

**Publicity plan for 100-day programme**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken up elaborate publicity programmes highlighting its achievements during its 100-day programme that ends on January 26.

A decision in this regard was taken at a review meeting chaired by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on December 30 to discuss implementation of the programme objectives.

As per the decision, the Ministry of Information has formed a cell to publish two brochures, bring out newspaper supplements and produce a documentary about the success stories of the programmes.

The Department of Films and Publications (DFP) has been given

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**Cashier of Molla Salt workers union stabbed, robbed in N'ganj**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A gang of miscreant snatched Tk 86 thousand from the cashier of the workers union of Molla Salt Industry at Dapa, Fatullah in Narayanganj yesterday.

Witnesses said the local miscreants led by Jakir, Mohammad Ali, Tony, Ripon and Shahid attacked cashier Kabir in front of the industry while he was going to a bank to deposit the money at about 12.30 pm. The gang stabbed Kabir and took away the money.

Later, angry workers of the industry laid a siege to Fatullah thana demanding immediate arrest of the culprits.

The workers withdraw the siege following an assurance from the district police officials of arresting the miscreants immediately.

**Fire at PMO complex**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A fire broke out at the International Conference Centre in Prime Minister's Office complex at Tejgaon in the city yesterday.

Fire service sources said the fire originated in a room on the first floor of the conference centre at about 1:45pm following an electric short circuit and gutted at least three air-conditioned rooms. The cause of the fire could not be known immediately.

The fire gutted sofa, carpet and other fittings in the rooms. The extent of damage however could not be known.

Six fire fighter teams rushed to the spot and brought the fire under control.

Political secretary to PM Mosaddek Ali and PM's Private Secretary-2 Lt Commander (Rtd) Saiful Islam rushed to the spot and took spot decision to deal with the situation.

Meanwhile, a probe body has been formed with Additional Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office AMM Reza-e-Rabbi as convenor to investigate the cause of the fire.

**Truck driver abducted in Khagrachhari**

UNB, Khagrachhari

Armed tribal youths kidnapped a truck driver from Baillachhari in Matiranga upazila yesterday.

Police said the miscreants halted a Jaliapara-bound truck from Khagrachhari at about 8.30 am and took away driver Kalu Mia, 40.

Law forcing agencies were continuing efforts to rescue the abducted driver.

Meanwhile, eight out of 10 people abducted earlier were released from Chailatalai area of Laxmichhari upazila Friday night, 11 days after their abduction, on ransom.

They are Shingha Mani Chakma, 35, Titamohan Chakma, 29, Lalita Kumar Chakma, 20, Sunil Kumar Chakma, 18, Tripta Ranjan Chakma, 30, Manindra Chakma, 35, Ganbikash Chakma, 28, and Jatindra Chakma, 30.

Family of the victims said the abductors demanded Tk 2 lakh more for release of the remaining two persons -- Ranjan member said Purna Kumar Chakma.

A case was filed accusing UPDF members after the abduction.

**South Asian leaders voice support for common market**

AFF, Kathmandu

South Asian leaders yesterday stressed the need for a common market and greater cooperation to fend off pressure from an increasingly global economic environment.

They said that unless the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was able to reinforce its grouping with strong trade and business cooperation, its main objective would remain unfulfilled.

"It is time to adopt a visionary goal of establishing the South Asian Economic Union... and to start taking gradual and incremental steps towards that objective," Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba said.

The summiters at a 90-minute "mini version of retreat" in Kathmandu endorsed the Council of Ministers' recommendation for preparing the framework treaty for South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) by this year, BSS reports.

Earlier, the 11th SAARC Summit opened here yesterday morning within a security bullwork of unprecedented scale as summiters sat for the meet.

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga, the outgoing chairperson of SAARC, opened the summit at 11:00am. One-minute silence was observed in memory of King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, one of the founders of the bloc, who was assassinated along with his family members at a royal place massacre.

Deuba, who took over the chairmanship of SAARC yesterday, said a higher "growth trajectory" was imperative for the poverty ridden South Asian region through deeper cooperation.

He said the "least developed countries" of the region should be given special concessions to help them derive enough trade advantages.

So far the level of trade between the grouping of seven nations, which has nearly one-fifth of the world population, is just four percent of the total volume of trade conducted between the countries and the rest of the world.

The seven South Asian nations have already signed an agreement for a South Asian Preferential Trading Agreement

(SAPTA), which is a forerunner to a free market.

But it has not yet been fully implemented.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said that such a regional economic grouping could cushion all the countries in the region from adverse global trade shocks.

"The progression from SAPTA to a free trade area and then to a South Asian economic union has a self evident economic logic," he added.

Bangladesh Premier Khaleda Zia said unless the main export commodities of member countries were given preferential duties and administrative blocks were

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More than one hundred shanties were gutted in a fire at a slum at Shialbari in the city's Pallabi area yesterday. Homeless people sift through rubbles.

**Arsenic-free tap water for a village in N'ganj**

NAIMUL HAQ, back from Narayanganj

Supply of arsenic-free tap water through underground pipeline system in rural area was introduced for the first time in a village in Narayanganj district yesterday.

Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, launched the system at a simple function at Pakundia village under Sonargaon upazila.

From now on, about 2300 people of 419 families in the village will get arsenic-free water, pumped by a 400ft deep tubewell (DTW).

The treated water is stored in a 35,000 litre capacity overhead tank and supplied through a 8000 feet pipeline network reaching every household.

A treatment plant has been added to the system to remove iron from the water up to the safe level of 0.03mg/L.

The computer-operated pump can draw about one lakh litres of water per hour.

The project is jointly sponsored by BRAC, the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) and Unicef while the Rural Development Academy (RDA), Bogra, provided technical assistance.

The RDA designed and developed the low-cost multipurpose DTW which can supply pure water not only to households but also to poultry farmers, livestock rearers and to farmers for irrigation. Installation of a DTW costs Tk 3.25 lakh.

BRAC implemented the Pakundia project at a cost of Tk 18 lakh.

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**Committee on gas use for full transparency**

First meeting held

SHARIEF KHAN

The committee on optimum use of gas at its first meeting at Petrobangla office yesterday adopted a resolution that it would maintain "full transparency" in filing its report to the Prime Minister.

In the wake of the recent debate on gas export, triggered by US oil company Unocal's proposal for pipeline export and subsequent comments by two ministers, the Prime Minister on December 26 formed two committees to look into gas reserve and its use.

The committee on gas use

yesterday reviewed its Terms of Reference (TOR) outlined by the government and decided to review all existing information as well as to invite experts, officials and people involved in the gas sector for exchange of information.

Chaired by former energy secretary Azim Uddin Ahmed, the meeting was participated by Petrobangla Director (Finance) SR Osmani, its Director (Operation) Dr. M Ismail, Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, BUET professors M Tamim and Dr Ijaz Hossain, Chartered Accountant MA

Hafiz, BIDS Research Director Dr KAS Murshid and Prof. Momtajuddin Ahmed.

The committee would look into the following issues:

a. How the government should deal with Unocal as regards Bibiyana gas field, which has a proven reserve of 2.4 trillion cubic feet. Arguing that Bangladesh's gas market is not expanding and so Bibiyana gas field can not be developed soon, Unocal earlier submit

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Pakistan's Yousuf Youhana sweeps one on his way to 101 not out against Bangladesh A yesterday. Pakistan declared their first innings on 312 for three and in reply Bangladesh A were 38 without loss at the end of first day.

**Murder of PBCP cadre: 19 held in Khulna**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police have so far arrested 19 people suspecting their involvement in the murder of Abdul Mannan Biswas, a leader of Dumuria-based unit of Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) at Shahpur Bazar of Dumuria upazilla on Friday night.

Police suspect Mannan was murdered by BCP cadres in a sequel to the killing of Niranjan Kumar at Dolekhola bazar last year.

Niranjan was an armed cadre of Shailen group of Biplobi Communist Party (BCP).

Police further said the slain leader of PBCP was on bail in some murder and criminal cases. He was arrested along with some members of PBCP after surrendering illegal arms for taking advantage of general amnesty as declared by the immediate past Awami League government.

Hundreds of people yesterday demonstrated in front of Dumuria thana protesting arrest of innocent men instead of identified armed cadres of BCP.

**Bangladesh keen to help reconstruct Afghanistan**

M ANWARUL HAQ

Dhaka is keenly monitoring the progress of the UN Trust Fund and waiting for the outcome of the forthcoming conference on reconstruction of Afghanistan to be held in Japan sometime this month.

It may also send a representative to this conference. Bangladesh is ready to commit troops to Kabul for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). A top foreign office source said, "We would move our soldiers to Kabul as soon as the Trust Fund is available."

Dhaka is also keen to participate in the reconstruction process of Afghanistan. The country's political and diplomatic circles strongly feel that Dhaka must extend its helping hand to the people of Afghanistan with whom the country has long cultural and historical links.

Bangladesh sent its ambassador to Uzbekistan and its deputy high commissioner to Pakistan to the oath-taking ceremony of the interim Afghan government to famifist its solidarity with the Afghan people.

Only 24 countries sent representatives to the ceremony through which Hamid Karzai became president of Afghanistan.

Bangladeshi businessmen and NGOs including BRAC are expected to participate in the reconstruction of Kabul.

Meanwhile, it was learnt that the forthcoming confer-

ence in Japan will be crucial as it will primarily review the progress of the UN Trust Fund and the likely steps to be taken for re-building war-ravaged Afghanistan.

Bangladesh agreed to a request by British premier Tony Blair during his visit last Thursday to commit troops to Afghanistan, but said it will monitor the developments of the UN Trust Fund.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for Kabul and its surroundings was created through a UN Security Council resolution on December 20.

While normal peacekeeping is under Article VI of the UN Charter, the Stabilisation Force in Afghanistan has been created under Article VII of the charter.

Chapter VII calls for enforcement action involving high risk exposure and action while Chapter VI deals with routine peacekeeping and is considered a normal 'blue helmet' operation.

Bangladesh is currently the largest UN peacekeeper in the world.

ISAF, popularly known as the Afghanistan Stabilisation Force, was set up by the Security Council following a request by British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw on December 19 that also said the UK was willing to organise and lead the force.

Initially, it was decided that the expenses of the Stabilisation Force will be borne by the participants. It

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**Commerce secretary level talks**

**Delhi offers new date but Dhaka yet to decide**

SHAHRIAR KARIM

India has proposed a new date for commerce secretary level talks with Bangladesh which was postponed last month due to Delhi's unwillingness to attend the meeting.

In a communiqué recently, Indian commerce ministry proposed January 19-20 as a new date for the talks.

However, Dhaka is yet to decide whether it would be possible to hold the talks at that time due to its 'busy schedule', according to highly placed sources.

The Chinese Prime Minister is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on January 11 on a three-day visit. A US congressional team is also due arrive at that time to discuss apparel export from Bangladesh. Moreover, the Pakistani commerce minister is scheduled to come to Dhaka in the third week of this month.

"We have a busy schedule throughout January. We have to sit and see whether we can hold Bangladesh-India commerce secretary level talks at that time. Whatever be the decision, we will take it in a couple of days after overall review of the situation," a highly placed commerce ministry source told The Daily Star yesterday.

Other sources said much will depend on how India reacts after the bilateral talks between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her Indian counterpart Atal Behari

Vajpayee on the sidelines of the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu. The huge trade gap between the two countries was discussed at the meeting, among other issues.

Meantime, the government has taken an initiative to identify bilateral issues that need to have a thorough look. The move is aimed at preparing well for the bilateral meeting with India, sources said.

Earlier, commerce secretary level talks between the two countries, which was scheduled for December 26-27 last year in Dhaka, was postponed at the last moment as the Indian side declined to attend it due to difference of opinion over its agenda.

While Dhaka wanted to focus on the huge trade gap, which is heavily in favour of India, Delhi insisted on focussing on all the bilateral issues and demands lying unresolved for long. Bangladesh also wanted to have a new bilateral trade agreement with wider scope as the existing one expired on October last year.

Officials said Bangladesh expected a 'goodwill gesture' from India on its long standing demand for zero tariff access of 25 categories of its products. However, India insisted on tariff concessions on a reciprocal basis and demanded duty concessions from Bangladesh on 90 items. Delhi even said that it could agree to Dhaka's demands if it allowed similar facility on 10-12 Indian items.