

# The Daily Star

## on Friday

Your 20-page  
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paper

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VOL. X NO. 153 REGD. NO. DA 781

www.dailystarnews.com

DHAKA FRIDAY, JUNE 23, 2000

ASHAR 9, 1407 BS

RABIUL AWAL 20, 1421 HIJRI

20 PAGES PLUS MAGAZINE PRICE: TAKA 9.00

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## Courting disaster

By Morshed Ali Khan and Raziur Rahman

Negligence to duty by staff of passenger motor launches and sloppy monitoring by the authorities are the main causes behind fatal accidents in the country's waterways.

Officials at the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA), Department of Shipping, vessel owners and even water transport workers admitted that due to slackness in implementation of navigation laws, a sort of 'anarchy' is prevailing in the sector.

Taking advantage of the virtual absence of monitoring, serangs (chief operators), sukanis (assistants) frequently leave control of launches to appren-

tices. These apprentices are admitted for fees to learn navigation.

With hundreds of passengers on board, these 'learners' are allowed to command the vessels even in channels classified as 'dangerous', sources said.

At times, launches are locked in fierce race with the helpless passengers looking on.

Sources concerned strongly suspected that collision between two passenger launches at Badarpur channel in Barisal on June 14 which left at least 20 people dead and 50 missing was caused due to 'over-speed' in the narrow channel and 'amateur'.

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Mismanagement on the part of passenger motor launches and sloppy monitoring by regulatory bodies have made riverine transport system all the more dangerous.

—Star photo

## Into the fifth year

### Triennial council today on ruling party's founding anniversary

By Nazmul Ashraf

Awami League goes for a three-dimensional programme to hold the triennial council of the ruling party today, which also coincides with the anniversary of its founding and return to power.

June 23 means a lot to the 51-year old party because it was founded this day in 1949 in the wake of repression by military rulers of the then Pakistan.

It was also this day four years ago when the AL formed government under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, ending a 21-year stint in opposition since founder of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in August 1975.

The AL chose June 23 to hold its special council since it

stepped into the 52nd year of existence and the fifth year in power. Since coming into being it has held office for roughly eight years.

Its plans to revitalise the organisation with the general election at best a year away makes the council all the more crucial.

Dhaka's Paltan Maidan that witnessed many a historic event is all set to host the council that begins at 3 p.m. Inauguration of the council by party chief and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be followed by adoption of an obituary reference and submission of report by the general secretary, among other things. The councillors will take stock of the performance in the three years since

the last council in the light of the report.

Hasina will launch a membership renewal and collection drive by renewing her own membership. In her winding up speech, the AL chief is expected to issue crucial directives to the councillors and delegates mainly about preparations for the next elections.

Then the council is scheduled to approve the already expired central committee for another term of three years. Today's special council is being held one and a half months after the present central committee expired. The last two-day council was held on May 6-7 in 1997. This is the second council since the AL came back to

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### Suicide or else?

By Staff Correspondent

A 25-year-old man found hanging from the water pipe in the bathroom at Tongi thana in the evening on June 14 was shown arrested in a case in which he was not even an FIR listed accused, sources concerned said yesterday.

The young man was identified as Saiful Islam Solet. He was shown arrested in a theft case on June 14 and placed on a two-day remand.

When contacted, SP of Gazipur Farukh Ahmed Chowdhury said, "Solet was a drug addict as per police information collected so far. He committed suicide hanging himself from the water pipe in the bathroom with his full sleeve shirt while in thana custody on June 14."

Since drug was not available to Solet for over 24 hours since his arrest, 'withdrawal symptom' might be the cause of his suicide, the SP thought.

"There were marks of injury in his heels and a number of spots on the wall which were caused when he was trying to hang himself," the SP said mentioning police findings and autopsy report.

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### Workers of US factories at CEPZ continue agitation

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, June 22: Security has been beefed up at Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) today with deployment of additional police force against the backdrop of staggering labour unrest in some textile factories.

The workers of some towel factories of American company Qualitex Group staged demonstrations in front of their factories today demanding reinstatement of 15 terminated workers, police said.

The workers have been agitating since June 11 protesting termination of 15 workers of US factories.

Fearing an outbreak of violence a large number of police, mostly in riot gear rushed to CEPZ at about 2 pm and started patrolling there to maintain

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## PM renews call for talks

### Hasina wants opposition to come back to parliament

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who celebrates fourth anniversary of her government today, urged the opposition to return to Parliament and sit for dialogue to settle any demands they may have, reports UNB.

"We've created an environment in Parliament so the opposition could come back. If the opposition feels they have some more demands or anything to say, they can sit for discussion."

The Prime Minister, who steps into the fifth year of her rule, gave the call in a address to the nation over the state-owned radio and television last night.

She said, "We've created a unique history of establishing and preserving democracy. We will have to place national interest above all to consolidate democracy and bring about the nation's economic freedom in the 21st century."

She urged all to sacrifice personal and party interests to national cause and present a peaceful developed nation to the future generations.

"I, hereby, appeal to the op-

position to sit for talks as we believe any problem can be solved through dialogue."

The Prime Minister said she had made repeated appeals to her opponents to hold discussions on all national issues in Parliament to consolidate democracy and make the House centre of all activities.

"But they did not respond to my appeal. Rather they abstained from Parliament for a long evading their tasks for the people and Parliament as well," she told the countrymen.

Referring to the opposition's surprise return to the House last Tuesday, she said: "They sat only 45 minutes to retain their memberships an enjoy rights and privileges. This is tantamount to sheer disrespect to the verdict of the people of this country."

Hasina, who steered Awami League back to power on June 23, 1996, noted that since her takeover, she had sought cooperation from all opposition parties having representation in Parliament for consensus on all national issues.

"But I did not receive any

positive response to my call. I telephoned the Leader of the Opposition on many occasions to settle political disputes for the sake of democracy. But I could not reach her by phone. She did not even feel courtesy of making a return call to me."

On the appointment of Chief Election Commissioner, she said although there was no constitutional obligation, she had invited the opposition leader through letter for discussion only to strengthen democracy and set an instance for the future. But, regretted the PM, she didn't get any positive response from the other end.

In her 37-minute speech the Prime Minister apprised the nation of her government's successes achieved in last four years and remaining tasks before her after inheriting a legacy of chaos, corruption and lawlessness in national life.

The Prime Minister said the greatest achievement of Awami League's four-year rule is stability on economic front with growth of GDP over 5 per cent.

"We have attached top priority

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### Biman's F-28 averts accident at ZIA

By Staff Correspondent

A Bangladesh Biman F-28 aircraft averted an accident when its captain had to slam the brakes hard to avoid a bench on the runway of the Zia International Airport yesterday, aviation sources said.

Another F-28 on way to Chittagong yesterday morning had to return to the airport shortly after takeoff following vibration on its engines. It was grounded for repair.

The F-28 aircraft later took off for Sylhet after the bench was removed.

## Saifur sees economy in a debt trap

By Staff Correspondent

Former finance minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday cautioned that the economy was heading towards a 'debt trap' due to government's increasing revenue expenditure and its heavy borrowing from the banking system.

To pay for the bank borrowing, the government will have to borrow more, further affecting the macroeconomic stability and discouraging foreign investment, Saifur said in a critical

appraisal of the proposed budget for fiscal 2000-2001.

Destabilisation of the macroeconomy will affect inflation, interest rate and create pressure on the reserve position, which are key to foreign investment, Saifur, a Standing Committee member of opposition BNP said addressing a press conference at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament.

Saifur said deficit financing

has gone up to three per cent of GDP, which was never above 1.5 per cent earlier. "Deficit financing is costing heavily in terms of interest."

Terming the current financial year's projected 22.5 per cent revenue growth 'over ambitious', Saifur said, "In the last five to 10 years the revenue growth was 10 to 12 per cent at the most but, the finance minister had set a target defying reality."

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## Agri-research ignored

By Reaz Ahmad

Bangladesh has the lowest allocation for agricultural research in the world despite the fact that farm sector contributes almost one-fourth of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Public investment in agricultural research is roughly 20 million US dollars a year; in other word Bangladesh spends only 0.25 per cent of its agricultural GDP on agricultural research, official sources said.

Resource allocation for agricultural research in Bangladesh is lower than India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and some East Asian countries. India spends 0.50 per cent of its agriculture GDP on agricultural research while Pakistan spends 0.58 per cent, Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand spend over one per cent.

Officials said high-income countries spend more than three per cent of their agricultural GDP on research.

The Agriculture Commission

said the money saved by reduction of subsidy in agriculture is diverted to other sectors although the subsidy cut on agricultural input initiated in the '80s was to support different sub-sectors of agriculture.

The commission headed by AM Anisuzzaman, agriculture advisor to the prime minister, strongly advocates for diverting the money to agricultural research.

Bangladesh Agricultural Economists Association also said if Bangladesh is to sustain its tremendous success in agro-production, then more money needs to be channelled to agricultural research.

Agriculture Minister Motia Chowdhury told the Daily Star there has been tremendous expansion of high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice in the country over the last two decades that has doubled the domestic rice production. Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) devel-

oped these varieties having increased yield potential.

Renowned economist Dr Mahabub Hossain said out of a 2.2 per cent yearly growth in rice yield since 1973, about 1.3 per cent was on account of the diffusion of modern rice varieties.

"The total cost savings in rice production is estimated to be 300 million dollars a year, which is a huge benefit compared to the investment made on rice research," said Hossain, a former director-general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) who currently heads the Social Science Division of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI).

According to official statistics, Bangladesh on average spends little over two million dollars a year for rice research, whereas the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) showed that rice contributes to 70 per cent of

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## Colombo Dhaka Direct



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