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146 import items exempted from suppl duties

The government has exempted 146 import items under HS Code from supplementary duties after introducing a mandatory pre-shipment inspection system, reports UNB.

The government made a provision in the Finance Act 1999 for the duty exemption when the system was introduced, officials said.

However, the duty on 56 items under HS Code increased when the system came into effect on Tuesday.

The items subject to supplementary duties include powdered milk, fruit, spices, coconut oil, sodium chloride, salt, marble, stone, portland cement, gray portland cement, cosmetics and toiletries, hair cosmetics, plastic floor covering and other plastic products, cigarette paper, refrigerators, compressors, telephones, magnetic tapes, colour television and vacuums.

Items subject to the duty waiver include onions, garlic, dates, cement clinker, some chemicals, photography paper, printing ink, plastic sheets, newsprint and paperboards.

Loadshedding due to fault at Ashuganj

A major power failure at Ashuganj led to a countrywide loadshedding of nearly 400 MW yesterday evening, reports UNB.

Power Development Board (PDB) sources said the generation of three 150-MW units and one 37-MW gas turbine unit of Ashuganj station halted as an auxiliary transformer supplying power to the station tripped at about 6:10 pm.

PDB's loadshedding reached the year's highest 384 MW following this major power disruption with the generation of 2,110 MW against the peak hour demand of 2,494 MW yesterday loadshedding in DESA accounted for 185 MW on the day.

Officials termed this loadshedding "unwanted" as PDB generates sufficient power to meet the lean season's demand. Maximum loadshedding in recent days was 45 MW.

PDB's generation target was 2542 MW, but the sudden power failure brought down the generation causing the loadshedding.

PDB produced 2,528 MW of electricity on Tuesday. Private power plants add some 350 MW to PDB's national grid.

Housewife shot dead in N'ganj

NARAYANGANJ, Feb 16: A housewife was shot dead allegedly by her husband while she was asleep at their house at Bangabandhu Road in the town today, reports UNB.

Police recovered the body of Rokhsana Akhter, 32, wife of Sheikh Masudul Islam Khokon, from her bedroom this morning along with Khokon's revolver kept beside her head.

Rokhsana, daughter of Nurul Islam of Pikepara of the town, was the second wife of Khokon. They were married 15 years ago and she left behind her two sons, family sources said.

Khokon's brother, Abdur Razzak, alleged that Rokhsana often went to her parent's house after quarrels with Khokon over gambling and liquor parties arranged by him at

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Our new numbers

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Prayer Timings

February 17

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:30	6:00
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:45
Maghrib	5:58	6:00
Esha	7:30	8:00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Liquor poisoning kills 22 in Feni

50 others fall sick

From Our Correspondent

FENI, Feb. 16: At least 22 people died in the town and some villages in the district last night and today and about 50 fell sick after taking toxic liquor.

The death toll may rise as more sick people are being admitted to Feni Hospital and different clinics in the town. Two of the victims are in critical condition at the Feni Hospital, police and hospital sources said.

A UNB report however put the death toll at 27.

Police said most of the deaths took place at the residences of the victims. Some others died at Feni Hospital.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday the Deputy Commissioner confirmed death of 22 people. Some of the victims died while being taken to hospital from villages and different areas of the town, he said.

The DC said there could be some unreported deaths as well. Bodies of some of the victims were buried by relatives to avoid legal process.

The tragedy may be from consumption of rectified spirit, he said. "Autopsy of some of the bodies have been done. The reasons will be confirmed after viscera examinations in Dhaka," the DC said.

The dead were identified as Sirajul Haq, 35, and Md Lokman, 30, of village West Ukilpara; Korbani Ali, 40, Shahabuddin, 38, Khaju Miah, 50, and Mojibul Haq of village West Rampur; Abul Kalam, 32, and Khokon, 25, of village Syedna. See page 11 col 7

Banks, export-related offices to remain open during weekend

By Staff Correspondent

The government has taken an initiative to keep banks, ports, customs and export-related offices open during the next weekend to make up for the losses caused by the opposition-called three-day shutdown.

All scheduled banks will remain open on Saturday as per a directive given by the Bangladesh Bank yesterday on the basis of Clause 45 of the Bank Company Act 1991, a BB press release said. Banks will remain open till 5 pm and transaction time will be up to 3 pm with a break for half an hour from 1 pm, the press release said.

Ports and customs offices will also function on Friday and Saturday as per an earlier order of the National Board of Revenue (NBR).

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) will keep its Textile Cell open on Saturday to facilitate garment exports.

Some important branches of private commercial banks normally remain open for few hours on Saturday.

The initiative was taken in response to a plea by the business community, particularly the Bangladesh Garments

Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), it said. Meanwhile, BGMEA in a press release yesterday expressed concern over injury of two female garments workers in a cracker blast at Sayedabad in the city during yesterday's

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36-hour hartal ends at 6 pm today

By Staff Correspondent

The countrywide 36-hour long 'blockade hartal' called by the BNP-led four-party alliance ends at 6 pm today.

The hartal began early Tuesday morning protesting enactment of what it said 'black and repressive' Public Safety Act and demanding resignation of the ruling Awami League government.

Hospital, ambulance, medicine shop, newspaper office, restaurant, vehicles carrying journalists, law enforcers, emergency water-gas-electricity supply will remain out of the purview of hartal.

36-hour hartal Bomb blast in city kills pedestrian

By Staff Correspondent

A pedestrian was killed in an explosion during clashes between police and pickets at Raysaheb Bazaar in the capital yesterday, the first day of the 36-hour countrywide hartal.

Police and hospital sources identified the dead as Naresh, 38, a goldsmith at Tantibazaar in Sutrapur area.

Naresh was killed at around 8 p.m. when police battled with pickets who allegedly attacked and ransacked the Awami League office at Raysaheb Bazaar. However, police could not confirm whether the AL office was attacked during the clash.

He was rushed to the Mitford Hospital with bomb injuries in his head and chest, police and witnesses said. Doctors pronounced him dead when he was taken to the hospital. Badal, 14, identified his father's dead body.

At least 35 home-made bombs were blasted and an equal number of tear gas canisters fired.

Elsewhere in the city, 25 people were injured. The opposition alliance led

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Tannery waste kills fish in Buriganga

By Morshed Ali Khan

Schools of fish and at least two Gangetic dolphins died in Buriganga River last week due to "sudden rise in levels of tannery wastes", said villagers at Jhaochar and Waspur.

They said two dead dolphins were found on the river bank near their villages last week. And fishes were still dying whenever the high tide pushed the river water upstream. Villagers were found taking away some fatty parts of the dead dolphins.

The villagers said high tide lasted for quite a long time last week, sending the tannery wastes upstream and killing the mammals and the fishes in an otherwise 'safe' water.

The reason fishes and mammals are dying is that the current of the river is very mild during the dry season. When the

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President okays draft of ordn on PSA

By Nurul Kabir and Mizan Ali

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday approved the draft of an ordinance amending certain provisions of the controversial Public Safety (Special Provision) Act, a highly placed source in the law ministry confirmed last night.

Earlier, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khashru handed over the draft to President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban.

The ordinance would fully accommodate the suggestions that President Shahabuddin Ahmed put forward while assenting to the Bill on February

14 last, a top official told The Daily Star. "Certain other provisions of the law would also be amended through the ordinance."

The ordinance would also bring out changes in another provision of the PSA that provides scope for awarding severe punishment on the basis of written testimony of prosecution witness, without being cross examined before a Tribunal, sources said.

The draft would now go to the Home Ministry. The Home Ministry would then send it, in the form of a summary, to the

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2 cases filed under PSA on second day

By Staff Correspondent

Two separate cases were filed under the Public Safety Act on the second day of its enforcement in the city yesterday.

The first case was registered with the Kafrul Police after a child was kidnapped, while the second was lodged with Mohammadpur Police after someone detonated some home made bombs, creating a panic in the area.

Haji Mohammad Iskander, a businessman and resident of North Kafrul, filed a case that accused five people of kidnapping with Kafrul Police on February 11. He also accused them of kidnapping his property and demanding a Tk 5 lakh ransom.

Kafrul Police said Jahangir Hossain Manik, a grocer, has been arrested in connection with kidnapping and ransom. See page 12 col 8

AL activist shot dead in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 16: An activist of ruling Awami League was shot dead allegedly by Shibir activists at Middle Kanchana village under Satkania thana, 25 miles off the city today, police said.

The victim Abdul Aziz, 35, was shot by a group of armed youths at Kanchana Bazar at 12:45 pm today while he was standing there, police said.

Aziz died on the spot. The shots were fired on him from a gun, police said.

Police said Aziz was killed as a sequel to previous rivalry with the activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir, Awami League blamed Shibir activists for the killing. Aziz was the younger brother of Kanchana union chairman Ataur Rahman. Shibir denied the charge.

Tension prevailed at Satkania after the killing. Additional police force were deployed to avoid fresh violence there.

Eyes of six outlaws gouged out

SHARIATPUR, Feb 16: At least 10 outlawed extremists, including a woman, were arrested by police after a two-hour fire fight at a village on Naria thana this morning, reports BSS.

Police said angry villagers gouged out the eyes of six extremists while they were retreating from the gun battle.

Acting on a tip police cordoned off the house of Suwash Chowdhury, the 35-year-old leader of an outlawed group in Kandapara village, Naria thana. The terrorists fired at police, who returned fire and demanded the terrorists surrender.

Locals said they came to help the police after they heard the sounds of gun shots. They caught six of the terrorists, beat them severely, gouged out their eyes and handed them over to police. Police also arrested four others, including the ringleader and seized three guns, 33 rounds of bullets and two bayonets.

Police took four people into custody. They are Suwash Chowdhury, Bejoy Chowdhury, Kamal Sardar and Shamsun Nahar Bina.

Six terrorists were taken to Shariatpur General Hospital in critical condition. They were identified as Khaleque Sobhan, Rahim, Badal, Kamal and Sudhir Mandal.

Police filed separate cases with Naria police in connection with the shoot at.

3 murder charges

Ershad Shikdar not produced before court on security reason

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Feb 16: Ershad Shikdar was not produced before the Special Court today in connection with framing of charges against him for killing of Siraj, Jahangir and Kahu.

He was not produced in the court for security reason due to hartal called by opposition parties.

The next date for producing Shikdar before the court has not also been fixed, said the Special Court source.

Meanwhile, police seized the private car of Shamsul Islam, one of the most wanted accomplices of Ershad Shikdar.

Shamsul, the alleged smuggler, is being hunted by police on charge of financing the masterminds of a conspiracy to snatch Ershad from police during his appearances in the Special Court.

Police believe that Shamsul is in possession of most of the illegal arms of Ershad Shikdar.

3-day Ekushey programme at DU begins

By DU Correspondent

A three-day programme at 'Amar Ekushey' and International Mother Language Day began on the Dhaka University campus yesterday.

Dhaka University authorities chalked out the programmes. National Professor Kabir Chowdhury inaugurated the programmes at the Mofl Chhatra of the university yesterday afternoon. DU Pro-VC Prof. M Shadat Ali presided over the inaugural function while Vice-Chancellor Prof. AK Azad Chowdhury attended as the chief guest.

The programmes began with the rendering of Ekushey song 'Amar Bhaiyer Rakte Rangano Ekushey February'.

Later, Rathindranath Ray, Ferdous Ara, Subir Nandi, Rezwan Chowdhury Banna, Farida Parveen, Nilufar Yesmin rendered Tagore songs while Prof. Humayun Azad, Prof. Khandakar Ashraf Hossain, Asaduzzaman Noor and Progya Laboni took part in recitation of poems.

A session of tribal people's songs and patriotic songs will be held on the second day today.

Vital posts in energy sector vacant

By Sharier Khan

Though the government in recent years emphasised development of the energy sector, the sector is heavily suffering from leadership crisis as a number of vital posts remained vacant in different organisations under it.

The post of Additional Secretary in Energy Ministry is vacant since last month. Petrobangla, a vital organisation in oil and gas sector, is without a Director Operations for four years.

For several months, there is no Managing Director in BAPEX, country's lone oil and gas exploration unit and in the Rupantarita Prakritik Gas Company Ltd (RPGCL).

Eastern Refinery, the lone oil processing unit in the country, is running without a General Manager. Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC), which imports and supplies oil, does not have a Director Operations. There is no General Manager in Padma Oil Company.

Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO), owned by Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (DESA), is operating without its three-member core management team for over a month now.

The second extension of service of Petrobangla Chairman will expire soon. Similarly, the Director Mines and Minerals is also serving under a two-year extension that will expire soon.

There has been virtually no fresh recruitment of officials in Petrobangla for over a decade though attempts were made several times. The Petroleum Concessions Division (PCD) which is directly involved in monitoring Production Sharing Contract (PSC) has become 'virtually inoperative' due to lack of manpower, sources said.

The Hydrocarbon Cell in the Energy Ministry, which was created two years ago to set policy and guidelines for the gas sector, has not yet taken off due to lack of appointment of executives.

"Considering manpower, the only fully functional entities are gas pipeline and distribution companies, the Power Development Board, DESA and some other smaller organisations in the sector," a source in the ministry said. "Others have

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PSC under second round block bidding

Shell, Unocal not willing to drill exploratory wells

Star Report

Shell and Unocal have expressed their willingness to sign production sharing contracts under the second round block bidding without the obligation to drill exploratory wells.

The contracts would focus on the collection of seismic data in Block 5, Block 7 and Block 10. Maersk, a European oil company, made a similar proposal during its negotiations over Block 19 and Block 20.

Sources said Unocal and Shell said during negotiations, which started last Monday with Ministry and Petrobangla officials, that the government wasn't doing very much to expand the local gas market or allow the oil companies to export gas. They asked Petrobangla to study the growth of local gas

markets over the next five years.

The Energy Secretary expressed the government's intention to finalise and sign the contract for Block 7.

However, Unocal representatives said they had already spent \$300 million US and that it was not willing to invest further until it had a clear picture about Bangladesh's plans to expand domestic markets or open the sector to direct gas exports.

Government officials reminded Unocal that it was negotiating under a bidding process initiated by Petrobangla under certain terms and conditions it accepted before it submitted its proposals. The negotiations were not being held on the basis of Bangladesh's energy market and the negotiators

could not do anything outside the bidding terms.

If Unocal was unwilling to continue, the government would invite the second highest bidder for Block 7 rather than modify its policies, said the government officials.

Unocal officials said they might sign a contract to conduct a seismic surveys in Block 7.

Shell officials voiced a similar interest, which means the government and the two oil giants should reach a consensus on the contracts by the end of the month.

Today, the government will hold a 'match-making' meeting with Irish company Tallow and US of giant Chevron-Teneco to discuss Block 9. Chevron-Teneco will be asked to form a

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Attendance was low at the book fair at the Bangla Academy yesterday, thanks to the hartal.

— Star photo