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VOL. X NO. 4 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA MONDAY JANUARY 17, 2000

3rd Millennium

MAGH 4, 1406 BS

SHAWAL 9, 1420 HIRI

16 PAGES PRICE: TAKA 6.00

Talks with politicians Businessmen yet to devise a common strategy

By M Shamsur Rahman

Businessmen still have not devised a common strategy for next week's conference with political leaders to discuss solutions to the unrest weighing on the country's economy.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) is organising the conference of the business leaders at Osmani Memorial Hall on January 22 and 23.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia along with their senior colleagues are expected to attend the conference.

However, many business leaders said yesterday that they have not received any invitation outlining the programme schedule and the names of the speakers.

The prime minister, FBCCI president Abdul Awal Minto, commerce minister Abdul Jalil and the industries minister Tofail Ahmed are expected to address the conference on the inaugural day.

The Leader of the Opposition will speak at the concluding day. Four top BNP leaders including former finance minister M Saifur Rahman are also expected to attend the session.

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries president Latifur Rahman, International Chamber of Commerce president Mahbubur Rahman, the Federation of International Chamber of Commerce and Industry president Waliur Rahman and BGMEA president Anisur Rahman Sinha will voice their views, among other business leaders.

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Death reference in Bangabandhu murder case not moved

By Staff Correspondent

The death reference in the Bangabandhu murder case could not be moved before the High Court yesterday.

As Special Public Prosecutor Anisul Huq made a move before the HC seeking a date for hearing of the death reference, the Criminal Bench comprising Justice Kazi Ebadul Haq and Justice Sikdar Mokbul Huq advised him to move the case before the Death Reference Bench.

"Try your luck first with the Death Reference Bench, which is now on vacation for next seven days", the Criminal Bench said.

Huq appeared at the court room at about 10:30 am and the matter ended in two minutes.

Fifteen people were given death sentence in the verdict on Bangabandhu murder case. District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka, Kazi Golam Rasul gave the verdict on November 8, 1998 after 149 days' hearing.

The judge ordered that the 15 be executed in an open firing squad. If that is not possible for some reason, they be executed by hanging, the verdict said.

The convicts earlier appealed to the High Court against the verdict.

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Prayer Timings

January 17		
Fajr	5:18	5:25
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Ash	4:00	4:15
Maghrib	5:35	5:40
Esha	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation

Bourse leaders create SAFE

New South Asian outfit targets
cross-border trading

From Toufique Imrose Khalidi

CHITTAGONG, January 16: South Asian Federation of Exchanges (SAFE) was launched here today as leaders of the region's bourses ended a two-day conference setting such long-term objectives as cross-border trading and joint memberships.

Cross-border trading is high on the SAFE agenda, an ambitious target in a region where political relations between neighbours are often marked by bitter animosities.

The immediate objectives... are to enhance communication and to standardise operation procedure. Long-term objectives may include cross border listing and joint membership. Ultimately, the co-operation may lead to unification of a trading system on a common network," said the joint declaration announcing the creation of SAFE.

The new regional outfit also aims technology transfer and exchange of information to try to create a level playing field, which the leaders believe will

help pursue their targets. Chittagong Stock Exchange (CSE) president Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, MP, was elected the first president of SAFE for a two-year term. Future presidents will however have a one-year tenure.

Hiran Mendis, director general of Colombo Stock Exchange, Sri Lanka, was chosen as vice-chairman.

"Regional cooperation among us would enable us to compete with the developed markets in Europe and North America," the CSE president said. "If we work together we can make this South Asian zone a lucrative centre for western and fund managers in bulk."

CSE hosted the conference, the first of its kind in the region, bringing together some of the top functionaries from the region as well as other parts of the world.

They all showered praises on CSE for taking the lead in launching the regional forum

and spoke on the need of such an alliance of the stock exchanges.

"I am impressed with this conference. I look forward to working with them," said Gerrit De Marez, secretary general of Federation of International Stock Exchanges (FIBV).

"The region though strong in human resources are short in financial resources. It is important to raise finances for investment in the region to help in job opportunities. The federation will play a vital role in resource mobilisation. The federation will help in enabling the region to prosper," said Arif Habib, chairman of Karachi Stock Exchange, Pakistan.

"The federation will help us with the transfer of technology, transfer of information and cross border trading. It will benefit all the members of the federation," said P N Kadiaskar, executive director of Pune Stock Exchange, India.

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Four years over, govt yet to upgrade DEOs

Strengthening EC remains a far cry

By Nurul Kabir

The Election Commission still struggles to strengthen itself with adequate field level staff for establishing effective control over the electoral process, thanks to the continued bureaucratic tangle and the government's indifference towards the EC agenda.

The Commission still does not have thana level staff of its own although 487 posts were created in 1995. We need our own people at the field level specially for establishing effective control over the electoral process," acting Chief Election Commissioner Mostaque Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star Saturday.

"But we cannot recruit thana level officials until the post of our district level officer is upgraded. The Commission has been awaiting government ap-

proval in this regard for more than four years now."

In the absence of EC staff, the Assistant Commissioner (Land) discharges the responsibilities of thana level election officers.

The Commission managed to get its proposal to create 487 posts of Thana Election Officers (TEOs) approved by the government of Khaleda Zia in 1995. Her government also agreed to provide two other staff including a stenographer for each of the TEOs and allocated necessary funds for implementing the plan in fiscal 1995-96.

While putting forward the proposal, for TEOs, the EC wanted them to be placed in grade IX of the national pay scale, 'keeping in mind that the post of District Election Officer (DEO) would be upgraded'. The

DEOs were and still are grade IX officers.

After 'getting government approval to have the TEOs in grade IX, the EC wrote to the authorities concerned in May 1995 for upgrading the post of DEO from grade IX to grade VI. The Commission noted that the DEOs would have supervisory authority over the TEOs. "So the status and pay of district level officers must be higher than those of their thana level colleagues," it argued.

In 1995, the pay scale applicable for DEOs (grade-IX) was Tk 2,850-Tk 5,155 while the pay scale for district level officers of other government departments was Tk 4,800-Tk 7,250 at the minimum. The EC, it appears, wanted to place DEOs in grade VI which is equivalent to

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Blueprint for snatching Shikdar, killing 6 influential people

Two letters to professional killer

From Staff Correspondent



Ershad Shikdar

KHULNA, Jan 16: A high official of Khulna Metropolitan Police confirmed today recovery of two letters written by accomplices of Ershad Shikdar inside Khulna District Jail.

The contents of the letters include a blueprint for snatching Shikdar from police and killing six influential people including three top political leaders.

Taka one crore has been earmarked for execution of the blueprint drawn up by Ershad Shikdar himself in consultation with some of his accomplices while appeared before the court in connection with several murder cases recently, the

official said. Nazem Sarder, a convicted accused in a murder case, wrote the letters to 'Jama' Faruque, a top professional killer and second-in-command of Shikdar's gang who is absconding since the arrest of Shikdar.

The letters were recovered while Nazem tried to pass them out through a relative he had met in Khulna Jail on January 14.

He, on behalf of Ershad Shikdar, instructed 'Jama' Faruque to collect Tk one crore from an MP belonging to the ruling party in Dhaka within the quickest possible time so

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US, India race to rebuild ties as Clinton prepares for trip

NEW DELHI, Jan 16: With a visit by US President Bill Clinton in the offing, the United States and India are racing to rebuild political and economic ties and reconcile differences on India's nuclear programme, reports AP.

Visits by members of the US Congress, a top military commander and Cabinet secretaries are setting the pace in efforts to improve ties and put to rest decades of antipathy that existed when India had links to the former Soviet Union.

US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers will be in New Delhi tomorrow, on his way to the G-7 meeting of major industrialised nations in Tokyo.

Days before his visit, India lifted trade barriers, that for nearly five decades, blocked US products in key Indian markets such as textiles, agriculture, and consumer and manufac-

tured goods. Also in the coming week, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott will meet Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh in London to discuss the nuclear issue on which the two countries have some fundamental differences.

US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright is expected in New Delhi to oversee preparations for Clinton's visit to South Asia, expected some time in March.

"The flow of visitors is not accidental," said Kanti Vajpayee, an expert on South Asian security at the Jawaharal Nehru University.

Clinton also plans to go on to Bangladesh, but a stop in Pakistan appeared unlikely after the military coup ousted the elected government in Islamabad in October. While Pakistan is under a military regime, the Indian government

installed last October appears as stable as any in the past decade.

Indian markets are opening and prospects are good for a return to a high growth rate above 7 per cent annually. For Washington, India looks like, "a military and strategic power, whether America likes it or not," Vajpayee said.

Treasury Secretary Summers will be the highest ranking American to visit since India detonated a nuclear device in May 1998.

After meetings with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha and opposition leader Sonia Gandhi, Summers plans to visit the southern city of Bangalore, the center of India's exploding software industry and fertile ground for US investment.

Admiral Dennis Caultier

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CID takes up Nikunja murder case

By Court Correspondent

The Nikunja Bihari Debnath murder case was transferred to the CID yesterday, highly placed sources in police said.

But police could not yet arrest Ohl, the main suspect in the killing.

Four of the five persons arrested in connection with the killing were produced before the CMM's court yesterday after expiry of their three-day remand. The four are Din Islam, Shahinor, Hossain and Alamgir.

Of them, Din Islam was taken on a fresh remand for three days and the three were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Another arrested accused, Shukur Ali, made a judicial statement on Saturday confessing involvement of himself and eight others in the killing. The eight include Din Islam, Shahinor, Hossain and Alamgir. The three others named by Shukur Ali are yet to be arrested, police said but did not disclose their names.

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No dialogue till preconditions met: BNP

By Staff Correspondent

BNP will not hold any dialogue with the ruling Awami League regarding the Opposition's return to parliament if the party's five pre-conditions are not met.

But BNP will reply to the Speaker's third letter sent to the party chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Khaleda Zia on Thursday.

The decisions were taken at Khaleda Zia's meeting with four top party leaders at her Minto Road official residence last night.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Opposition Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain and BNP Vice-chairman M Shamsul Islam attended the meeting.

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3 Biman pilots sacked

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman has retired one DC-10 pilot and fired two others, including its first female commander.

Capt. Ishfaqur Rahman was retired after 25 years of services, while Rahman's wife, Yasmeen, and Capt. Ansar were fired "in public interest," said a Biman source.

Biman notified the pilots of its decision on January 11. The couple have been grounded since August 16, 1996, while Capt. Ansar was grounded in November 1998.

Mosharraf Hossain, minister for civil aviation, told the BBC there were "specific charges" against the pilots but refused to elaborate "in the interest of the state."

Yasmeen Rahman is the sister of Lt. Col. Faruque Rahman, one of 15 former military off-

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Implementation of Tk 15000 cr HPSP Report says 'good progress,' officials see otherwise

By Naimul Haq

There has been little progress in implementation of the Tk 15,000 crore five-year Health and Population Sector Programme (HPSP), launched by the government in July 1998.

The first phase of the programme aimed at providing essential healthcare services to the "most vulnerable" women and children through setting up 1250 community clinics in rural areas.

The clinics were planned for providing reproductive health care, child health care, limited curative care and controlling communicable diseases under an Essential Service Package (ESP).

The clinics involving an expenditure of about Tk 19 crore were to be completed within one year of launching the HPSP, official sources said.

But only one such clinic has been set up at Sreepur in

Gazipur district, they said. They blamed this on lack of funds.

But the just published annual report on HPSP (1998-1999) said "good progress" has been made in its implementation.

Talking to this correspondent, officials involved in implementation of the HPSP preferred to call it a "reform programme" and admitted that they were confused as the concept was not clear to them.

Earlier, healthcare and family planning services in rural areas were provided through separate institutions and agencies but this programme seeks to bring those under a "unified service," they said.

This needs a lot of planning, training and orientation at all levels, they said.

The role of different agencies and departments involved in implementation of the HPSP

are yet to be defined clearly and many of the vital operation plans (OP) are not in place, they said.

Lack of training and decision-making as regards financial and administrative matters and frequent transfer of key officials are seriously hampering the programme.

Most of the Line Directors in charge of implementing the programme expressed utter disappointment regarding training and workshop. Some of those who attended training programmes said the training is not "appropriate."

Another unresolved issue which is greatly hampering work at the grassroots level is putting the services of some health ministry staff under the revenue budget from the development budget. The staff, now under the family planning de-

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Bangladesh duped by rain

From Al-Amin



Incidentally this is for the second consecutive occasion that Bangladesh have failed to make it to the Super Eight due to poor run-rate.

At the Moratuwa Ground, Bangladesh tried their best to beat all the odds. Sky opened up all of a sudden when Bangladesh, chasing a modest Holland total of 137 all out in 46.5 overs, were cruising comfortably with 111 for five in the 24th over.

Their misery was com-

pounded when an unsporting Holland left-arm spinner K Kout hurled down the last two deliveries wide down the leg side. By then rain was coming down heavily, forcing Sri Lankan umpire Philip Mendis to call off the match, with one ball of that eventful over left. According to the tournament by-laws there should be at least 25 overs to be played to decide a match.

Although the deceitful Dutch failed to deny Bangladesh a deserving victory, but by the time the match resumed Bangladesh were robbed of their net run-rate by the wicked Duckworth-Lewis method for a curtailed match.

The match restarted after one hour and Bangladesh were given a revised target of 118 runs in 35 overs, which means

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