

ALERT!
Access to safe drinking water is now the biggest challenge in Bangladesh. Arsenic aside, drinking water across the country is more or less contaminated by an alarming level of different types of chemicals and minerals-- including uranium, a new study says. Consumption of such contaminated water leads to damage of liver, kidney and poses other serious health hazards.

INSIDE TODAY

- Article** 6
IMF's end game
Column: In My View
Hasnat Abdul Hye
- Asia** 5
Japan: The 'Axis of Evil' during Bush's East Asia visit
Monzurul Haq writes from Tokyo
- Environment** 8
Global water supplies in peril: Proper management is the only answer
Md. Asadullah Khan
- Focus** 9
Is Awami League heading towards another disaster?
A. K. Faezul Huq



No headway in BTTB mobile phone scheme

MUSTAK HOSSAIN
There has been no headway in the much-talked-about mobile phone project of the state-run Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) since the new government took over in October last year. A high official of the BTTB told The Daily Star they were yet to get a go ahead signal with the mobile phone project from the government.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Due to unavoidable circumstances, Star Weekend Magazine has been held over. We regret our readers' inconvenience. However, today's issue of The Daily Star is

Sec 144 in six villages Police, PBCP cadres clash in Rupsha, Terokhada upazilas
STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
At least 20 people, including four policemen, were injured in armed clashes involving police, villagers and PBCP cadres in Rupsha and Terokhada upazilas yesterday. Section of 144 has been promulgated in six villages of the two upazilas for an indefinite period following the clashes. The villages are Mohishaguni, Badal and Durjani Mahal of Rupsha upazila and Mokampur, Lashkarpur and Ajugarha villages of Terokhada upazila.
SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

EC goes slow on date

Pending polls to three city corporations likely by April 14

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Dispelling widespread speculations, the Election Commission yesterday did not draw up the schedule of the long-pending elections to the city corporations in Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi. However, it preferred an April 14 deadline for holding the city polls during a meeting held on the day. "Usually, rough weather begins at that time (April 14). The (city corporation) elections should be held before Pahela Baishakh (the first day of the Bangla calendar year)," EC Secretary M Saiful Islam told the press about the outcome of the nearly two-hour meeting. Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed presided over the meeting, which was attended by all the three election commissioners. Top EC officials were also present at the meeting that discussed various aspects of holding the city polls. Secretary Islam told reporters that the EC would meet again on March 4 to outline the election schedule that may be announced after finalisation of the voter list by March 10. Meeting sources said the polling may take place in the second week of next month, but an announcement of the city polls schedule is unlikely before Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's return on March 7. To a question on the government's preference about the election schedule, the EC secretary said the local government ministry had already given the commission the go-ahead.
SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Catalytic converters must for cars

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
All motor vehicles must have catalytic converters to have registration and fitness certificates, as decided by the government to reduce air pollution. To make it compulsory, the government has also amended the relevant rules as part of its campaign to cut down the level of air pollution, especially in cities. Minister for Environment and Forests Shahjahan Siraj said yesterday at a press conference at the Press Information Department at the Secretariat. The amendment to the Environment Conservation Rules, 1997 took effect from yesterday through a gazette notification. The rules were amended on February 16. The new decision exempts two-stroke auto-rickshaws operating in the capital because the vehicles will be phased out from August. But the three-wheelers operating outside the capital must be fitted with converters, the minister said. The use of catalytic converters by
SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Terrorists make mockery of crime containment drive

55 killed last month, incidents of extortion up

ABUL KALAM AZAD
Alarming rise in murders and other crimes in the city has proved futile the government's efforts to contain terrorism and improve the law and order situation. At least 55 people were murdered in the city last month against 40 in the previous month. Incidents of extortion and mugging also rose during the period. Of these, 21 were shot dead, 11 beaten to death, nine stabbed or hacked to death, seven strangled and one burnt to death. Besides, a six-year-old girl was raped and strangled at East Jurain and a minor boy was killed in a cross-fire in another area. A rickshawpuller succumbed to bomb injuries. The victims include six businessmen, five students, five housewives, two Jubo Dal leaders, one BNP activist, one JCD activist, one police source, one teacher and two drug traders. Police recovered bodies of two infants from dustbins in Khilgaon and Shahidbagh areas. Killings in mob beating, which had increased alarmingly in the city in the recent past, however came down last month when only two such incidents took place. Seven murders each took place in Mohammadpur and Kafrul thana areas; followed by four each in Mirpur, Tejgaon and Lalbagh; three each in Pallbi, Sutrapur and Dhanmondi and two each in Motijheel and Khilgaon in Dhaka. The most sensational incident was the killing of 98-year-old Monohari Das at her house at Sultanganj Road in Hazaribagh by unidentified assailants. Month-wise records show that
SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Khaleda in Coolum Beach: Talks with S'pore PM today

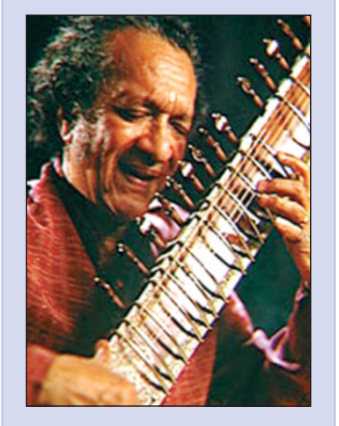
COOLUM BEACH, Australia
Prime Minister Khaleda Zia arrived here yesterday evening from Singapore to attend the 13th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) beginning tomorrow. On arrival at Brisbane, the Prime Minister, who is leading a ten-member Bangladesh delegation to the four-day CHOGM, was taken by a special aircraft to Maroochydore, popularly known as Sunshine Coast. She will be staying at Hyatt Regency Hotel. Hyatt Regency is the venue of all sessions of the CHOGM. The prime minister left Dhaka on Wednesday and had a night halt at Singapore. At Sunshine Coast airport the prime minister was received, among others, by a federal minister, State Minister for Brisbane and representative of the Shire Council (mayor). During her stay here Khaleda is expected to hold bilateral discussions with her counterparts from some other member countries of the Commonwealth.
SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

58 killed in Gujarat violence: Army called in, curfew in 26 towns

AGENCIES, Ahmedabad, India
India put its army on stand-by Thursday as sectarian riots claimed 20 lives in the western state of Gujarat where Hindus went on the rampage to avenge a massacre of Hindu activists. "It was decided that the army be asked to stand by," Home Minister L.K. Advani told reporters following a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security. Defence Minister George Fernandes was being despatched to Gujarat's commercial capital Ahmedabad on Friday, Advani said, adding that around 1,000 paramilitary personnel had already been sent to help the Gujarat state police keep control. Violence erupted in Ahmedabad and other cities in Gujarat on Thursday morning with Hindu youths attacking mosques and torching Muslim-owned shops and businesses. The attacks followed Wednesday's massacre by a Muslim mob of 58 mostly Hindu activists travelling on a train in eastern Gujarat. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said at least 20 people had been killed across the state, while police said six people were killed in police firing. "I hope that the situation will be resolved. I am hopeful of a breakthrough," Advani said, adding that he was remaining in close contact with Modi to keep abreast of developments. Advani said he would be making a statement on the violence in parliament on Friday.
LATEST
In an apparent reprisal, a mob burned to death 38 Muslims in their homes in Ahmedabad.
Modi said two people were killed in police fire, one in Nadiad and the other in Godhra, the town south of Ahmedabad where the violence began Wednesday when Muslim tea vendors and their neighbours stoned a train carrying Hindu nationalists returning from a religious site disputed by Hindus and Muslims. After slogan-chanting Hindu nationalists refused to pay for snacks during a five-minute halt, the mob set the train on fire, killing 58, the rail station chief, J K Katija, said Thursday. Hindu nationalists called for a statewide strike on Thursday in retaliation for the deaths and angry mobs rioted and looted shops in Ahmedabad and other Gujarat towns. For hours, outnumbered police stood watching or occasionally fired tear gas in Ahmedabad, as gangs of hundreds of people burned hotels, petrol pumps, cars, restaurants and shops, making bonfires of the looted goods and blocking the roads. Among the 20 dead, three were killed by rioters, including a truck driver dragged from his vehicle, police said. Smoke billowed over the skyline and police halted all traffic coming into the city. On the highways, gangs of young men, with sticks and iron rods, halted cars to ask whether Muslims or Hindus were inside. Hindus were allowed to proceed. Roadside tea and tobacco stalls, owned by Muslims, were burned to the ground.
PAGE 11 COL 44

Paris Club meet draft paper endorsed

SHAHRIAR KARIM
The cabinet committee on economic affairs yesterday sat with the proposed reform measures to be placed before the donors at the Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meet beginning in Paris from March 13. The committee endorsed in principle the draft memorandum prepared for the so-called Paris Club meeting. It was viewed that future relations with the development partners would basically depend on the implementation of the reform measures. However, there was a debate over whether to swallow all the donor conditionalities, some of which could tax the commoners. The committee, breaking from the usual practice, also decided that from now on the state-run Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation (BSEC) will have to compete with private firms to sell its products to the government. This marks a sea difference from the current practice of the government departments procuring BSEC products without any competitive bidding. The government prepared the memorandum for the BDF putting emphasis on its commitment for improved governance, massive privatisation programme, separation of the judiciary from the executive wing, setting up of an office of the ombudsman, and other targeted reforms in different sectors. The memorandum also detailed the government's poverty reduction strategy, the state of the economy and its macroeconomic management strategy. "We have to a lot do, from restoring the fiscal balance to streamlining expenditure, to putting a cap on the government's borrowing, to establishing good governance and doing away with the state-owned enterprises for a
SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Ravi Shankar awarded Grammy
AFP, Los Angeles
Legendary Indian sitar player and composer Ravi Shankar on Wednesday won one of music's highest awards, a Grammy, for his achievements in world music. Shankar was honoured for his album 'Full
SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Criminal indifference!

Police leave vital evidences under open sky

SHAIKH NAZRUL ISLAM
Moreover, alamt are mostly blood-stained, dirty clothes which policemen do not like to keep inside their offices. Policemen also said that they put a tag on each bag of alamt, which gets lost or torn. Police investigators gather evidences or alamt of murder, unnatural death and other cases but keep them so carelessly that they hardly come to any aid of the victims, sources said. As a result, victims are often deprived of justice due to lack of evidence! Many cases pending with the courts could not be forwarded as police failed to produce alamt before the court during the time of recording of deposition of the seizure-listed witnesses, court sources said. Persons present during the recovery and listing of Alamt are known as seizure-listed witnesses. As per the law, alamt are to be produced before the court and exhibited when the seizure-listed witnesses are cross-examined. A case loses its credibility if alamt are not exhibited during the time of cross-examination of the seizure-listed witnesses, legal experts said. Alamt are supposed to be kept into the storeroom adjacent to the court building. But scarcity of such storerooms pushes the police to keep them at the malkhana of different police stations. After each murder or unnatural death, police collect alamt to be produced during the trial of such cases. Most of the time they collect blood-stained clothes and documents and keep them as alamt outside the court building. Normally, alamt are wrapped in polythene bags before being hung with trees under open sky. No wonder alamt sometimes are destroyed or go missing during the trial of a case. Asked why they handle alamt so carelessly, several police officers said they do not have adequate storage facility. The malkhana where alamt are supposed to be kept is full with legal and illegal weapons and other valuables.
A policeman shows alamt of criminal incidents kept hanging from a tree at a city police station.
PHOTO: STAR

Detectives arrest Hasina's aide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Detectives arrested A F M Bahauddin Nasim, special assistant to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, from Zia International Airport (ZIA) in the early hours of yesterday. In the evening, Nasim was produced before the CMM's Court, Dhaka in two cases - smuggling of foreign currency and firing on the then opposition leader Khaleda Zia's motorcade last year. The court placed him on a ten-day remand, sources in the court said. The arrest came as part of the ongoing police crackdown on opposition activists across the country. Nasim, also joint convener of Awami Sechcha Sebak League, was intercepted by immigration officials at the immigration desk at about 1:20 am. Nasim was scheduled to fly off to the USA via Kuala Lumpur and London on a flight of the Malaysian Airlines. Police and immigration officials kept him detained at the airport before handing him over to the
SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Bring back bodies, slain NRB's father urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Father of Mahmuda Sultana, a non-resident Bangladeshi (NRB) who used to live in Malaysia, who along with her three children was reportedly murdered, urged the government to take an initiative to bring the bodies back home. Mohammad Mofiz Uddin in a letter to the foreign secretary said, referring to newspaper reports, that his daughter and three grandchildren were killed in Malaysia on February 23. Mahmuda migrated to Malaysia in 1992 as a worker and married Ashraf Hossain Babu of 126 Lalmoan Shaha Street, Narinda in Dhaka in 1993.
SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Attacks on Christians in Pabna Three accused held in Chatmahar

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna
Chatmahar Police Station in connection with Wednesday's attacks - one filed by Subol Mondol, a local leader of the Christian community, who was also injured in the attack.
Chatmahar police have so far arrested three accused in connection with Wednesday's attacks on three villages of the Christian community in the thana. Alleged BNP-backed terrorists attacked the three villages under Faizana and Kadamtali unions, leaving at least 30 people injured. The armed attackers also looted and damaged a large number of houses and confined nearly 200 Christian families in their houses till Wednesday afternoon. Faizana UP chairman and BNP union unit president Mohammad Shajahan Ali allegedly led the attacks. Police are yet to arrest him though he was seen in the area. The UP chairman and his men have allegedly threatened the Christians not to file any case against them. Two cases have been filed with
SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Scene of a vandalised house at a Christian village at Chatmahar.

Main Mahima rape culprits still at large

ABDUL WADOOD, Rajshahi
Police are yet to nab the main culprit Selim and his two accomplices Farid and Farooque, all accused in the Mahima gang-rape and suicide case. They are known to be activists of Jatiyatbadi Chharta Dal, student wing of ruling BNP, but local BNP and JCD leaders say they do not belong to the party. Failure of police to nab the three has created suspicion among local people. Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury met Mahima's parents yesterday and assured them of stern action against the culprits. Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque, Mayor of Rajshahi Mijanur Rahman Minu MP, local MP Nadim Mostafa and some other BNP leaders accompanied him. Police confirmed that schoolgirl Mahima committed suicide after being gang-raped but are yet to unearth the motive behind the brutality. Mahima, 15, committed suicide on February 19 at her house in Kanthalbaria village under Phutia thana after being gang-raped on February 15. The parists also took photo of rape scene. Mohima's father Abdul Hannan filed two cases in this connection. Selim, Ujjal, Farid and Farooque were made accused in the gang-rape case and their fathers Khalil, Musharraf, Motaleb and Sekender respectively were made accused in another case for instigating Mohima to commit suicide. Police arrested Ujjal and the four fathers the same night. Selim's maternal uncle Jahangir, a college teacher and an activist of Jamaat-e-Islami, was arrested in connection with case for instigating the suicide. Police recovered the coloured negative film of the photo. But the photo shown by police to journalists after washing is hazy. Nothing can be recognised. The film has been sent to experts in Dhaka, police said.
SEE PAGE 11 COL 1