



## Govt won't allow trade unions at EPZs

Commerce minister tells US Ambassador

By Rafiq Hasan

Despite pressure from the United States and unrest among workers in different factories, the government is determined not to allow trade union activities in the country's export processing zones (EPZ) now.

Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil, at a meeting with US ambassador John C Holzman on Monday, told him that the country was not in a position to allow trade unions in EPZ factories at this moment, sources concerned said.

The government would send a delegation to participate in the hearing in the office of US Trade Representative in Washington on August 15 to explain Bangladesh's position in this regard.

The AFLCIO, the largest platform of trade unions in US, submitted a petition to the office of the Trade Representative in June last year appealing for

**Opposition's demonstration day on July 5**  
By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance will observe a country-wide "Demonstration Day" on July 5 demanding resignation of the government and protesting "politicisation" of administration including Election Commission.

The programme was announced at a meeting of the Central Liaison Committee (CLC) at 29 Minto Road with BNP vice chairman M Shamsul Islam MP in the chair.

As part of the programme, the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote will hold separate rallies and bring out processions.

The meeting strongly protested and condemned appointment of former secretary Shafiq Rahman as Election Commissioner and said the credibility of the EC has been lost through appointment of a "most controversial" person, who joined the *Janata Manch* violating service rule and discipline of the government.

The meeting said the ruling Awami League appointed Chief Election Commissioner unilaterally and later posted a "controversial" person as Election Commissioner to rig future elections.

It said the people of the country will foil all "conspiracies" against democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights of the people. The meeting called upon the countrymen to intensify the current one-point movement.

BNP leader Anwar Zahir, JP leader Kazi Firoz Rashid, Jamaat leaders Shaikh Anas Ali and A T M Azharul Islam and IOJ leader Abdul Latif Nezami attended the meeting.

**Dhaka to gain from gas export to Delhi: Schaffer**

By Staff Correspondent

Former US ambassador to Sri Lanka Teresa C Schaffer suggested yesterday that Dhaka could benefit immensely by exporting gas through pipeline to India.

Dhaka and its neighbourhood require gas which could be exported through pipeline, if Bangladesh desired, she said.

Speaking to newsmen on the fringe of the two-day International Conference on Gas and Development: Learning from Experience at the Sonargaon Hotel, she felt that Bangladesh needs to take the decision on gas export in its own interest.

She said Dhaka could earn a huge foreign exchange by the gas export.

Asked which region in India requires gas, Schaffer said it was Delhi and its neighbourhood. West Bengal has surplus electricity so Delhi is the place that could be prospected, she said.

Schaffer said current estimates showed that Bangladesh consumes one billion cubic feet of gas a day and an additional one billion was surplus, which could be "immediately exported".

Two Latin American experts who were also present narrated how their countries benefited from gas export through pipeline.

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## Budget passed

Opposition motions on cost cuts not moved

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad passed the new budget for fiscal 2000-2001 yesterday amid continued abstention by the mainstream opposition lawmakers.

The House adopted the Appropriation Bill 2000 granting a total of Tk 52,186.79 crore to meet expenditures in the next financial year.

Placed in the House on June 8, the new budget amounts to Tk 42,859 crore with an overall deficit of Tk 18,661 crore.

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria revised on Wednesday some of the tax proposals he made in the original budget while wrapping up a general discussion on it.

A few lawmakers of the pro-government faction of Jatiya Party were present in the House during the passage of the new budget, but understandably they did not oppose the move. Only

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## DCC banks on state support, foreign aid

Hanif unveils fiscal plans for 2000-01

By Staff Correspondent

Mayor Md. Hanif announced yesterday a Tk 546.82 crore budget for Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for fiscal 2000-2001, of which Tk 280 crore is expected in government grant and foreign aid.

No new tax has been proposed, the mayor said in his budgetary speech at the auditorium of Mahanagar Natya Mancha auditorium.

The foreign and government aid have been tagged to facilitate DCC spending in different development projects aided by the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the government, while Tk 115.38 crore

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would be generated from DCC's own fund.

The mayor also presented the revised budget for fiscal 1999-2000 during the presentation, which was also attended by the city ward commissioners.

The proposed budget was unanimously endorsed earlier during a meeting of the ward commissioners on June 26.

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## Public opinion, debate in JS needed on gas export

International conference in the city on gas and development told

By Staff Correspondent

A decision as crucial as the one on gas export through pipelines should not be taken without seeking public opinion and open discussion in the parliament, said Dr. Kamal Hossain at an international conference in the city yesterday.

The nation has to know in the first place the actual gas reserves of the country by conducting a credible study before thinking of exporting gas. US experts may assist such a study, but local geologists must be included for the sake of credibility, he said.

Dr. Kamal Hossain, Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director of the Centre for

Executive Chairman of the Board of Investment M. Mokammel Haque was present

as chief guest, while it was moderated by Director, BCAS, Dr. A. Atiq Rahman, Director, CSIS, and Ambassador Teresa C Schaffer delivered the concluding speech.

Representatives from Petrobangla, BUET, Dhaka University, oil companies and research organisations took part in the conference.

A number of speakers including Bruce McMullen said a little gas export would help the growth of the country's gas market and provide the incentives to the private investors to expand their activities. Some said due to technological advancement in the future, gas

might soon become an obsolete source of energy.

However, some others disagreed saying the current gas reserve of 10 trillion cubic feet (tcf) does not go along with the notion of gas export since it is too little for Bangladesh's own development. Some of them also said gas was unlikely to become an obsolete source of energy for the next 60-70 years.

But most speakers agreed that such decision depends on how much gas Bangladesh has.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya maintained that any study on gas reserves must be made credible from the very beginning. "Why do we have to share

the outcome of a study without knowing how the study was made? What was the parameter?"

He said Bangladesh's economy was benefited by two major foreign exchange earners in the past—the garment sector and the remittance from people working abroad.

"Unfortunately, none of the earnings through these two sectors have backward linkage or integration with our economy."

From these lessons, this time we want to integrate gas with our economy," he added.

Bruce McMullen, focusing on the Latin America's experience

in the energy sector, said regional economic integration typically results in improved political relationship.

He maintained that a lot needs to be done in Bangladesh to develop its energy sector. "Bangladesh has no alternative but to develop its energy sector, and the private sector will have to play a role."

However, it is unlikely that the Bangladesh's energy sector would be privatised very soon.

"There will be reforms and unbundling which might be painful but necessary at this stage," McMullen added.

Sharing Bangladesh's 40

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Inquisitive eyes of tiny tots watch a white parrot yesterday at the Pet Guest Birds Exhibition 2000 at Engineers' Institution, organised by Bangladesh Cage Bird Breeders' Association.

— Star photo

**Dhaka loses out on OIC race**  
Another Moroccan at the helm

KUALA LUMPUR, June 29: The Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on Thursday chose another Moroccan, Abdellah Belkiz, as its next chief despite private protests that it was Asia's turn for the job, reports AFP.

After two days of wrangling, OIC foreign ministers unanimously agreed on Belkiz as next secretary general. Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar told reporters.

Belkiz, a former Moroccan foreign minister, will replace Morocco's Ezzedine Laraki whose term expires December 31.

Bangladesh and Turkey also vied for the post, with Ankara lobbying especially hard in an attempt to burnish its Islamic credentials.

The Bangladeshi candidate was Speaker of its parliament Humayun Rashid Choudhury.

One delegate said the contest eventually boiled down to Morocco or Turkey, with Iran objecting to Turkey for "traditional political reasons" — an apparent reference to its close military ties with Israel.

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**Cargo handling at Ctg, Mongla ports resumes**

CHITTAGONG, June 29: Gang-booking of dock workers at Chittagong port resumed at 4 pm today after the stevedores called off their strike.

The stevedores went on strike at Chittagong port at 4 pm yesterday demanding withdrawal of the bill in the new budget for forcing them to take strike from customs authorities.

Cargo handling activities remained paralysed for 24 hours from 8 pm yesterday, port sources said. However, the cargo handling resumes at 8 pm.

The stevedores called off their strike in line with government's today's decision to keep the bill in abeyance.

The decision taken by Finance Minister and State Minister for Port and Shipping today was communicated to the chairman of Chittagong port through a fax message, port sources said.

The port chairman then held a meeting with the leaders of Bangladesh Master Stevedores Association (BMSA) today to inform the decision of the ministers in this regard.

BMSA chairman Monjur Alam talking to his correspondent said that the strike programme of stevedores was postponed till July 15.

The stevedores said they will go on strike from July 16 if the bill is not scrapped by July 15.

Meanwhile, congestion of vessels at Chittagong port began.

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## CEC sure of opposition participation in all polls

By Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner Md. A Syed strongly believes the BNP-led opposition alliance would eventually participate in all the elections to be conducted by him.

"I can bet on the opposition taking part in all the polls I am going to hold," the CEC told a group of reporters at his office yesterday afternoon.

Reinforced that the opposition demands reconstitution of the Election Commission, the CEC said. "Take it from me that the opposition would change its decision and participate in all the polls, national or local government, the present commission is going to conduct."

Asked whether he expects a positive opposition response to an invitation for a dialogue on

CEC evaded a direct reply.

His ability to "offer fair elections", Syed said, would "inspire confidence in the opposition".

The CEC told newsmen that he had already had "some discussions with certain opposition leaders over telephone". He didn't, however, disclose any name.

"I have sought an appointment with BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia last week," the CEC said, adding that he was yet to receive any communication from her secretary.

Asked whether he expects a government had consulted him before appointing Shafiq Rahman as an election commissioner, the

CEC evaded a direct reply.

"I new that his name was being considered. However, I am very happy that a competent person like him has joined the Commission. He is an asset to the Commission."

On Upazila elections, the CEC said that the Commission has not yet decided on a schedule. "We have to hold the Upazila elections. The schedule would be prepared following discussion with all political parties and other interested groups."

Asked whether he expects a positive opposition response to an invitation for a dialogue on

development, the main focus should be on poverty eradication and ensuring rights to all.

He said the government is committed to human development through increasing social investment particularly in education and health sectors, empowering the poor and the women, strengthening local government bodies, encouraging savings and investment and giving priority to agriculture development.

Dr. Kamal Hossain said abuse of power is the most formidable obstacle to human development. Politicians and bureaucrats must accept the discipline of transparency and accountability to ensure human development and fulfil people's expectation, he said.

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