

The Daily Star

on Friday

Your 20-page weekend paper plus a 4-page supplement

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Hasina resents ODA decline PM celebrates Bangladesh's 25 years at UN

NEW YORK, Sept 16: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said that the current move of various UN agencies to cut down the volume of their assistance would severely affect the developing countries, including Bangladesh, reports BSS.

Sheikh Hasina was speaking at a lunch hosted by Bangladesh Permanent Representative to the UN for senior UN officials here Wednesday.

While suggesting keeping the flow of UN assistance unhindered, the prime minister said that the programmes of the developing countries like Bangladesh for eradication of poverty would be hard-hit if the financing...

Poisonous preservatives!

Government scientists admit the level of adulteration in certain categories of chocolates, dairy products and edible oil could cause disability

By Naimul Haq

Many of the food items in the market contain harmful preservatives and colouring agents which can potentially cause serious health hazards.

Sample tests of food items showed that almost half of those are adulterated and contain harmful pathogens that may cause food poisoning as well.

The tests conducted at the Food Testing Laboratory of the Institute of Public Health (IPH) also showed that on an average, 45 per cent of the food samples tested for quality are adulterated, the worst being dairy products and sweets.

The ministries of health and industries do not have proper mechanism to monitor adulteration of food. The IPH under health ministry and Bangladesh Standard and Testing Institution (BSTI) under industries ministry blame one another for lack of initiative to check this.

Chemical analysis at the IPH laboratory showed that common food items packed in plastic, paper, tin or other sealed containers are adulterated to a great extent. Food items found in open containers were also tested and none of those were found free from 'harmful pathogens', sources concerned said seeking anonymity.

Milk and dairy products were found to be contaminated to an extent beyond imagination. More than 95 per cent of sweets are adulterated. However all of those are not harmful for man. Except those of a few reputed companies, most of the milk packets marketed failed quality tests, said a chemical analyst.

Many of the food items contain harmful preservatives that can even lead to death from...



All that glitters... Jovan, Royal Magnum, Prophecy and what not. The bottles are real, the perfume not. A makeshift perfume shop in the city's Gulistan area. Star photo: Anisur Rahman.

Local polls stakes are high

The decisions could prove crucial for both political camps

By Nurul Kabir

Contending political camps led by ruling Awami League and opposition BNP are busy working out strategies to face each other in the coming months, while leaders on both sides believe that decisions on the upcoming local government elections would largely shape their respective political fate.

The Election Commission is legally obliged to hold mayoral polls to Khulna City Corpora-

tion by December 27 this year, Rajshahi City Corporations by December 30, Chittagong by January 4 next year and Dhaka City Corporation by January 28.

If the EC goes by the convention - holding the polls simultaneously - the deadline for the mayoral elections is December 27. But as things appear, it may not be possible for the EC to hold DCC elections in December

as there are certain cases, relating to delimitation of the newly-created wards of the local body, pending with the High Court.

On the other hand, the deadline for the elections to 463 Upazila bodies is December 28 this year. However, there is a flexibility in the law concerning the latest amendment to the law says that the EC will enjoy the authority to fix fresh

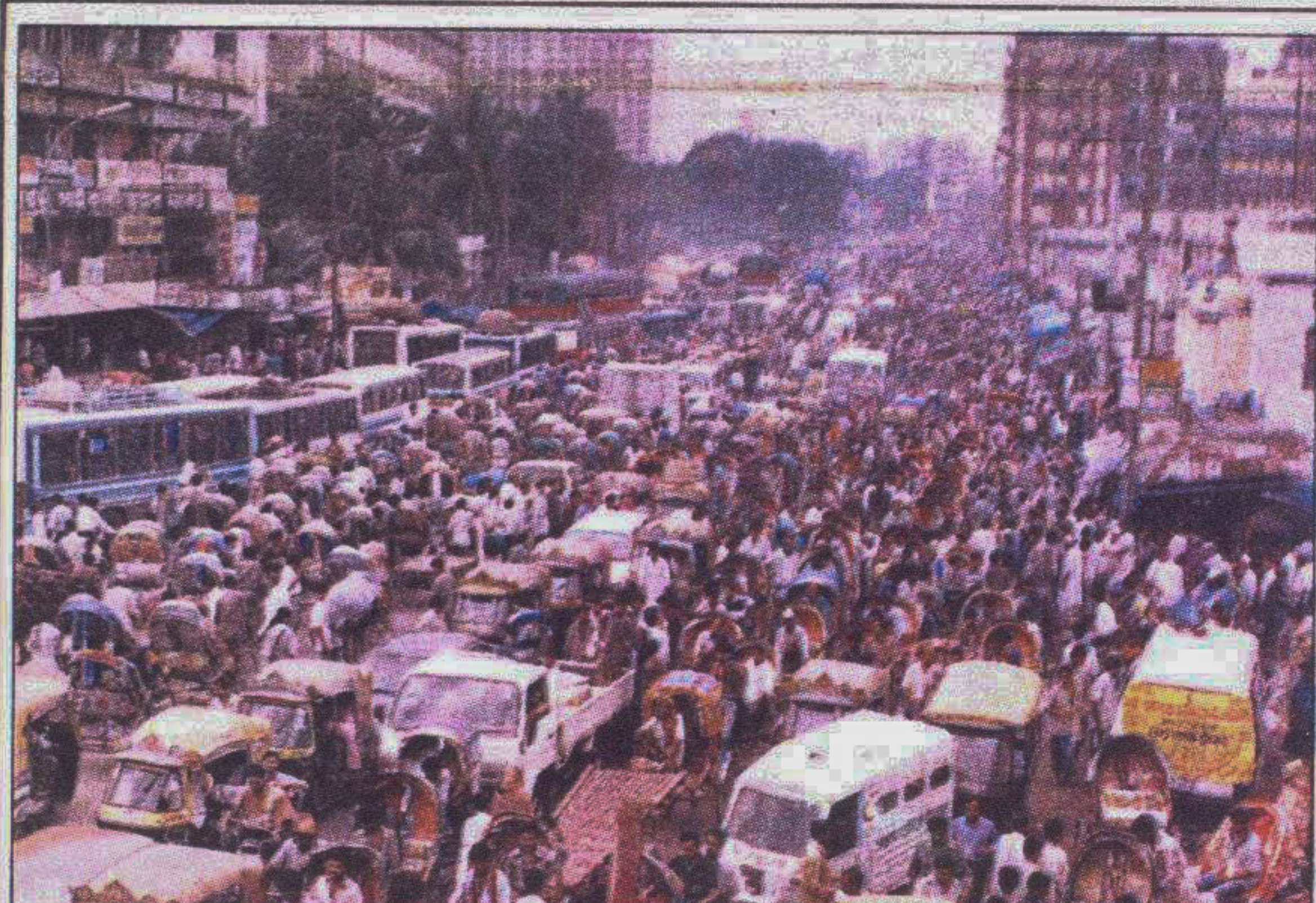
date/dates, if the polls are not held on time due to unavoidable reasons.

Meanwhile, most top ranking AL leaders believe that they would continue to enjoy an upper hand over the agitating BNP as long as elections to important institutions like the upazila parishads and city corporations are still there. But a few, however, think otherwise. The whole process, they think,

would lose credibility if the main opposition stays away.

"The opposition has already fallen in its own trap. The party boycotted the municipal elections in February this year," an influential leader of the governing party told The Daily Star.

"If the party now decides to go to the upcoming local government elections, it has to face music from the party exponents who...



In a mess, again... The opposition's programme over, the capital came alive yesterday with long hours of traffic congestion at the heart. Star photo: Anisur Rahman.

City suffocates in traffic chaos

By Staff Correspondent

Most of the inter-sections in the city were choked with heavy traffic throughout the day yesterday.

The traffic chaos could well be attributed to the mad rush of city dwellers following the three-day opposition hartal and the day being the last day of the week. Thin presence of traffic police on the streets also added to the woes.

The DMP traffic department was taken by surprise at the sheer number of vehicles that took to the city streets yesterday. Some on-duty policemen said many traffic sergeants and policemen were having their day-off following special hartal duties.

The DC Traffic could not be reached for his comments.

Traffic started to pour heavily on to the streets from around 9 in the morning. Rickshaws, cars, buses and auto-rickshaws dashed to their destinations in the most chaotic manner, leaving little space for smooth movement.

Commuters were trapped inside the vehicles for hours together at places like Mirpur Road, Dhanmondi, Elephant Road, Shahbagh, Sonargaon Road, Khilgaon, Bangla Motor, Shantinagar, Kakrail, Airport Road, Mohakhali, Motijheel, Topkaliana, Jatrabari, Kamalapur, witnessing one of the worst traffic nightmares in recent times.

World Bank under fire

Business leaders, academics lashes out at trade liberalisation formula

Star Report

The World Bank came under attack from local economists and businessmen yesterday at a discussion meeting in the city for its suggestions to make faster trade liberalisation.

In a study report presented at the discussion on trade liberalisation, the WB suggested that the opening up process had benefited export and manufacturing sectors. It also favoured a more liberalised trade as its Chief Economist for South Asia John Williamson described Bangladesh's trade liberalisation since 1990 as a 'textbook case of success'.

But local economists and businessmen contradicted the Bank's view and said the fast liberalisation has rather harmed local industries. They suggested a slow progress in this area so that local industries get time to adjust themselves to the external shock.

Speaking at the inaugural session, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria said, "I am concerned at the pace of liberalisation. We do not want to be so fast that the whole process could eclipse the future benefits."

The fast liberalisation had led to sickness of many industries, he noted.

The WB report titled "Bangladesh - trade liberalisation: its pace and impacts" said contrary to public opinion, trade liberalisation in Bangladesh has been good for promoting export and manufacturing growth and it did not lead to an unsustainable trend in the country's balance of trade.

Later, at a press briefing, WB economist Williamson said, "The country would be well advised to seek more trade liberalisation, leading to faster growth. It's not true that Bangladesh liberalised much..."

Petrobangla decries gas study

By Sharier Khan

Petrobangla has "serious reservations" about the US sponsored studies on gas reserve and gas utilisation because these are "not being done on the basis of facts" but will influence many vital decisions in future, like gas export.

There were "stormy discussions" at a meeting earlier this month between officials of Petrobangla and the US Trade Development Agency (USTDA) which has sponsored both the studies, sources concerned said.

Officials of Petrobangla, Energy Ministry and the USTDA met twice to discuss these studies and a US government-backed Energy Action Plan for Bangladesh. The USTDA is also pursuing formulation of an Independent Gas Regulatory Authority (IGRA) as part of the Action Plan.

Petrobangla officials said they will not accept the studies if those are based on "assumptions on gas reserve" and make "its own conclusion on the basis of hard facts".

Data on gas reserve should be obtained from well drilling sites as well as from exploration. If it is done in this manner, Bangladesh's current proven gas reserve of 10.7 trillion cubic feet (tcf) may increase and decrease, depending on the method of analysis, they told the meeting.

They said study "clearly leaned towards the prospects of finding future gas instead of assessing the current reserves. And so, they maintained, it would be appropriate to term the gas reserve study as gas 'resource' study."

The USTDA team said at the meetings that the main purpose of these studies and setting up of an Independent Gas Regulatory Authority was to ensure that Bangladesh export gas and that the US oil companies get a clear direction about marketing of gas.

The gas reserve study, being done by the US Geological Survey as part of its global assessment of potential gas reserve, is expected to be completed by December.

On the other hand, the gas utilisation study, undertaken by James Chemical Company, is scheduled to be completed next month.

Petrobangla has also expressed its reservations about the IGRA saying that the country lacked expert manpower to look into the technicalities in the gas sector and it would not be "realistic" to form a new authority.

Planning based on a resource study will not guarantee bank finance. Banks provide credit against fact-based planning. Therefore, oil companies will not be benefited from these studies in pursuing "real projects" in Bangladesh, Petrobangla officials said.

On setting up the proposed IGRA, the government had serious debates with USTDA. See page 11 Col 6

Dissent

By Staff Correspondent

Thirty-five senior teachers of Dhaka University in a joint statement yesterday said the Academic Council's decision to confer honorary Doctorate degree on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was not taken through "appropriate process".

"We are not unanimous with the decision taken by the university authorities and we strongly protest such a misleading news," the statement said.

The topic to confer the degree was not included in the main...

Ershad in deep credibility crisis

By Rezaul Karim

Former president and Jatiya Party chief HM Ershad seems to be suffering a credibility crisis, as leaders of both ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP find it difficult to trust him as a political ally.

The tainted image of the party leader has created a lot of frustration among the JP activists.

The JP faction led by Ershad is a key partner of the four-party opposition alliance led by BNP.

But many ruling Awami League leaders believe that Ershad would take a U-turn any time to return to Jatiya Sangsad abandoning BNP and its other allies who are boycottists. See Page 11 Col 7

Abul Mansur Ahmad remembered

He was one of the original proponents of a separate cultural identity of people of Bangladesh



In Memoriam... Bangla Academy held a discussion meeting at its seminar room yesterday to mark the birth centenary of prominent journalist and writer Abul Mansur Ahmad. Star photo: Amran Hossain

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a discussion meeting in the city yesterday recalled the contribution of renowned litterateur, journalist and politician late Abul Mansur Ahmad and said that he was one of the guiding spirits of modern Bangladesh.

Sovereign Bangladesh traces much of its separate identity in the field of culture, literature and democratic politics in the works of Abul Mansur Ahmad, they observed.

He was the man who gave the intellectual guideline for creation of a separate cultural identity for the people in this area which has a distinctive cultural heritage, they said. Through his writings, he proved that the inhabitants of the area had a distinctive heritage and...

SENA KALYAN SANGSTHA

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ANNOUNCEMENT

- Due to unavoidable circumstances the opening ceremony of Tongi Commercial Complex was postponed on 13th September 1999. The opening ceremony of Tongi Commercial complex and Exhibition will now be held on 18 September 1999 at 17.00 hours as per earlier programme schedule, as mentioned in the invitation card.
- All invited guests are requested to attend the opening ceremony in time.

Managing Director
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