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Textbook trouble
takes new twist

Beximco trio fail to meet
NCTB deadline

By Mustak Hossain

The textbook crisis has deepened as the three concerns of Beximco Group which were to print 8.12 crore textbooks for primary and secondary levels did not deposit those with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) although the deadline expired yesterday.

The coordination committee of Publishers, Printers and Distributors Association at a press conference on Tuesday offered to complete printing of the textbooks by January 10 next. It claimed that 750 members of the association have the expertise, experience and manpower to complete the job within this time.

Asked about this, Chairman of the NCTB Dr Tapan Kanti Chowdhury said yesterday, "There is not enough time to consider the proposals of the printers association as we have already distributed the job among 105 printers for printing primary

level books."

Asked about distribution of textbooks within the stipulated time, he said, "I cannot say that the situation is satisfactory. But we are trying to distribute books through all channels so that students could get those in time."

He said the NCTB will continue to monitor printing and distribution of textbooks during the ensuing holidays.

Meanwhile, printers and distributors apprehended that if the Beximco concerns fail to distribute books by the first week of January, then the prices of books would rise.

The NCTB in a surprise move had awarded the gigantic task of printing such a large number of textbooks to three concerns of Beximco Group-Suktara, Free Press and Pustaka which allegedly had no trade licence when they participated in the bidding.

See page 11 col 6



For better or for worse
Perpetually dispossessed, a poor fellow doses off along with his loyal partner on the walkway in front of the Holy Family Hospital yesterday.
—Star photo by Anisur Rahman

LTTE declares
month-long
ceasefire

COLOMBO, Dec 21: Tamil Tigers have declared a month-long unilateral cease-fire in the country's 17-year civil war as a 'goodwill measure to facilitate the peace process', a statement on their official Web site said today, reports AP.

The statement said the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran, had issued orders to all combatants of the LTTE army to 'cease hostile military actions against the Sri Lanka armed forces from midnight 24th December 2000 to midnight 24th January 2001'.

The Tamil Tigers typically communicate through their Web site or London offices.

Last week, the LTTE agreed to talks with the government, but wanted a cease-fire first. The government has so far rejected a truce, saying a similar initiative in 1995 failed after rebels failed to honour it.

Media Minister Anura Priyadarshana Yapa said he welcomed the LTTE's gesture, but said the government would respond only after 'considering all the facts'.

The main Tamil opposition party, United Liberation Front, urged the government to respond immediately to the truce offering.

'This is delightful news,' said party vice president Veerasingham Anandasangaree. 'The government must now move fast because every minute delayed will mean loss of life and millions worth of property.'

President Chandrika Kumaratunga and Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar were not in Sri Lanka today, having yet to return from a meeting in Paris, which could delay official response.

The announcement comes after the government rejected earlier this month the rebel

See page 11 col 4

Latifur Rahman
re-elected MCCI
president

One of the country's leading entrepreneurs, Latifur Rahman, has been re-elected president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Dhaka, says a press release.

He was re-elected at the 96th Annual General Meeting of the chamber's new members held in the city yesterday.

Latifur Rahman

Rahman was earlier elected president of MCCI for two successive years 1993 and 1994. He has substantial investments in electronics, pharmaceuticals, soft drinks, tea, news media, jute, insurance and several other sectors.

Tapan Chowdhury, Managing Director of Square Pharmaceuticals Limited, has been elected Vice-President. He is also a leading entrepreneur having investments in pharmaceuticals, textiles, insurance, banks, cosmetics and real estate.

Other members of the Committee are: C.M. Alam, FCA Managing Director of Industrial Promotion and Development Company of Bangladesh Ltd, Jean Alfonsi Chairman & Managing Director of Lever Brothers Bangladesh Ltd, S.A. Azim Chairman of Azim & Son (Pvt) Ltd, Abdul Hafiz Chowdhury, FCA Senior Partner of Rahman Rahman Huq, Maj. Gen. Amlad Khan

See page 11 col 3

C&F firm looted
in Ctg: Night
guard killed

CHITTAGONG, Dec 21: Miscreants looted about Tk 20 thousand from a C and F firm killing its night guard at Enayet Bazar under Kotwali thana here last night, reports BSS.

Miscreants entered the office of Ruma Trading Company on the first floor of the two storied building by breaking open the collapsible gate, police said.

They strangled night guard Ramzan Ali, 60, and decamped with the said money.

Police recovered the body of Ramzan Ali today and sent it to hospital for autopsy. Ramzan had been serving as a night guard in the firm for the last 30 years, sources said.

Govt to launch US\$52m
AIDS project in Jan

Focus on prevention through behavioural change

By Staff Correspondent

A group of Bangladeshi workers who recently returned from Bahrain alleged yesterday that they were not paid as per their contract and were tortured by their employer there.

Addressing a press conference at the DRU office, some of the returnees alleged that Kimia Garments Industries in Bahrain, owned by a Bangladeshi, recruited around 80 workers from Bangladesh in May. As per the contract, each worker was supposed to be paid an amount equivalent to Tk 8000 per month. But it paid only Tk 6,400 after three months' hard work, they alleged.

Each worker had to spend Tk 70,000 for the job, they said.

They also alleged that they were forced to 15/16 hours a day without overtime and any extra benefit, which was violation of the contract.

"I was forced to work from 7 am to 12 pm every day. As per the contract, I was supposed to work eight hours a day," said Al Amin (22) who hails from Chardehunda village in Kishorganj district.

"A gang engaged by the employer, Zakaria Mahmud, used to torture us if we refused to do extra work without benefit," he said.

The management even locked

See page 11 col 3

SAARC People's Forum takes
a swipe at bio-technology

Role of WB, IMF, WTO also criticised

From Naimul Haq

KATHMANDU Dec 21: The four-day second conference of SAARC People's Forum (SPF) ended here today unanimously endorsing a 'Mukti Paani Declaration'.

The declaration contained commitments to defend three fundamental rights - 'right to livelihood, right to movement and personal security and right to self-determination'.

The theme of the conference was 'Security of Livelihood, Security of Movement'.

Participants from five countries raised a strong voice against the way globalisation has led to an 'increase in violence, exploitation and militarisation and destruction of livelihood and communities in South Asia'.

A delegate from Pakistan said, "The issue of trafficking of people is integrally linked with insecurity of livelihood as a result of the globalisation process, which also increased disparity, discrimination against women and girls and marginalised communities."

He went on, "Trafficking is a particularly violent and negative outcome of migration as it results in a violation of human rights."

The SPF expressed apprehension about the proposed US Bill on Trafficking that would 'further victimise' affected women and

See page 11 col 7

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See page 11 col 3

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BJP targets Sonia
over Bofors scam

NEW DELHI, Dec 21: India's ruling Hindu nationalists today said main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi owed the nation an explanation for her ties to an Italian businessman linked to a huge armament scandal, reports AFP.

The Italian-born widow of slain former premier Rajiv Gandhi faced the unexpected attack one day after India said it wanted to have the businessman, Ottavio Quattrocchi, extradited from Malaysia in connection with the 1.3-billion-dollar Bofors scandal in 1986.

The scandal ultimately led to the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi's Congress party in general elections in 1989.

Quattrocchi, who was released on bail shortly after his arrest by Malaysian police on Wednesday, is charged in India with accepting money from the Swedish firm Bofors to clinch a howitzer deal

14 years ago.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party said it had several questions for Sonia Gandhi, who now heads India's main opposition Congress party.

"Why is Sonia Gandhi eloquent in her silence on the issue?" BJP spokesman Vijay Kumar Malhotra said in a statement.

"Can she dispute that Quattrocchi was her gift to this country? Is it not true that Quattrocchi shifted his base to India after Sonia Gandhi came here? Was she not the source of power from where Quattrocchi derived his influence?"

"The nation demands an explanation from her on all these questions," Malhotra said.

Responding to the attack, Sonia Gandhi said she had nothing to hide.

Trader stabbed,
robbed of
Tk 50,000 in city

By Staff Correspondent

Muggers stabbed a trader and took away Tk 50,000 from him near Rajerbagh Police Lines yesterday morning, hospital sources said.

The victim was identified as Samsul Haq, 47, son of Danu Sikder of 90/1, Block-A, Goran in Khilgaon.

The incident took place when Haq, a watch trader, was returning in a rickshaw after withdrawing the money from a local bank at 10-30 pm, hospital sources quoting the witnesses said.

When Haq reached near Rajerbagh police lines, four muggers stopped his rickshaw and asked him to give the money. As Haq refused to comply the gang stabbed him and took away the money.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

In another incident, a gang of miscreants stabbed a Jaker Party activist at Dhalpur in the city yesterday.

The incident took place when Mehedi Hasan, 15, son of Majid, was on his way to the Jaker party office at Demra. When he reached Dhalpur, at about 11-30 am, two miscreants stabbed him.

He was sent to the DMCH.

BNP standing
body meets
today

BNP standing committee will sit today to discuss the party's strategy on post-Eid movement and next general election, reports UNB.

Party chairperson Khaleda Zia summoned the Standing Committee, the highest policy-making body, to a meeting at her Banani Secretariat after iftar, party sources said last night.

Fish farm owner
murdered
in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 21: Jahangir Alam Sheikh, 30, owner of a fish farm at Putimari Beel under Batiaghata thana was murdered at midnight last night.

Police recovered his body early this morning.

The alleged killers are yet to be identified, police said.

Jahangir was called out of his farm by another owner of a neighbouring fish farm on Wednesday evening for settling a dispute over possession of a paddy land at Putimari.

Abul Hossain has been absconding since the murder, police of Batiaghata thana said.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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