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Cabinet okays drafts of SEC act, ordn

The cabinet at its regular meeting yesterday discussed the law on Bangladesh Human Rights Commission and decided to place it again before another cabinet meeting later after certain changes, reports BSS.

Drafts of the Securities and Exchange Commission (amendment) Act, 2000 and the Securities and Exchange Commission (amendment) Ordinance, 2000 were also approved in the meeting held with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Besides, members of the Council of Ministers at the meeting expressed their deep shock at the death of State Minister for Housing and Public Works Dr Md Auluddin and adopted a motion of condolence.

Foreign workers banned from entering Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28: The Malaysian government has banned foreign workers from entering the country until further notice, a report said today, according to AP.

The announcement was made by Deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi after he chaired a meeting of the cabinet committee on foreign workers, the national news agency Bernama reported.

He also said that foreign workers could not be employed in 138 categories of skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

The committee also decided that employers found guilty of abusing workers would be prohibited from recruiting foreign workers.

In the past few months, there have been several media reports of employers abusing foreign maids, many from Indonesia.

Businessmen in N'ganj stage protest

NARAYANGANJ, Feb 28: The country's business community staged a big protest in Narayanganj today against the political turmoil that is hitting them hard, reports UNB.

"We urged all politicians to free the country from hartal and terrorism for the sake salvaging an economy battered by such unrest," pleaded the business assembly.

"Give the nation a country free from hartal and terrorism and we, the businessmen, will give the nation a rich economy."

Nine national-level and 20 district-level trade bodies joined the rally, which was organised by the Narayanganj Chamber of Commerce and Industry at Chashara Golchattar with the aim of establishing a hartal-and-terrorism-free Bangladesh.

Eleven professional groups supported the business community's move in the wake of the persistent political standoff between the government and the opposition.

Some 20,000 businessmen carrying festoons, white flags and chanting "No hartal," "no

Our new numbers

19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215
 Phones : 812 4944, 812 4955
 & 812 4966
 Fax: 812 5155

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by AMM Shahabuddin
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Prayer Timings

February 29		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:00	5:30
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:45
Maghrib	6:00	6:05
Esha	7:30	8:00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Unocal's plan for gas pipelines upto Delhi, Andhra

Star Report

US oil company Unocal has revealed its plans to lay an underwater natural gas pipeline from Bangladesh to Andhra Pradesh in India and another surface pipeline to Delhi through Calcutta.

Unocal is operating in blocks 12, 13 and 14 in the country and negotiating for the controversial Western Region Integrated Project (WRIP) that seeks setting up of a gas pipeline up to bordering Kushtia. It is also seeking Block 7 under the Second Round Block Bidding.

Chairman-CEO of Unocal, Roger C Beach, in an interview with The Economic Times

Calcutta last week revealed the plans that involve an investment of over 1.2 billion US dollars.

Roger Beach said natural gas consumption in India is rising rapidly. By the year 2005, the demand is expected to triple and reach 56 billion cubic metres. If the proposed pipelines up to Delhi and Andhra Pradesh materialise, Unocal would play a pivotal role in creating the infrastructure and marketing Bangladesh's gas in India.

The Indian newspaper said, "Unocal's preliminary findings indicate that it is a commercially viable exercise. Power and fertiliser plants in

Delhi and Calcutta regions will need about 1.45 billion cubic feet of natural gas a day while Andhra Pradesh has a secondary market of about 300 million cubic feet a day. Andhra's demand is in addition to the gas produced from ONGC (Indian oil company) fields in the Krishna-Godavari basin."

It quoted Roger Beach as saying that Unocal had identified 140 to 200 billion cubic meters of natural gas in blocks 12, 13 and 14 in Bangladesh. The newspaper said that international experts believe Bangladesh's gas reserves could be three to five times higher

than its' current level of 280 to 340 billion cubic meters.

It said, "While Unocal's Production Sharing Contract (PSC) only entitles it to sell the gas produced from these reserves within Bangladesh, Mr. Beach said the company was exploring the possibility of exporting the gas to India with local authorities. The gas exports will help stimulate economic growth in Bangladesh."

"Mr. Beach added that at a later stage - once the Bangladesh gas pipeline to India is commissioned - even the possibility of transporting gas from Unocal's reserves in Myanmar to India's eastern re-

gion can be explored.

"Currently, the American giant is actively pursuing three ventures in India. The first is the 200 MW liquid hydrocarbon/gas based power plant in Bidadi, Karnataka."

The second is a consortium chosen by Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation to develop a 1800 MW power plant and a 2.5 million tonne LNG facility at Ennore.

"The third venture has, Unocal partnering Maytas and IJM of Malaysia for development of the Gautami 359 MW power project in Kakindada, Andhra Pradesh."

All these projects are facing different types of snags including finding source of fuel, The Economic Times Calcutta said.

Unocal entered the Bangladesh scenario through the WRIP proposals in late 1996. Since then, the company acquired interests of Occidental, an oil company that operated in blocks 12, 13 and 14, and also pursued other projects. Unocal always campaigned directly and indirectly in favour of gas export, saying Bangladesh has gas but no domestic market for expansion of foreign oil companies' activities.

Sylhet blast

Hearing of charge against AL MP Manik today

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Feb 28: Hearing of the charge framed against the ruling party MP, Muhibur Rahman Manik in bomb blast case will be held tomorrow in the District Judge's Court of Sunamganj.

The MP's lawyer sought a new date for hearing which was earlier scheduled for February 22. Later, the District Judge Ik-tedar Ahmed allowed it and fixed February 29 for hearing.

The bomb was exploded at Manik's residence at thana headquarters of Chhatak on March 15 last year. Two young men - Arif Halder, a Jubo League activist and Babul, a cousin of the MP were killed on the spot in the incident. Some others including Abul Lais Chowdhury another cousin of Manik sustained injuries.

Chhatak thana OC lodged a case in this connection. The case was later transferred to the CID. CID Inspector Sirajul Islam submitted charge sheet against Manik.

It was stated in the charge sheet that, Manik instructed for making bombs in his residence and engaged people from Sylhet and other places for the purpose. These were being made for using against his political opponents, the charge sheet said.

Manik is the principal accused in the case. He was arrested by the CID police on May 28. Later, he was granted bail by the District Judge's Court of Sunamganj.

Meer Nasiruddin, Dastagir, 17 others chargesheeted

CHITTAGONG, Feb 28: Police have chargesheeted Chittagong City BNP president Meer Mohammad Nasiruddin and general secretary Dastagir Chowdhury as well as 17 other party leaders and workers for attacking police, damaging public transportation and creating anarchy in the port city last year, reports UNB.

The police submitted the chargesheet to the CMM Court for a later investigation. Two cases lodged with Kotwali thana in February and September last year.

In one case, an assistant sub-inspector accused 18 people after a clash between police and BNP leaders and workers at Rezauddin Bazar on Feb 10, 1999. Sixteen were chargesheeted after the investigation. The accused include BNP leaders Meer Nasiruddin, Dastagir Chowdhury and Abu Sufian.

The second case was filed after a clash between police and BNP leaders and workers at

Rickshaw passenger shot during hartal in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 28: Pickets shot a rickshaw passenger during hartal hours at Oxygen crossing here today, police and witnesses said.

Mohammed Selim, 22, who works at a garment factory received bullet wounds in his hands when pickets fired at the rickshaw he was riding at 10 in the morning, police said.

Selim was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. Pickets were active at some other places of the city, witnesses said. One picket was arrested, from Chandigao area.

A large number of rickshaws plied the city roads during the hartal hours although all other vehicles stayed off the roads and highways.

Railway sources said train service to and from Chittagong went as usual.

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Opposition announces fresh programme

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday announced a two-week long series of demonstration programmes beginning tomorrow to mobilise public support in favour of its demand for immediate resignation of the government and scrapping the Public Safety Act (PSA).

Announcing the fresh programmes at a press briefing of the Central Liaison Committee at 29, Minto Road in the evening, BNP Senior Vice-chairman M Shamsul Islam MP said the opposition will announce tougher action programmes if the government does not accept the demands immediately.

The programmes are: formation of All Party Action Council (APAC) in all district and thana headquarters between March 1 and 6, combined public rally in all thana headquarters from March 6 to 14, joint workers meeting of the alliance at 29, Minto Road on March 7 and

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50 hurt in stray incidents during day-long hartal

By Staff Correspondent

The opposition's country-wide dawn-to-dusk hartal paralysed normal life but passed peacefully with the exception of some stray incidents of violence.

At least 50 people were injured in sporadic incidents of violence and clashes in Dhaka and other parts of the country.

In capital Dhaka, at least 25 people were injured in separate incidents of clashes, attacks and bomb explosions at Farmgate, Bijoy Nagar, Green Road and Motijheel areas. Police arrested six people on charge of exploding bomb in the city during the shutdown.

A procession of Tejgaon thana unit of BNP was allegedly attacked by police and Awami League activists near Holy Cross College at Farmgate at about 10 a.m. leaving about a dozen injured.

Police clubbed the processionists while anti-hartal activists used sticks to beat them. Police also fired tear gas canisters to disperse the pickets. A number of bombs exploded at that time.

Of the injured, thana BNP joint convenor L. Rahman, activists Abdur Razzak Dulal, Roisuddin, Mostafizul Islam Nannu and Baten Sarker were admitted to a private hospital. Condition of L. Rahman was stated to be critical.

Four people were injured when unidentified miscreants hurled a bomb on a Gulistan-Kuril bus at Bijoy Nagar at 5 p.m. The injured were identified as Fazlul Haq, 45, Fazlu Mian, 50, Mafizul Islam, 18, and Harunur Rashid, 36. They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The condition of

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Parents of Mohammed Hira, who was stabbed to death at Mir Hazaribagh area, wailing over his body at DMCH yesterday. — Star photo

Amendments to PSA Omission of criminal action against police proposed

By Mizan Ali

The proposed amendments to the Public Safety Act (PSA) could not be placed before the cabinet meeting yesterday and are likely to be put up at the cabinet meeting next week, sources concerned said.

The amendments are now under scrutiny by the home ministry.

The draft amendments were finalised at a meeting yesterday, chaired by Home Secretary MM Reza and attended by Additional Law & officials of both the ministries.

A highly placed source

seeking anonymity told this correspondent last night, "The draft proposed omission of the provision relating to criminal action against police officials for concealing fact or negligence to duty in investigating a case under the newly enacted PSA". But the provision regarding departmental action has been retained.

In Section 13 (4) of the PSA, a provision has been included so that an accused may be treated also as a witness.

Besides, in Section 14 (3), a

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One stabbed to death in city

By Staff Correspondent

An employee of a shop of iron and steel products was stabbed to death by a group of miscreants near Mir Hazaribagh in Demra yesterday police said.

The victim was identified as Mohammad Hira, 22, son of Rashid Sheikh of 70C, North Mugda. The killing was sequel to previous enmity, relatives of the deceased said.

He was grabbed by the miscreants at Mir Hazaribagh while he was going to his place of work at about 10:00 am and stabbed indiscriminately in the chest. The miscreants were led by one Hazrat.

Hira was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died at about 12:00.

All lawyers for Sharif decide to pull out of case

KARACHI, Feb 28: The remaining lawyers representing deposed Pakistani premier Nawaz Sharif at his trial said today they would withdraw from the case in protest at the judge's performance, reports AFP.

On Sunday the two senior defence lawyers representing Sharif stepped down from the case, criticising a court order which may impose a reporting ban when the former premier gives his evidence.

Four more lawyers said today they would pull out of the trial, leaving Sharif without any counsel in the case.

Sharif, his brother Shahbaz and five other officials have been charged with hijacking, abduction, attempted murder and terrorism in a case based on the night of the country's military coup on October 12.

All the accused have pleaded not guilty but face the death penalty if convicted.

"We have withdrawn from the case because we are helpless to defend our clients in such a situation," said lawyer Iqbal Raddi.

He said three colleagues, Salim Zia, Nihal Hashmi, and Khwaja Naveed, were also

pulling out of the case.

"How can we defend our clients when their right of defence is snatched away?" Radh said.

"In practical terms Sharif would have no counsel but he is not alone. Allah is with him."

Three lawyers representing the other accused remain on the defence team. Prosecutors had asked the anti-terrorism hearing the case to hold sessions in private with Sharif and his co-accused give evidence, claiming their testimony could breach national security.

On Friday Judge Rehamat

Hussain Jafri ruled Sharif could give evidence in public but the judge himself would then decide what could be reported in the press.

Sharif was overthrown in a military coup in October 1999 after he sacked his army chief General Pervez Musharraf.

"Now they are afraid of Sharif because he is going to present a true story. He is going to disclose why he removed General Pervez Musharraf," Radh said.

Chief Public Prosecutor Raja Qureshi said the defence counsels' decision would not delay

the case.

"It is not going to cause any delay and I think it is a matter of eight to ten days of proceedings," Qureshi said.

"The statement of the boycott is a mere pretext to withdraw in the light of overwhelming evidence which has come through prosecution witnesses," he said.

"It is aimed at giving an impression to the world community that the court is biased and they are not being given a fair chance. But contrary to that throughout the proceedings, they have never called it biased."



Asia confidant of squashing Leap Year bugs

HONG KONG, Feb 28: Asia

will be on the alert for any signs of computer chaos as the clock ticks over to Leap Year Day tomorrow, but officials are confident the rollover will be as smooth as the start of the new millennium, reports AFP.

Some experts have warned that computers may fall prey to "Leap bugs" the offspring of the Y2K bug, which despite the dire threats of the doomsday merchants turned out to be little more than a damp squib.

Under the calendar rules, Leap Years occur every four years, except in years which can be divided by 100. The exception to this rule comes once every 400 years -- and 2000 is one of them.

The chairman of the US President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion, John Koskinen, warned at a press conference on Friday that the intricacies in "Leap Year" scheduling could

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BTTB monopoly in V-SAT goes Internet to be cheaper, faster

By Staff Correspondent

The government has ended the monopoly of Bangladesh Telephone and Telegraph Board (BTTB) in V-SAT, paving the way for cheaper and faster Internet use.

A high-level meeting at the Finance Ministry yesterday decided that BTTB would no longer have monopoly control on V-SAT companies and any Internet service provider (ISP) would be free to negotiate with any company for V-SAT facilities on their own terms, sources concerned said.

So long BTTB had contracts with seven V-SAT companies and any ISP had to subscribe at high rates for services from these firms. But now ISPs would get services at much cheaper rates.

The meeting yesterday was chaired by Finance Minister SAMS Kibria and attended by Telecommunications Minister

Mohammad Nasim, Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed, Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil, Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) President Dr Sobhan, Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury of BUET and Chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury.

The meeting decided that Digital Data Network (DDN) services would be started soon for high speed data transmission. BTTB would announce a tariff structure for DDN by March 15.

With the decision taken yesterday, cost for Internet use is now likely to come down to one fifth of the existing cost of Tk two per minute during peak hours and Tk 1.00 to Tk 1.50 during off-peak hours. It will also facilitate a speed of two mega bytes per second (MBPS) instead of the current speed of

64 kilo bytes per second (KBPS). Under the new arrangements, the government will get an annual fee of 3,500 US dollars from a company for hiring of V-SAT and each company will fix their monthly cost by negotiating with the companies concerned.

Earlier, the government used to charge 8,000 dollars per month for V-SAT use and only seven selected companies were allowed to provide V-SAT services.

The BTTB used to keep 1000 dollars and pay 7000 dollars to the foreign companies for providing V-SAT services.

Under the earlier arrangements, any one using V-SAT had to pay 96,000 dollars annually, but now the cost may come down to around 20,000 dollars.

Meanwhile, President of

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Government of New Zealand

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Government of New Zealand has opened an Honorary Consulate in Dhaka, Bangladesh and appointed Mr. Syed Fazle Rabbi as the Honorary Consul of New Zealand in Bangladesh.

Office : BRAC Center, 5th Floor
 75 Mohakhali
 Dhaka-1212
 BANGLADESH

Phone : + (880-2) 9882140-2

Facsimile : + (880-2) 9882143