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Wishing the
BEST for the
3rd Millennium

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Int'l confce on arsenic tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent
A two-day international conference on groundwater arsenic contamination begins here tomorrow (Saturday) under the auspices of the NGOs, the UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh.

The conference, third of its kind in last three years, is aimed at sharing experiences and finding future directions for addressing the emergency declared in 1996.

The two-day conference, to be held at the Dhaka Community Hospital, will bring to light various water contamination issues.

Welcoming a large number of journalists, Dr Quazi Quamruzzaman, Chairman of Dhaka Community Hospital Trustee board said, "Based on random surveys across the country, we estimate that about 8.5 crore people are now drinking arsenic contaminated water. We can solve our problem ourselves with the existing technology."

He also added, "In this regard we need a long term policy on watershed management and so we hope to achieve a national consensus during the conference."

It may be mentioned here that Arsenic continues to pose a serious threat to millions throughout the country, as most of the tube wells in 54 out of 64 districts have already been identified as 'contaminated'.

UNICEF Country Representative Shahida Afzal who led a five-member delegation in the

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AJM workers block traffic on Dhaka-Ctg Rd

From Our Correspondent
NARAYANGANJ, May 11: Several thousands workers of Adamjee Jute Mills today put up a barricade on Dhaka-Chittagong highway demanding payment of their salaries and allowances.

The workers of the Unit-4 came out of the factory under the leadership of former secretary of CBA Ismail Hossain at 7 am and put up a barricade at Simrail Crossing, disrupting traffic for an hour.

Police rushed to the spot and requested the agitating workers to remove the barricade.

As the workers refused to do so, police resorted to lathicharge.

Amid chase and counter-chase, the workers went back to the mills.

They resumed their duties at 11:30 am following an assurance by the CBA leaders Atta Sardar and Abdur Rob of disbursing their salaries.

Our new numbers

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Shadows of shady deals

A bird's eye view of the concrete jungle in Arambagh area. One wonders how many of these buildings have proper approval of Rajuk.

—Star file photo

Rajuk in a quandary

Plans for more than 100 buildings approved without records in the archive

By Morshed Ali Khan

As Rajuk tries to tighten its grip over approval of new building plans, its officials have found out that plans for more than 100 buildings were approved without any record in its archive, sources concerned said.

Top Rajuk officials warned that these plans were initially classified as 2C, meaning these do not merit approval. But with the help of an organised gang within Rajuk, these plans were given "3C" category number and approved.

It was found that 'fake' Land Use Clearance certificates were produced for approval of plans for multi-storyed commercial buildings at busy road intersections and other places.

In several cases, Rajuk challenged the offenders but it was unable to fight the cases as no record could be traced in its office. 'Hundreds' of files kept under the responsibility of clerks at the Authorised Section 'simply vanished', the sources said.

Recently, when Rajuk's Au-

thorised officer took steps to cancel the plan for a 20-storyed building at a busy intersection, he was sued by the developer. The case is now pending and speculations are there that Rajuk might lose the case due to lack of back up files.

There were also instances where the Building Construction Committee approved plans at its meetings held without quorum, in violation of law. At least six top Rajuk officials and a number of employees are now under investigation for alleged involvement in such approval of plans.

The measures include submission of plans through architects registered with Rajuk. The plans must include environmental clearance and should also cover risks of earthquake.

Rajuk has also stopped approving plans for more than six-storyed buildings.

One source said that till recently, more than 70 per cent of Rajuk officials and employees including peons, guards and clerks were involved in "deals related to building plan approval". After imposition of strict measures, a section of employees even brought out procession inside Rajuk office, demanding relaxation of the plan approval procedures and withdrawal of departmental allegations.

Rajuk Chairman M Azizul Haque, when contacted, told The Daily Star that the entire filing system has been computerised.

The irregularities started to

come to light as Rajuk applied stringent measures to ensure proper approval of building plans over the last few months.

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Advani's remark on Kargil war induces Congress walk-out

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, May 11: Indian Home Minister L K Advani's perceived comparison between Indian army's victories in the 1971 war against Pakistan that led to the emergence of Bangladesh and in Kargil conflict last year triggered a heated debate followed by a walkout by the main opposition Congress and Left parties in the Rajya Sabha, upper house of Parliament, yesterday.

Advani, in reply to a call attention motion on internal security problem with reference to Jammu and Kashmir state, said the Indian army's victory in Kargil against Pakistani forces and intruders was different from all other victories in the past.

He said Kargil was a victory for India both on the battlefield as well as on the diplomatic front where India succeeded in winning the opinion of the entire international community in its favour.

Veteran Congress member Karan Singh sharply reacted to Advani's remarks and said it was not correct to 'berate' India's victory in 1971 as it was not only a military triumph but also led to the birth of a new nation.

Advani said there was no question of comparing between

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The prime minister has decided to unilaterally nominate the new chief election commissioner.

However, whether a former bureaucrat or a judge should be given the job is still an open question, ruling party sources said.

The prime minister has already communicated to Khaleda Zia last night that following the opposition leader's refusal to the offer to sit for a dialogue, she will now "proceed constitutionally". The constitution allows the PM to unilaterally nominate the person for CEC and advise the president to give the appointment.

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ADB links loans with reforms, governance

US\$ 1.5 billion to be disbursed over the next three years

By Staff Correspondent

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has outlined a US\$ 1.5 billion lending scheme for Bangladesh over the next three years (2001-2003), but linked actual disbursement with reforms, good governance and implementation capacity.

At a press briefing yesterday, an ADB mission, on a 15-day visit since April 26 in connection with the preparation of the new Country Assistance Plan (CAP) for Bangladesh, disclosed this.

The visiting ADB mission also expressed its concern over Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserve position and slow pace of reforms and asked the government to maintain a sound macroeconomic policy.

The actual disbursement will depend on the progress of reforms in different sectors and the efficiency of project implementation by the government," said Rajat M Nag, Deputy Director of ADB's Programmes Department (West) and a member of the visiting ADB Country Programming Mission.

ADB Resident Representative Suphith Suphiphat, Principal Country Officer and Mission Chief Sudipto Mundle, Programmes Manager Kazu Sakai also spoke on the occa-

sion.

The visiting officials said that accomplishment of the targeted CAP goals would require significant improvement in governance. The ADB has alerted the government about the large and growing fiscal deficit and in particular, low foreign exchange reserve position, they added.

The ADB mission has just concluded discussion with the government, major stakeholders of the civil society and development partners for formulating the CAP.

According to the new plan, Bangladesh will receive US\$ 500 million annual assistance from ADB, US\$ 200 million up from the earlier amount, of which US\$ 350 million will come from ADB's soft loan window -- Asian Development Fund (ADF) -- with 1.5 per cent interest rate. The remaining US\$ 150 million will be from Ordinary Capital Resources (OCR) with an annual interest of 6.5 per cent.

This is the first CAP that has been prepared after the government and ADB signed a Poverty Reduction Agreement on April 3 during ADB President Tadako Chino's visit to

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PM to act as per Constitution

Fresh communications between the govt and the opposition on appointment of CEC

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night said she would now proceed constitutionally to nominate a new Chief Election Commissioner in view of absence of positive response from the Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia to her

proposal for a discussion to reach an understanding to the appointment of new CEC following resignation of Mohammad Abu Hena, reports BSS.

In her reply to Khaleda Zia's letter declining to attend the meeting proposed by her earlier, the Prime Minister said although it was not constitutionally obligatory on her part to discuss the appointment of CEC with Leader of the Opposition, she took the initiative to uphold the spirit of democracy and set a rare example in the political history of the country.

The Prime Minister said that for upholding the norms and spirit of democracy (she took the initiative on the issue of appointing a new CEC although it is her own prerogative under Articles 48(3) and 118(1)

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BNP's legal team goes closed doors

By Staff Correspondent

Legal advisers to the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chief went into a closed door meeting with party

Secretary General Abdul Manan Bhuiyan late last night to prepare a reply to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's second letter to Khaleda Zia concerning

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a retired bureaucrat or to appoint a Supreme Court judge.

Some ruling party leaders believe there is no legal bar for Moshtaque Ahmed Chowdhury to continue as the acting CEC for some time.

"When (Mohammad) Abu Hena went on leave, he gave Chowdhury the charge of chief election commissioner until he joined the office. Now that Abu Hena has resigned, Chowdhury can continue until a new CEC is appointed," said another presidium member.

"In so doing, the party leaders are examining three options: to continue with acting chief election commissioner Moshtaque Ahmed Chowdhury for some time, to give the job to

Parliamentary affairs adviser to the prime minister

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