said one source. "By emptying See Page 12 Col 1

City to have 4000 more Premium buses soon

Some 4,000 more premium buses will be pressed into service on different routes in the capital soon to ensure comfortable transportation system, ease traffic jam and protect environment, reports UNB.

The project involving about Tk 850 crore has been undertaken by Dhaka Urban Transport Project funded by the World Bank. Rajuk will allot lands for the depots of new buses.

This was disclosed at a high-powered meeting of the service-oriented organisations held at the LGRD Ministry yesterday with LGRD and cooperatives minister Zillur Rahman in the chair.

The meeting directed the authorities concerned to take up immediate measures to launch a drive against unau-
See Page 12 Col 4



Children making pithas at the pitha festival organised by the Shishu Academy at its premises in the city yesterday.
— Star photo

PM's fresh call to BNP Raise all problems in parliament

SARIAKANDI (Bogra), Feb 26: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today renewed her call to opposition BNP to return to parliament and raise all the problems in the House, reports UNB.

"Join parliament and work for overall development of the country and welfare of the nation... that's what the people want from you," she said.

Addressing a huge public meeting at Sariaikandi Degree College ground in the afternoon, she said it is unfortunate that those elected to raise the people's problems are not going to parliament.

She claimed that the opposition was allowed to speak on every issue and their demands were accepted. "Why then they are staying away from the House?"

Turning to the economic issues, the Prime Minister said the government has taken all possible steps for economic development of the country.

The government is trying to ensure a better life for the peo-

ple by fulfilling their basic needs, she said, calling upon all to work for the rapid progress of the country.

Hasina said the government has a plan to develop a better communication network across the country, mentioning that the Bangabandhu bridge over the river Jamuna will be opened to traffic by next June.

On completion of the bridge, massive economic activities would start in the northern region, she added.

The government is also working to remove illiteracy from the country within the shortest possible time and is planning to reach electricity to every village, she said.

About the local problems, the Prime Minister said the government has taken steps to solve those.

Mentioning the river bank protection project Hasina said it will be completed by next November, and added that the government would take more programmes to save the people
See Page 12 Col 3

Khaleda protests filing of 'false cases' against JCD leaders

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has condemned and protested the filing of a "false case" against the JCD leaders, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, Begum Zia blamed the "terrorists and hired goons" of the ruling party for vandalism at the Central Shaheed Minar on February 21 and demanded immediate withdrawal of the "false case".

The opposition leader also accused the "subservient and inept" government of realising its conspiratorial designs one after another in a bid to save itself from people's hatred and cover up its failure to run the country.

Describing the Shaheed Minar as a sacred place and symbol of national spirit, she charged the government with creating a chaotic situation in the Shaheed Minar to tarnish the image of BNP.

"The country's independence, sovereignty, integrity and even sacred places are not safe under this government", she remarked.

See Page 12 Col 8

Stay of HC order rejecting writ against Chetia's extradition refused

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday refused to give an ad-interim stay order against the rejection order of Anup Chetia's writ petition by the High Court, reports UNB.

Chamber Judge of Appellate Division Justice Abdur Rouf refused to grant the ad-interim stay and ordered to place the provisional stay petition before the full bench of the Appellate Division on Wednesday.

Justice Rouf gave the directive while he was approached for a provisional stay order against the operation of the High Court order on the writ of
See Page 12 Col 5

Rowdiness

DU probe body chief's room ransacked

By DU Correspondent

Unidentified persons ransacked the office of Prof Shahadat Ali of Zoology department of Dhaka University sometime between Wednesday evening and yesterday morning.

Prof Ali, who is heading a three-member committee now investigating rowdiness at the Central Shaheed Minar on Saturday, told The Daily Star last night he found his office room
See Page 12 Col 3

TUs running parallel administration in banks

Star Report

The trade unions (TUs) of the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) having connection with those in power are running a parallel administration in the banks, having greater control over postings, transfers and promotions of

both employees and officials.

These were the findings of the task force report on TUs submitted recently to the government.

There are no trade unions in any of the foreign banks or those private commercial banks established since 1980s. The TUs exist only in the nationalised commercial banks and the privatised Pubali and Uttara banks.

Theoretically, no more than three TUs can exist in one bank because it needs the support of at least one third of employees to get registration as TU. Sonali Bank has five TUs, Janata six

Task Force report

TUs and Agrani five TUs. Only Rupali Bank has three TUs, the report said.

The law does not permit formation of CBAs in regional offices. But all these banks have CBA committees in all divisional and district offices, and even in some of the branches. These so-called CBAs often sit with the management and negotiate on their different demands.

Because of such unlawful formation of CBAs, a huge

number of bank employees have become involved in TU activities. In the 10 public sector banks and DFIs, 11,796 employees are involved in CBA and TU activities.

The TUs are running a parallel administration in the NCBs, observed the task force report. It needs approval from the TUs to transfer any of their members. They also dictate who should be transferred to where and when.

The CBAs and TUs take extra

interest in posting their own people to bank branches where one can earn from illegitimate sources. They go to any extent including intimidation, collusion and rowdiness to get their right man posted to the right place. The TUs take high lobbying fees from employees for either giving them 'desired' postings or for cancelling 'unwanted' postings.

The airport branches of Sonali and Janata banks are examples of such lucrative places of posting. The National Board of Revenue (NBR) and other authorities have scores of complaints of harassment for

extorting money from passengers against the employees of these branches. But whenever any transfer order is issued against any of the employees, the CBAs react violently.

The TUs not only influence the transfer and postings of employees, these also have long hands in the affairs of the officials. They try to remove honest officials from important branches or divisions of banks.

The CBA general secretary of Sonali Bank had said to a newly appointed managing director, "This bank is not like any other bank. The appoint-
See Page 12 Col 3

BOI's one-stop-service Investors now to get support in 30 days

Entrepreneurs will now get infrastructure and institutional supports within 30 days to set up an industry from the one-stop-service centre of the Board of Investment (BOI), reports UNB.

The assurance came from a meeting of the BOI with top executive of relevant government agencies yesterday afternoon.

The BOI one-stop-service cell, initiated during the past regime, has proved ineffective to provide necessary service to the potential investors. Yesterday's meeting was aimed at activating the one-stop-service centre.

BOI Executive Chairman Farooq Sobhan presided over the meeting on formulation of an effective working procedure to

deliver infrastructure and institutional supports from BOI one-stop-service required for setting up of industries."

The top executives from ten government and semi-government organisations — NBR, Bangladesh Bank, PDB, DESA, REB, T&T Board, WASA, Titag Gas and Department of Environment — were present at the meeting.

Farooq Sobhan presented a draft working plan of the one-stop-service, scheduled to start operation from March 7 from the BOI new office at Jiban Bima Tower.

He said the government plans to undertake a project soon to strengthen the BOI's one-stop-service for providing
See Page 12 Col 1

BNP postpones Ctg hartal

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 26: Chittagong City Unit of BNP has postponed its hartal programme here on March 1 for 15 days.

The hartal programme was announced earlier in protest against 'assault' on city BNP leader Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury MP allegedly by Awami League activists.

The city BNP, in a press release today, said the hartal programme was postponed following an assurance from the police administration that proper action would be taken against those responsible for the assault.

Earlier several hundred BNP supporters gheraoed the office of the police commissioner and submitted a memorandum to him, demanding arrest of those who assaulted Amir Khasru in Lalkhan bazar area on February 20.

Kalyan Singh govt wins confidence vote

LUCKNOW, Feb 26: In a boost for Hindu nationalists, the government in India's largest state won a confidence vote today, five days after it was dismissed by the state governor, reports AP.

The vote ended political turmoil in the state of Uttar Pradesh which saw two claimants to the title of chief minister square off in a fight on the floor of the state legislature.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, which had been in power five months when it was abruptly dismissed Saturday, won confirmation of its court-ordered reinstatement by a vote of 225-196, allowing Chief Minister Kalyan Singh to reclaim his office.

The drama in Uttar Pradesh state came amid a federal parliamentary election, in which the Bharatiya Janata was expected to emerge as the largest

Australian expert tells The Daily Star Experience in arsenic pollution lesson for other countries

By Morshed Ali Khan

Bangladesh's experience in confronting the arsenic contamination of groundwater has been a lesson for Australia and many other countries of the world.

Gerry Jacobson, Principal Research Scientist, Geohazards, Land and Water Resources Division of the Australian Geological Survey Organisation said the arsenic problem had only been detected recently. In Australia, so far no test were carried out to detect arsenic con-

tamination of groundwater. In Bangladesh there are four million tubewells put in place at a very heavy investment on the part of the government.

Jacobson, who was here to attend the recent international conference on arsenic problem said that with the lessons learnt from Bangladesh, Australia would have to take up projects to test its groundwater. Asked how best Bangladesh could handle the enormous problem of arsenic contamina-

tion, the geologist said it was an enormous job to identify all the tubewells supplying contaminated water. "The solution to the problem is well known and also easy but there remains a lot of work to be done," he said.

Going to the villages, testing water and then warning the people is an enormous job. Then the people would have to decide for an alternative source of drinking water.
See Page 12 Col 3

Muslim marriage registration act modified

The government has modified the rules under the Muslim Marriages and Divorces (Registration) Act, 1974, making the Nikah registrars (kazi) accountable and simplifying the management system, official sources told BSS yesterday.

As per the modified rules, some sub-rules have been introduced relating to the appointment of nikah registrars, enhancement of their licence fee renewable after every three years on payment and deposit of fixed annual fees realised under the rule.

The jurisdiction of a nikah registrar has also been revised considering the increased popu-
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Notice

International Seminar/Workshop on Standardization, Quality & Environmental Management — ISO 9000 and 14000

Bangladesh Standards & Testing Institution (BSTI) is a national institution discharging the responsibility of regularly setting and ensuring and testing the national standard for locally produced and marketed commodities and products. Since 1974 BSTI, as a member of the International Organisation for Standardization (ISO) has been regularly receiving cooperation of ISO in setting national standard and of late is completing the procedure of acceptance of ISO 9000 series standards for Bangladesh standard. In 1996 ISO set Environmental Management Standards in ISO 14000 series for proper conservation of environment. For preservation of our environment, it is inevitable to accept and implement these international standards on national level.

With a view to implementing the above objective, an international seminar, as title stated above, will be held at the initiative of BSTI & ISO Geneva on 2-3 April, 1998 at the BSTI Conference Room. There will be series of lectures and provision for learning, about information on knowledge and science in vogue and acquired in present day world on standard setting, control, ensuring, awareness about environment and standard and maintenance of qualitative standard of products/commodities at the seminar. The seminar/workshop will play a strengthening role also in achieving the excellence of present day technological development, technic and standard. Persons intending to participate in the seminar are requested to contact Standards Section, BSTI (Phone No. 608324) for registration of name on first come first served basis by 12-03-98.

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Prof Dr Golam Mowla
Director-General