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Ekushey Natya Mela begins

By Staff Correspondent
The Ekushey Natya Mela began at the Nat-Mandal auditorium on the Dhaka University campus yesterday evening.
On the first day "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen was staged.
Three more dramas will be staged during the eight-day long mela, organised by the Department of Theatre and Music of the Dhaka University. The dramas are Kamala Ranir Sagar Dighi, Tobatec Sing and Urvhangam.
Bangladesh Shishu Academy also chalked out a three-day programme. The programme, beginning February 19, includes discussion, recitation, cultural function and photo exhibition.
Meanwhile, the Ekushey See Page 12 Col 2

Share granted bail again

By Staff Correspondent
The Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court has granted another one-month bail to each of the five accused of the much-talked share scam of 1996.
It is yet to be decided which of the Metropolitan courts will take up the cases.
All the accused — AKM Shamsuddoha of Dhaka Securities, ASF Rahman, Salman F Rahman and DH Khan of Beximco Pharmaceuticals, and AB Siddiqui Rahman of Shinepukur Holdings — appeared before the court of Shaikh Rejwan Ali yesterday and got bail up to March 14, the next date of hearing. The court is likely to frame charges against the accused on the same day.
Earlier, Mia Mohammad Sharif, the First Additional Sessions Judge of Dhaka, heard the cases partly on January 3-6. The court also directed to shift all the three cases to the newly formed Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court on January 11. On the same day, the court granted bail to all the accused up to February 14.

In 1996, the local share-market had to face a massive set back following the share scam that involved huge financial assets. Shareholders, in general, unnerved by the inci-

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Supplement

A two-page supplement on the 'Centenary Celebration of the Founding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia' on Pages 6 & 7

Prayer Timings

February 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-25	5-29
Zohr	12:15	1:15
Asr	4-10	4-20
Maghrib	5-58	6-02
Esha	7-10	7-20

Source: Islamic Foundation

KAFCO: Dhaka's 'no' to commercial settlement

Bangladesh has refused to accept the commercial settlement proposed by the general contractor of the crisis-ridden Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company (KAFCO) which has incurred a loss of US\$ 120 million for frequent breakdown of its plant, reports UNB.
Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed has expressed the disapproval during a three-day discussion on the past, present and future of the multinational venture at the highest echelon of the stakeholders.
Tofail represented Bangladesh in the meeting while Managing Director of the Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECF) of Japan Kei-ichiro Tango led the other side at the negotiations, which seemed to have ended without any breakthrough in the dispute.
"Acceptance of KAFCO plant has not yet been possible for the present government. It was not

possible for the past government also since it went into production in 1995 for some definite reasons," Tofail said as Tango requested the government to accept the commercial settlement.
The OECF, along with two Japanese companies, Chiyoda and Marubeni, holds 31.29 per cent share of KAFCO while Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation on behalf of the government owns 43.51 per cent of the stake.
Like past BNP government, the present government also insisted upon its endorsing KAFCO, the minister told the meeting. "But," he regretted, "our partners do not consider the consequences of 36 times closure of the plant so far causing loss of US\$ 120 million."
The Industries Minister said the plant was jerrybuilt with low-quality equipment, resulting in numerous technical problems every now and then.

"It will again shut down any time due to technical faults," he argued. "If the plant is accepted as it is, past and future losses due to mechanical and technical problems would emerge as a great concern for a poor country like Bangladesh." But, except Bangladesh, all other parties have already made profit from KAFCO, he noted.
In reply to Tango's request for finalising the issue as soon as possible, the minister said it is very hard on the part of a transparent and accountable government to settle the issue of eight years within one or two months.
Questioning the construction cost of KAFCO, the minister said since 1990 when the KAFCO contract was signed, similar fertilizer factories had been set up in Bangladesh and in other regional countries with much lower costs.
See Page 12 Col 8

Stop activities endangering security of newspapers, newsmen: BSP

By Staff Correspondent
The Bangladesh Sangbadpatri Parishad (BSP) has strongly condemned the attacks on newspapers, journalists, news workers and their vehicles during the 60-hour hartal last week and urged the government, law enforcing agencies, callers of hartal and those resisting it to stop such activities that endanger the security of newspapers and newsmen.
Expressing grave concern over the incidents, the BSP in an emergency meeting on Saturday categorically reminded all sides — the pro-hartal and anti-hartal parties and the government — that such a situation should not be allowed to continue as one cannot discharge professional responsibilities in an atmosphere of insecurity.
The meeting was chaired by Kazi Shahed Ahmed, president of BSP and editor of The Daily Ajker Kagoj.
UNB adds: A press release of BSP said newspapers came under attack again by the pro-hartal and anti-hartal activists during the February 9-11 hartal. See Page 12 Col 4

Political programmes USBBC urges president to intervene

The US-Bangladesh Business Council has sought President's intervention in the current political programmes which they apprehend may retard the pace of country's economic development, reports UNB.
Chairman of the US-Bangladesh Business Council Ambassador Frank G Wisner, who is leading a USBBC delegation, made the proposal during a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday.
Stressing the need for a peaceful political environment as his country is interested in the economic uplift of Bangladesh, Wisner said peace is "precondition to economic development."
US Ambassador in Bangladesh John C Holzman was present in the meeting.
Boyd Montgomery, Executive Vice President of UNOCAL,

Daniel Stover, Vice President of Halliburton, Osman Yousuf of Gulf Resources, David Rees of Citibank, Herbert Davis, USBBC, Cooper Kinney, USBBC, Puwipinder Dhillon, Economic Officer of the US Embassy in Dhaka, and John A Smetanka of American Express Bank attended the meeting, said a communique from the President house.
Also present on the occasion were Rauf Diwan, Managing Director, EMP, M Nurul Islam, of the American Life Insurance Company, Dalip Verma, Emerging Markets Partnership, Mark Rieley, Thelen Reid and Priest, Scott Kicker, AES Haripur PVT and S K Sharif Hassan, Director General, American-Pacific Wing of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Dhaka.
Welcoming Ambassador Wisner and the members of his See Page 12 Col 7

Business leaders meet President today

By Staff Correspondent
A delegation of businessmen led by FBCCI President Abdul Awal Minto will call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban today.
The business leaders will hand over a memorandum to the President seeking his direct intervention in resolving the present political crisis.
They will also urge the President to take initiative for holding a dialogue between the government and opposition political parties to reach a consensus renouncing hartal as a political weapon.
The FBCCI, apex body of the business community, at an emergency meeting on Saturday also decided to hold a grand rally of the businessmen on February 18.
UNB adds: An aide to the President at Bangabhaban confirmed the schedule of the meeting at 10 in the morning. "The businessmen will exchange views with the President," he said.
"Halting hartal and political stability is now a must for the sake of country's economy. We'll seek President's intervention directly," said an FBCCI leader prior to the planned meeting.



Rare lizards victimized!!
Poachers catch this rare species in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Sundarbans and subsequently break the animals' backs to prevent them from escaping. The lizards are then sent to the slaughter-house, where a remedial oil is extracted from their bodies. Quacks claim that the oil is capable of healing all maladies, and many innocent and poor people believe them. The lizards are displayed to attract the gullible crowds. The picture was taken recently at the city's Nayabazar area.
— Star Photo by Anisur Rahman

Govt, Opposition prepare for another bout

By Nazmul Ashraf and Reaz Ahmad
The first two rounds over, the government and the Opposition are preparing for a third round of battle over the municipal elections scheduled for February 23-25.
After the Opposition had turned down offers for dialogue with the Chief Election Commissioner and the ruling Awami League, the conflicting political groups undertook a fresh campaign for and against the crucial local polls, believed to determine the course of national politics in the days to come.
Nevertheless, another attempt for a negotiated solution to the current political crisis is being made. The country's top business leaders have shuttled between the conflicting groups to find out a solution. They put special emphasis on searching for an alternative to hartals.
Leaders of the FBCCI, the apex body of chambers and associations, are due to meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed this morning to seek his intervention in the political conflict.
It has been learnt that both AL and the BNP are willing to respond positively to a presidential move. However, the Jatiya Party of deposed President HM Ershad is reluctant to accept such an arrangement.
"We believe in peace and stability and hence we're ready to respond positively to any move for a negotiated settlement. Let there be an invitation for a President-mediated dialogue and we will definitely accept it," said AL joint secretary Abdul Jalil.
Replying to another question, Jalil, also the member-secretary of AL coordination committee on municipal polls told The Daily Star last night, "that his party would take up fresh programmes to continue pro-election campaign after assessing the performance of 13 teams now visiting different municipalities."
Asked about the issue, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told this newspaper

ATN programme on municipal polls cancelled

By Staff Correspondent
A programme on political debates centring the upcoming municipal polls, scheduled to have been telecast on February 11, was cancelled abruptly due to a last minute intervention by the Ministry of Information.
Sources told The Daily Star that the current affairs programme styled 'Aei Samoy' was scheduled to go on air through ATN Bangla channel at 9 pm on February 11.
ATN repeatedly displayed promotional about the new programme over the last few days but all of a sudden the TV See Page 12 Col 1

Japanese business delegation starts arriving

By Staff Correspondent
Some members of a high powered Japanese business delegation arrived in the city yesterday and the rest of the 49-member team is likely to come today for attending the 10th meeting of the committee for Japan-Bangladesh economic and commercial cooperation, business sources said.
The meeting will be held at Sonargaon Hotel tomorrow. Prior to the meeting, the delegation led by Uzuhiro Uwatako is expected to meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Finance Minister SAMS Kibria.
Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed is scheduled to inaugurate the meeting. State minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury will be present as special guest.
The meeting will have three working sessions which are to be presided over by former FBCCI presidents Salman F Rahman and Yusuf Abdullah Harun and incumbent BGMEA president Mostafa Golam Qudus.
FBCCI president Abdul Awal Minto and Japanese delegation leader Uzuhiro Uwatako will brief newsmen about the outcome of the meeting in the evening.
High government officials, representatives from foreign organisations and embassies and local businessmen will also attend the meeting.

BNP calls hartal in southern Ctg today

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 14: Bangladesh Nationalist Party has called a dawn-hartal in southern Chittagong tomorrow to protest killing of a JCD activist in Banskhal just before the end of the 60-hour long hartal on Thursday.
The victim, Yusuf, was shot dead during a clash between two rival groups in Jaldi village of Banskhal.

Three kidnapped in Rangamati

RANGAMATI, Feb 14: Three persons were kidnapped by 'tribal terrorists' from Kutchchari Bazar of Sadar thana today, reports UNB.
Police said Tribid Chakma, Kanchan Chakma and Kanika Chakma were kidnapped at gun point, allegedly for supporting the CHT peace accord, when they were returning home from the Bazar.
Armed terrorists opposing the peace accord kidnapped at least 10 people from different areas of the district since December last year. Most of them were later set free on payment of huge ransoms, sources said.

10 PCP activists arrested in Khagrachhari

KHAGRACHHARI, Feb 14: Aided by Army, police arrested 10 people from Mohammadpur in Panchhari thana and seized bomb-making materials and lethal weapons from them on Saturday night, reports UNB.
Identified as activists of a Pahari Chhatra Parishad faction (Prasit-Sanjoy) that opposes the CHT peace accord, they were detained in thana hjat.
The arrested are: Buddhi-moni Chakma, 25, Chadrayoti Chakma, 22, Jayanta Bikash Chakma, 30, Ripon Chakma, 29, Rupamkar Chakma, 20, Ranakriti Chakma, 28, Mangalyoti Chakma, 26, Jalaketu Chakma, 24, Arun Chakma, 21 and Riten Chakma, 24.

'Commercial banks do well despite devastating floods'

By Rafiq Hasan
Most of the commercial banks in the country earned 'good profit' and their deposits increased last year despite the prolonged floods affecting about one third of the country, banking sources said.
The impact of the devastating floods was 'not felt much by the banking sector' as export, import, business and loan operation 'picked up immediately after the floods.'
"The banks disbursed new loans, recovered previous instalments regularly and their performances were not disturbed much," said a senior official of Bangladesh Bank (BB).
"The banks also earned 'significant amount as commission from huge import of foodgrains and other commodities immediately after the flood. It helped the banks overcome the situation and generated additional income for them," he said.
The central bank official further said the commercial banks also improved the 'quality of loans' and increased the overall business during the year. "The amount of classified loans was less last year than that in the previous year."
Sixteen out of 21 local commercial banks including three nationalised ones earned a net profit of around Tk 722 crore last year. The figures of the other banks were not available.
According to a preliminary estimate by the BB, the deposit with 39 operating banks in the country rose by 13 per cent last year over the previous year's.
Among the four nationalised Banks, Janata Bank earned the highest amount of profit — Tk 130 crore — Sonali Bank Tk 60.14 crore, Agrani Bank Tk 84 crore while Rupali Bank suffered a loss of about Tk five crore last year.
Out of 13 private commercial banks, National Bank Limited (NBL) topped the list by earning a profit of Tk 87 crore.
The NBL was followed by Islami Bank with a profit of Tk 68 crore. Islami Bank had the first position in earning profit and raising deposit in the three previous years.
The profit figure of the other private banks were: IFIC Tk 73.27 crore, Arab Bangladesh See Page 12 Col 1

I am still in JP, says Mizan Chy

Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury who was relieved of all positions in the Jatiya Party said yesterday any elected government should be allowed to complete its five-year term as per Constitution.
Talking to UNB over phone, Chowdhury said he has been holding parley with senior leaders and MPs of Jatiya Party to hold a conference as soon as possible to democratise and unify the party.
Jatiya Party chairman H M Ershad had relieved Chowdhury of all party positions for issuing statements against the party's current anti-government movement and working against the interest of the organisation.
Replying to a question, he asserted that he is still in Jatiya Party and continue in it. See Page 12 Col 8

UK visa officers go 'faster, firmer'

By Staff Correspondent
Nearly 77 per cent of Bangladeshi applicants were given United Kingdom visas last year, a British High Commission official said yesterday.
Eighty per cent of the settlement visa applicants, 76.99 per cent of visitor's visa seekers and 72.24 per cent of the students got the nod.
"We pursue a policy of being 'fairer, faster and firmer' in dealing with all individual cases. And we never refuse any genuine applicant desirous of entering the UK if he or she has valid reasons and necessary papers."
This was stated by Geoffrey Fairhurst, head of the Immigration Section at the British High Commission in Dhaka while briefing the press about its visa and consular operations.
A total of 17,192 applicants from Bangladesh received various categories of British visa last year.
Of the 11,822 applicants for visitor's visa last year, 9,102 were granted. Out of 4,365 cases of settlement applications, 3,492 were successful. As many as 726 qualified among 1005 students.
Geoffrey Fairhurst said that all intending visitors applying for a UK entry permit usually get their visas on the same day. Only in case of rush weeks or days when there is an overwhelming number of applicants, the processing may require an additional day or so.
All visa applicants first face a 'pre-sift' interview with a consular official who sees if the See Page 12 Col 3

Impeachment is over, but Starr is not finished

WASHINGTON, Feb 14: Impeachment is over, but Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr is not finished. There are presidential friends to be tried, a leaks case to resolve and a momentous decision: whether to indict President Bill Clinton, reports AP.
And when all that is done, Starr will have to tie together in a single report an investigation that has covered everything from Vincent Foster's suicide and the Whitewater land deal to the FBI files matter and, of course, the Monica Lewinsky saga.
It remains a mystery just when the prosecutor will end an investigation that Americans long since have been tired of.

"Is Starr running an investigation that will continue into perpetuity or is there a strategy here for an end-game?" former Iran-Contra prosecutor Craig Gillen asked. "If it's in perpetuity, that's an unacceptable scenario given eroding public confidence."
There are complications for Starr.
He not only is investigating, but also being investigated. A federal judge is trying to determine if his office violated grand jury secrecy laws, and the Justice Department informed him last month it intends to investigate his handling of the Lewinsky case.
"This could turn into a Dunkirk situation with no ships on the horizon to rescue the troops in Starr's office," said Gillen, who helped close out Lawrence Walsh's six-year Iran-Contra criminal probe.
Some of Starr's deputies have begun to think about work elsewhere. Still, his office has vowed to press ahead.
The biggest decision for Starr is whether to indict Clinton for perjury in the Paula Jones case and before Starr's grand jury and for obstruction of justice in the Lewinsky case. The Senate on Friday refused to convict Clinton on charges of perjury and obstruction.
Legal sources say "the prosecutor concluded some time ago he could indict a sitting president. With impeachment

at an end, the question now is whether Starr will seek a grand jury indictment before Clinton leaves office, wait until his term ends or drop the case.
He got some unsolicited advice Friday from the man who led the prosecution of Clinton's case before the Senate and lost. "I think for the good of the country, probably forget it," said House Judiciary Committee chairman Henry Hyde.
First up, however, is the obstruction case against the Clintons' former Whitewater business partner, Susan McDougal, who goes on trial March 8 in Little Rock, Arkansas, for refusing to cooperate with Starr's investigation.
The prosecutor has wanted to know from Mrs McDougal whether the president had a connection to a fraudulent \$300,000 loan that she never repaid. Clinton has testified he knew nothing about the transaction.
Starr also has two prosecutions pending against long-time presidential buddy Webster Hubbell, who has pleaded innocent.
In one case, Hubbell is accused of concealing his and Hillary Rodham Clinton's roles in a fraudulent 1980s Arkansas land development owned by Mrs McDougal's late ex-husband, James McDougal. Mrs Clinton, who worked at an Arkansas law firm with Hubbell, says she doesn't recall

what work she did on the development. Hubbell's father-in-law, retired Little Rock businessman Seth Ward, got \$300,000 from the deal.
Hubbell also faces tax evasion charges on hundreds of thousands of dollars in income, some of it arranged by friends of the president in 1994 when Hubbell was under investigation by Starr's office.
A judge originally dismissed those charges on grounds that Starr exceeded his authority, but a federal appeals court reinstated the case recently.
Lacking the records to make a case against the Clintons concerning their Arkansas business dealing, Starr has tried for See Page 12 Col 8