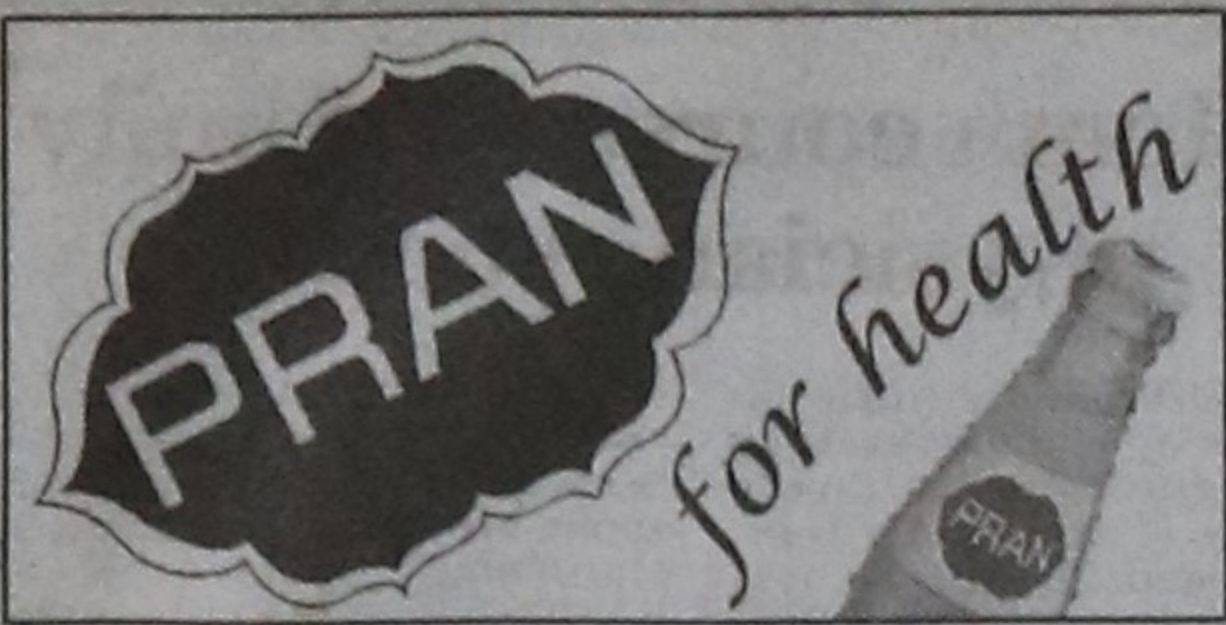


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Special tribunals 6 judges to be appointed next week

By Mizan Ali

Six special tribunals are being set up at the divisional headquarters under the Public Safety Act at a cost of Tk 25 lakh a year, law ministry officials said yesterday.

The government is likely to notify the names of the six judges appointed for the tribunals in the next week. The Supreme Court has approved appointment of six district judges to the tribunals, officials added.

Although the tribunals are expected to start functioning after the Eid, the judges are likely to take charge soon after the gazette notification next week. The district and sessions judge of Munshiganj, Shah Newaz, is to take charge at the special tribunal of Dhaka Division; the district and sessions judge of Barguna, Abdus Samad, at special tribunal of Barisal Division; the chairman of Rajshahi Labour Court, Showkat Hossain, at special tribunal of Sylhet Division; and the district and sessions judge of Narsingdi, Bashirullah, at special tribunal of Chittagong Division.

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Clinton's visit Bilateral trade, immigration will be high on agenda

Bilateral trade, duty-free access of products and immigration will be high on the agenda during talks between US President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury said this yesterday as US and Bangladesh officials are putting things in place for Clinton's March 20 visit.

We expect the US government will make a pragmatic and generous decision on the immigration issue. We also want duty-free access of Bangladesh goods to the US market," he told UNB.

Asked about the issue of exporting the country's natural gas, Chowdhury said this had been well articulated during the prime minister's live TV talk, adding Bangladesh needs a gas reserve that can last next 50 years at the least.

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Our new numbers

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Prayer Timings

March 4		
Fajr	Azan	Jamaat
Zohr	12:45	5:30
Asr	4:30	4:45
Maghrib	6:05	6:08
Esha	7:30	8:00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Reforms to continue to achieve 7pc growth

Finance Ministry report for donors says

By Shahriar Karim

Legal and institutional reforms in economic, administrative, political and judicial fronts are essential but will take time to implement, since democratic governments are complex and difficult.

This was stated in a Finance Ministry report prepared for the next donors' meeting, known as 'Paris Meeting' which will be held in Paris on April 3-4.

The Finance Ministry's economic advisory branch pre-

pared the 16-page report and sent it to the Economic Relation Department and Planning Commission. The department is preparing the government report that will be submitted at the meeting in Paris.

The report discussed the government's macro environment plans for 1999-2000, macro economic management, poverty alleviation programmes, economic analysis, good governance and institutional capacity building.

The report concluded the economy is stabilising, given the figures of growth, savings and investment, inflation, revenue and government expenditure and foreign reserves.

The report stated the 1998 flood had negative impact on the economy.

The Finance Ministry said Bangladesh has become a model for other developing countries in this sector. The ministry provided statistics of the loan

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Action Committee calls hartal in Sylhet tomorrow

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Mar 3: The All-Party Action Committee (Opposition) has called a day-long hartal in the district on March 5, the day scheduled for reception to the Foreign Minister Alhaj Abdus Samad Azad.

The Action Committee, agitating for withdrawal of names of different halls and buildings of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology declared the Foreign Minister 'persona non grata' in the district.

It was announced on December 25 following the death of Madrasah student in BDR firing during an armed clash between the agitators and the people.

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Malaysia plans law to separate religion from politics

KUALA LUMPUR, Mar 3: Malaysia's government is planning a law to separate religion from politics "to ensure the well-being of the people and the country," a minister says, reports AFP.

Rais Yatim, Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, said the opposition Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS) "has mixed up religion with politics to the extent of confusing the people."

Rais, quoted by the official Bernama news agency, said that with the passing of such a law, Muslims and Malays would be reunited after being long separated by different political ideologies.

However the government will seek feedback from the people and if the majority are in favour of such legislation then special provision for this will be made in the country's laws," he said.

No details were given of the proposed legislation.

PAS made major gains among ethnic Malay voters in last November's elections at the expense of Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's United Malays National Organisation (UMNO).

It more than tripled its parliamentary seats to 27 and took

control of the northeastern state of Terengganu.

This week the government severely restricted sales of the PAS newspaper Harakah.

Ministers accuse the party of distorting the teachings of Islam to seek votes, a charge it denies.

Meanwhile, Malaysia's government came under fire today for its clampdown on an opposition newspaper and one critic said reported threats to extend the curbs to the Internet edition made nonsense of national IT policy.

A US journalists' group

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A truck waits to be loaded with the neatly stacked timber on Panchari-Tabalchari road (right) and logs being seasoned before processing at an illegal saw mill, one of the many that mushroomed over couple of years along the Khagrachari-Panchari road.

—Star photo by Shehab Ahmed

Illegal timber trade wiping out forests

Tribals and settlers in CHT never had 'dispute' over 'one thing'

By Shehab Ahmed back from Khagrachhari

There have been occasional troubles between the tribesmen and the settlers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, but they never have a dispute on one issue — illegal extraction of logs and firewood from the forests and trading on those.

Under the cover of a special permit to extract firewood and logs from privately owned woods, a massive trade on tim-

ber is going on, gradually wiping out the classified and non-classified forests.

All along the road from Tabalchari to Panchari, logs are stockpiled, neatly sawed off and sized.

Trucks carry the timber to the traders and saw mills. Just down the Bailey bridge over the Chengi river at Panchari, a huge pile of logs is seen

at a saw mill. No mill was seen there two years ago.

At Panchari Bazaar, several saw mills and furniture shops are busy.

Every day before sun set, empty trucks rush down Khagrachhari road to Panchari Bazaar and return loaded with timbers. Some proceed straight to Chittagong and others to Dhaka without any hindrance.

All along the 25 km of the Khagrachhari-Panchari road, there are a number of saw mills with bamboo fencing on the roadside.

Just at the entrance of Khagrachhari Bazaar, logs, firewood and bamboo are on sale. New furniture shops also dot the Bazaar, besides many more in and around Chengi bridge

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To be or not to be that's the question

DCC-WASA row over road repair

By Morshed Ali Khan

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) is involved in a row with WASA over repair stretch of Mirpur Road which is likely to be used by US President Bill Clinton's entourage during his visit to Bangladesh, sources concerned said.

Officials of Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) of the DCC complained that despite repeated requests, WASA was not completing the drain pipeline work there as per specification. DUTP has to complete repair of the road before the March 20 visit.

The matter was discussed at a recent meeting with WASA officials and they assured that ditches dug for setting up the pipeline would be filled with 'proper compaction', DUTP officials said.

"But the ditches were filled

with ordinary soil instead of sand in violation of the specification. If we complete carpeting of the road in such a situation, the road would be damaged within a few days," said an engineer of DUTP.

The Mirpur Road from Shyamoli to Mazar Road Crossing will be widened and developed under the World bank funded DUTP. Dignitaries accompanying President Clinton are likely to use this road on way to the Jatiya Smriti Soudha at Savar.

"We have written a total of 11 letters with site photographs attached and requested the superintending engineer of WASA's Drainage Circle to immediately address the problem, but nothing has been done as yet," a DUTP official said.

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Safe blood transfusion from mid-March

By Naimul Haq

Patients who need transfusions will receive disease-free blood after the government launches its safe blood transfusion programme at 97 centres of the country this month.

The centres will be inaugurated in early March, though services won't actually start until the middle of the month," said Dr. Nazmus Shahar Sadiq, the UNDP's programme officer for HIV/AIDS. They will allow

us to screen blood for sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV/AIDS, in public specialised hospitals.

In addition to HIV/AIDS, the centres will be able to test blood for malaria and hepatitis. Currently, government hospitals give their patients unscreened blood, 90 per cent of which comes from professional donors.

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Quest for safe homes for brothel children

By Shaikh Nazrul Islam
back from Daulatdia

Children born in brothels should be separated from their mothers and raised in safe homes jointly run by generous people with government support, said speakers at a conference on sex workers here yesterday.

They also stressed the need for providing them facilities for education and training in different skills and accepting them in the society.

Girls born in brothels end up choosing the profession of their mothers and boys do some odd jobs there not only due to the mental attachment to the life style where they are born but also because of social reluctance to accept them, the speakers noted.

More than 400 children born and brought up in Daulatdia brothel gathered at the conference jointly organised by the Shishu Club, Karmajibi Kalyan Sangastha (KRS), Society for Social Service (SSS), Mukti Mahila Sangastha (MMS) and Gana Sahajaya Sangastha (GSS) with assistance from Save the Children, Australia.

The conference chaired by Kazi Keramat Ali MP was attended by, among others, TNO of Daulatdia, Zahiduddin Ahmed, Coordinator of Save the Children Monira Sultana and officials of the NGOs working at the local brothel.

Of the 400 children, 169 are attending a school and 20 are

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Power-struggle in Bihar

Pandemonium in parliament as NDA nominee made CM

PATNA, Mar 3: A Hindu nationalist leader was invited today to form a government in India's Bihar state, but on condition he prove his majority in 10 days to end a looming constitutional crisis, reports AFP.

The invitation sparked an uproar in the federal parliament as national opposition leaders met Indian President K R Narayanan to lodge their protest.

Bihar Governor Vinod Pandey swore in Nitish Kumar as state chief minister after the politician voluntarily resigned his post in Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's cabinet.

State elections last month badly fractured Bihar's 324-seat legislature, with Kumar's al-

liance of parties — headed by Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party — winning 122 seats. The regional RJD picked up 124 seats, making it far and away the largest single party in the new legislature.

But Kumar, a firebrand Bihar politician, was asked to form the state government after he claimed the additional support of 29 other lawmakers, which would still leave him 11 short of a simple majority.

Pandey gave him 10 days to prove his strength in the legislature, but the governor's decision to call Kumar left maverick RJD party leader Laloo Prasad Yadav and his allies fuming.

The RJD has emerged the

single largest party and we have the names of 171 legislators to the governor when we staked our claim," Yadav told reporters in state capital of Patna.

"This move by the government is completely unconstitutional," said Yadav, who became Bihar chief minister in 1991. Yadav handed the post over to his illiterate wife Rabri Devi in 1997 ahead of his arrest in a financial fraud.

The installation of the Hindu nationalist-backed Kumar as chief minister in Bihar sparked protests in parliament with opposition members accusing the centre of "murdering democracy."

RJD and Congress members

See page 11 Col 7



A potter paints his clay items in front of the Shishu Academy in the city yesterday.
— Star photo by Sk Enamul Haq

Kalu murder 'Jamal' Farooq, Nasir Khan remanded again

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Mar 3: 'Jamal' Farooq and Nasir Khan, the two accomplices of Ershad Shikdar have again been placed on police remand for six days in connection with Kalu murder case.

They were first placed on remand for five days on February 26.

Police officials have so far failed to make any breakthrough in the interrogation concerning Shikdar's firearms.

The police officials interrogating Farooq and Nasir are tight-lipped about their failure or success in recovering the firearms. They are yet to say what sort of information Farooq and Nasir have given about the firearms.

Meanwhile, a three-day religious function began today at the 100-year old Hindu temple at Skid Ghat today which was in the illegal possession of Ershad Shikdar.

Shikdar allegedly used this temple for raping women and other criminal activities.

A rally of Hindu community was held this afternoon at the temple where state minister for Disaster Management and Relief Talukder Abdul Khaque was present as chief guest.

Liquor kills 3 at Muktagacha

From Our Correspondent

MYMENSINGH, Mar 3: Three students died after taking spurious liquor at Lakshikota in Muktagacha town today. The victims were identified as Sajjad, 16, an SSC examinee, Humayun, 15, a school student and Kanchan, 17, a college student.

According to police the trio fell unconscious after taking spurious liquor at the house of one Sajjad in Lalukhula area of the town at about 9:00 am.

They were immediately taken to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCCH) where they died soon after admission. The bodies were sent to hospital morgue for autopsy.

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