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JS endorses changes to JMBA law

By Staff Correspondent
The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority (JMBA) Ordinance, 1998 amidst walkout by Opposition members who termed the bill faulty. Opposition members belonging to BNP and Jatiya Party also suggested for the President's approval to the bill, calling it a "money bill".
With the passage of the bill, the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority (JMBA) Ordinance, 1998 was amended entrusting JMBA with the responsibility of construction of bridges having a length of 1500 metres or more, and approach roads (toll roads) to be constructed either by government or private financing, and setting up of two police stations at both ends of the bridge and maintenance of such bridges.
BNP lawmakers, led by MK Anwar, staged the walkout moments before the House passed the bill unanimously with ruling Awami League members voting for it. The JP MPs, despite their opposition to the bill piloted by their party colleague and Communication Ministers Anwar Hossain, abstained.
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Oxy starts test production in Jalalabad

By Iqbal Siddiquee and Sharier Khan

US company Occidental began test production in the Jalalabad gas field yesterday, sources said.
If all goes well, Occidental might be able to start supplying 100 million cubic feet of gas per day (mmcf) to the national grid from late December, the sources said. This would be the first time that gas would come from an Occidental effort.
Different gas fields under various subsidiaries of Petrobangla are currently producing around 800 mmcf of gas. The gas is largely used for electricity and fertiliser production and there is a projected shortfall of around 200 mmcf against demand.
When Occidental would start supplying gas, it is likely that Petrobangla would have to reduce its own production to purchase Jalalabad gas although there is an unmet demand. "It would be so because gas consumption infrastructure is inadequate," said a source.
The purpose of the gas testing is to perforate the wells in the gas zones and produce a small quantity of gas to test the ability of the wells to deliver gas, field manager of Occidental in Sylhet Gonzalo A Ruiz told the Divisional Commissioner of Sylhet in a letter.
During the experimental production, gas will be burnt under controlled conditions and fire and smoke will be visible from the locations of the wells but it will be confined to a limited area called "flare pit".
The field manager said all precautions have been taken to ensure a safe operation and complete the testing in the shortest possible time.
Occidental is facing a "common" problem in installing the pipeline to connect the Jalalabad gas field with the national gas grid at Kailashitla. Sources said the US company was facing problems in acquiring private

lands to construct the pipeline. "But we hope Occidental would be able to acquire necessary land within its deadline," said a source adding that such problems of land acquisition were common in Bangladesh.
Occidental will be supplying the Jalalabad gas from four wells. Yesterday, it started testing from one of the four. Gradually, all the wells will be tested.
Each of the wells would initially supply 25 mmcf of gas through the 24-km pipeline to the national grid. Later, the production will be increased to 200 mmcf. It is expected that the Jalalabad Gas field would remain active for 15 years.
Work on the Gas Processing Plant at Alurtal, four kilometres off Sylhet town, is now nearing completion.
Official sources in Sylhet said Occidental is preparing to drill a fifth well in Jalalabad.
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Holzman meets Khaleda again

US Ambassador in Dhaka John C Holzman had over an hour's parley with Leader of the Opposition Begum Khaleda Zia at her 29 Minto Road residence yesterday evening, reports UNB.
Holzman exchanged views, along with other diplomats and mission representatives of different countries and organisations, with Begum Khaleda Zia at the same venue on Tuesday.
Country's political situation — opposition movement in particular — figured high in the topics at that meeting. But it was not known what transpired between the two yesterday.
"Nothing for the press," the American envoy said parrying queries from newsmen while emerging from the meeting.
Also, BNP didn't hold any press briefing on Holzman's meeting with the party chairperson, who is currently leading an opposition alliance movement, demanding midterm polls.
Party lawmakers Dr Moyeen Khan and Morshed Khan were present during the meeting.

Degree exams from today

GAZIPUR, Nov 18: Degree Pass and Certificate Course examinations under the National University begin tomorrow, reports UNB.
A total 1,90,041 candidates, including 3,619 Certificate Course examinees, will take part in this year's examinations to be held in 569 centres and 13 sub-centres, according to official sources.
Of the 1,86,422 degree examinees, the highest 89,953 will sit for BA examination, followed by 50,266 for BSc, 29,988 for B Com, 16,193 for BEd and 22 for B Music.
In Dhaka city, some 19,157 candidates will appear in the examinations at 20 centres.
The division-wise number of candidates: Dhaka — 34,228, Chittagong — 45,253, Rajshahi — 58,533, Khulna — 20,181, Barisal — 7,125 and Sylhet — 4,967.
This year, 19 new centres have been set up while 34 colleges were blacklisted, official sources said.

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Jail killing case 8 of 23 accused to be produced in court today

By Staff Correspondent

Eight of the 23 chargesheeted accused in the Jail Killing Case will be produced before the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court today.
The court will be housed in the same building in front of Dhaka Central Jail from where the verdict of Bangabandhu Murder Case was delivered, reports our court correspondent.
Four national leaders — Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmed, Mansur Ali and AHM Kamruzzaman — were killed in Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.
Of the chargesheeted 23, the eight are detained at Dhaka Central Jail, two — Khandokar Mustaque Ahmed and Mahabubul Alam Cahshi — are dead and the rest eleven are absconding.
The eight are: Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Faruqur Rahman, Lt Col (relieved) Sultan Sahrier Rashid Khan, Major (ret'd) Bazul Huda, Taheruddin Thakur, Major (ret'd) Khairuzaman, Shah Maazem Hossain, KM Obaidur Rahman and Nurul Islam Manjur. They will be produced before the court as today is the date for their appearance.
Of the eight, Faruqur Rahman, Sahrier Rashid and Bazul Huda have been sentenced to death by firing squad in public in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.
The three were sent to the condemn cell in the jail after pronouncement of the judgment in Bangabandhu Murder Case on November 8.
The Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Habibur Rahman will sit in the bench as the case is not ready for trial at this moment due to procedural matter. Ultimately, this case will be transferred to the Court of Session's Judge, Dhaka when it is ready for trial, our correspondent added.

Sonali in UK opts to become banking subsidiary

Sonali Bank, the country's largest nationalised commercial bank, will close all its six UK branches, to start afresh as a banking subsidiary by June next year.
"We'll close down our branches in UK towards making a new start as a banking subsidiary, not as a financial company," Sonali Bank Chairman Dr Farashuddin, since designated as Governor of Bangladesh Bank, told UNB yesterday.
Unhappy with the performance of Sonali Bank branches in UK, the Bank of England was pressing for closing down those branches and turning the Bank's operation there as a financial company.
The banking watchdog in UK also advised the Sonali Bank to take steps to recover its overdue loans and reduce manpower in UK.
The Sonali Bank authorities, however, tried to persuade the UK authorities to maintain its status in UK at least as a subsidiary company, if not as a full-fledged bank.
Dr Farashuddin was among the three-member delegation that rushed to London late last month to negotiate with the UK's banking authorities and to settle the Sonali Bank's future in England.
Sonali Bank will begin its business in UK again on a "smaller scale," said Dr Farashuddin.
The outstanding loans of the Bank's UK branches stood at about 3 million pound sterling (equivalent to Tk 24 crore). Of this, 2.5 million pound are "classified" with two borrowers, according to Sonali Bank sources.
All these outstanding loans have been transferred to the Sonali Bank's central account in absence of any collateral against the loans in England, Dr Farashuddin said.

Rajuk's search for foreign capital Modern tourist facilities including 5-Star hotel planned

By Staff Correspondent

Rajuk is seeking foreign investment in a multi-million-taka complex, World Trade Centre, on the southern side of Sonargaon Hotel in the city that is now an open sewerage.
Rajuk sources said the 14-acre complex will have five-star hotels, modern conference and shopping centres with an artificial lake in the middle. Rajuk has given up three acres of adjacent land for construction of World Trade Centre.
Two Malaysian engineering and construction firms have submitted an initial project proposal with their local representative, Comfort.
In the last week of October, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was shown a model of the probable complex that was based on

Duty-free onion import if necessary: Tofail

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed yesterday said if necessary, the government will make zero tariff on onion import to stabilise the market, reports UNB.
Replying to Hajj Md Selim (AL), he said the government has reduced the import tariff on onion from 30 per cent to 7.5 per cent due to production shortfall in the country and also in neighbouring India.
Tofail said although the government does not import onion or any other perishable items through TCB, it is now doing so alongside private sector considering the present situation.
Referring to the government steps to check price-hike of essentials, he said he had discussed the matter with different trade bodies and measures had been taken for import, adequate stock and steady supply of essentials.
Tofail said unfavourable climate hampered food production in the last season, and pro-

Make Monday's hunger strike a success: BNP

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuyian has sought cooperation from people of all walks of life to make Monday's mass hunger strike a success, reports UNB.
"We have to dislodge the 'terrorist and fascist' government through a united movement," he said while exchanging views with leaders of different professional groups yesterday.
Bhuyian told them that people would apply all means of democratic rights to overthrow the government if it does not give up anti-people and fascist activities.
"Awami League has been hatching a conspiracy to restore one party rule," he added.
He said corruption, irregularities and unrest in the administration have exceeded the record of any time. There is no chain of command in any sector.



Asma Begum is bracing slowly but surely for a painful end to her life at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital. — Star photo

Asma is dying

By Staff Correspondent

Asma Begum, whose only functioning kidney was 'mistakenly' removed during an operation at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) about two months ago, is now in a state of coma at Bangabandhu Medical Hospital (BMH).
During a visit yesterday this correspondent found Asma lying on a dirty bed, gasping for breath, her eyes half open. Her condition deteriorated since Tuesday night, her mother said.
A doctor said, "Asma's condition is not well and she is in death bed."
Asma cannot sit without any support. She cannot speak and recognise people except her mother since late Tuesday night. She shivers and moans in pain when she tries to lift any of her limbs. There are wrinkles all over her body.
Asma could not sleep during the last four nights and could not eat anything yesterday, her mother sitting on the bed beside her said.
Doctors said a medical board was formed yesterday in view of Asma's deteriorating condition. The board termed Asma's condition 'risky' and decided to 'continue treatment'.
Asma lost three kilograms of weight since her admission to the hospital and may continue to lose weight, they said.
Dr Habibur Rahman who is
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Draft law for HR watchdog

By Nurul Kabir

Amidst opposition allegations of gross human rights violation by the government, the ministry of law seems to be almost ready to set up a national level human rights commission in the country.
"Most of the home work has already been done. I will try to move the bill for setting up of the NHRC in any of the next two sessions of parliament," Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khashru told The Daily Star last week.
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced her government's plan to set up a human rights commission in the country's Jatiya Sangsad, while the law minister had made the promise in the UN general assembly last year.
However, a draft bill in this regard has almost been finalised by the Institutional Development of Human Rights in Bangladesh Project (IDHRB). The draft has so far been revised three times over the period of more than a year.
"In the course of revision, we have exchanged views with human rights activists, lawyers, journalists, local NGOs, foreign experts and so on," said K M Haque Kaiser, Project Co-ordinator of the
(A detailed story on page 11)

A glimpse of celestial fireworks

By Special Correspondent

Hundreds of people — from grandchildren to grandparents — converged on the trade fair ground at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar in the early hours of Wednesday to experience the magic of meteors showering on Earth.
A loud cheer from the crowd greeted the first sighting of meteors from the Tempel-Tuttle comet, shrouded in darkness as street lights were switched off by the City Corporation on request from the Bangladesh Astronomical Association.
But two telescopes specially set up were not enough to meet the appetites of the amateur astronomers. A long queue, nonetheless, waited patiently till the crack of dawn, despite a veil of light mist and stray clouds.
When the first meteor descended at 12:30 am, the crowd jumped and cheered in ecstasy. The stargazers counted 26 by 2:40 am.
Four-year-old Ismam Intesham Majid, who had forgotten to sleep to watch the celestial fireworks, waited patiently for his turn at the telescope with his parents.
"It is great," said his mother, Hosne Ara Jolly, a college teacher. His father, Shakoor Majid, an architect, captured on camera the historic moment of his wife and son watching the great event.
When the Leonid meteor shower, as it is popularly called, was theoretically supposed to appear its brightest, between 2:40 am and 4:17 am, clouds barred vision of the east-
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THEATRE IN THE SKY: Hundreds thronged the open square in city's Agargaon to have a glimpse of the heavenly showers. — Star photo

Farmers wait for scarce, costly seeds

By Gobinda Bar

Cultivation of IRR1-Boro and other winter crops is being delayed in Madaripur and Gopalganj districts due to acute crisis and high price of seeds, farmers said.
The farmers can hardly manage to collect seeds as their prices have shot up allegedly because government dealers have sold the seeds in the black market.
They are now seeking loan from banks and local mahajans (money lenders) to buy seeds which has confounded their problem because of delay in getting loans.
While visiting different areas of the two districts, this correspondent found that different varieties of IRR1-Boro seeds were selling at Tk 13 to 18 per kg against the usual price Tk 8 to 10 and wheat at Tk 20 to 23 against Tk 10 to 15.
Asked about the seed crisis, most of the farmers said they either ate or sold those after the flood. "Now we can realise the saying: one dies when some one eats poison but ten die when they eat seeds" a farmer in Tungpara said.
Enamul Haq Biswas of the same village said he mortgaged some of his land and borrowed money from local money lenders to buy seeds.
going to the Tungpara thana agriculture office for the last four-five days, but they are putting me off saying that seeds were not available." "Come tomorrow, they say," he said.
Talking to this correspondent, a number of farmers in Tungpara also alleged that some people who have no land and do not cultivate, have got seeds and fertiliser from the agriculture office. They got fertiliser and seeds because of their 'close relation' with the relief committee members, the farmers alleged. The relief committee formed with local influential people who belong to a political party approve the list of people eligible for getting seeds and fertiliser from the local agriculture office. But the

Report from Gopalganj and Madaripur

He intends to cultivate wheat and IRR1 in six bighas of land. Abdur Rahman of Patgati village expressed frustration whether he would get agriculture loans for cultivating wheat. "Officials of the local bank have been putting me off for the last 15 days. I am now frustrated about loan," Rahman a marginal farmer said.
Aiyub Ali Sheikh of the same village said, "I have been

ANNOUNCEMENT

A public dialogue on "Women and Security", organised by The Daily Star and Centre for Alternatives will be held at IBA auditorium (behind Madhu's Canteen) Dhaka University on Saturday, 21 November, 1998 from 9:30 am-5:00 pm. Leading women activists, academicians, jurists, feminists, writers and many more will participate in the discussion.
ALL ARE INVITED TO ATTEND