

DHAKA TUESDAY APRIL 16, 2002

**Nitol launches
Gati vehicle**

BSS, Dhaka

Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda yesterday said the government wanted to turn the capital into a clean and pollution-free city.

Reiterating the government decision to free the city from vehicles with two-stroke engines from September 1, he said: "We wish our capital will be one of the beautiful cities of the world."

The minister was inaugurating Human Hauler Tata vehicle "Gati" imported by Nitol Group at a function at Gulshan Shooting Club.

The function, chaired by Nitol Group chairman Abul Matlub Ahmed, was also addressed by Expatriates' Welfare and Employment Minister Major (Retd) Kamrul Islam, Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries President Begum Selima Ahmed and Human-Hauler Owners Association President Advocate Abdus Salam.

Three hundred four-stroke "Gati" vehicles hit the city roads after the inaugural function yesterday. Nitol will put 2,000 such vehicles into operation within the next six months.

The vehicles could be bought with a security deposit of Tk 1,95,000 and a daily payment of Tk 600 for 1,042 days. For a one time buyer, a "Gati" however, costs Tk 62,500.

The drivers of the vehicles today used to drive tempos earlier.

Expressing his satisfaction over the launch of the vehicles, the communications minister said successes were achieved in cutting traffic congestion and air pollution in the city due to the cooperation of the private sector.

He said the government would cooperate if the auto-rickshaw owners formed cooperatives and applied for loans.

Stressing the government commitment to root out terrorism, he said a new law was enacted to this end.

Referring to the criticism of the law by some quarters, he asked how terrorism could be curbed if they criticised the government for terrorist activities on the one hand and opposed passage of laws to rein in

**FICCI holds
pre-budget talks
with NBR**

The Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) held a pre-budget meeting with officials of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday in the city, says a press release.

The Chamber team was headed by its President, Walir Rahman Bhuiyan while that of NBR by its Chairman Dr Shoeb Ahmed.

The discussion was based on FICCI's proposals for the 2002-2003 national budget which included continuation of PSI scheme, compliance of GATT agreement of customs valuation, lowering of maximum tariff rate below 30 per cent, withdrawal of supplementary and regulatory duties, VAT realisation on invoice value, lowering of corporate income tax by 25 per cent for publicly traded companies and 30 per cent for others.

FICCI also urged the government to review the provision of the Income Tax Ordinance 1984 requiring expatriate employees of foreign companies to show income tax clearance certificate to the immigration authorities each time they go out of Bangladesh, withdraw flat duty of Tk 4,000 imposed recently on procurement/replacement of mobile phone sets as well as SIM cards.

The NBR Chairman assured the chamber that the proposals would receive due consideration of the government while preparing the national budget for the next fiscal.

**BGMEA launches
online database
facility**

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) has launched an online database and job advertisement board for garment and textile professionals.

BGMEA President Kutubuddin Ahmed opened the service at a function at the association office on Saturday.

The opening of the system heralds the beginning of a BGMEA plan to embark on e-commerce and expand the export market, he said.

He said the database and job site was aimed at facilitating the organisations under the body's to easily appoint necessary manpower in the minimum time without expense.

The country's biggest job portal, bdjobs.com, assisted in the setting up of the database.

ICC, B seeks all-out efforts to improve law & order

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh yesterday urged the government to take all necessary steps to improve the country's law and order situation.

"Otherwise all gains, political, social and economic, will fail to bring the desired results," ICC, B President Mahbubur Rahman said while presenting a report of the ICC, B executive board at the annual council of the association yesterday.

Mahbubur Rahman also said the law and order situation of the country has been a major cause of concern for the people in general and

the businesses in particular. Among others, ICC, B vice presidents Latifur Rahman and A. S. M. Quasem, FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun, DCCI President Matiur Rahman, CCCI President Farid Ahmed Chowdhury, BGMEA President Kutubuddin Ahmed, Insurance Association President Nasir A. Choudhury, MCCI Secretary General C. K. Hyder and chief executives of ICC, B corporate members attended the annual council.

While presenting the report Mahbubur Rahman said the standard of governance in the country did not improve during last two years. "Fiscal and balance of pay-

ments turned worse due to imprudent policies," he said.

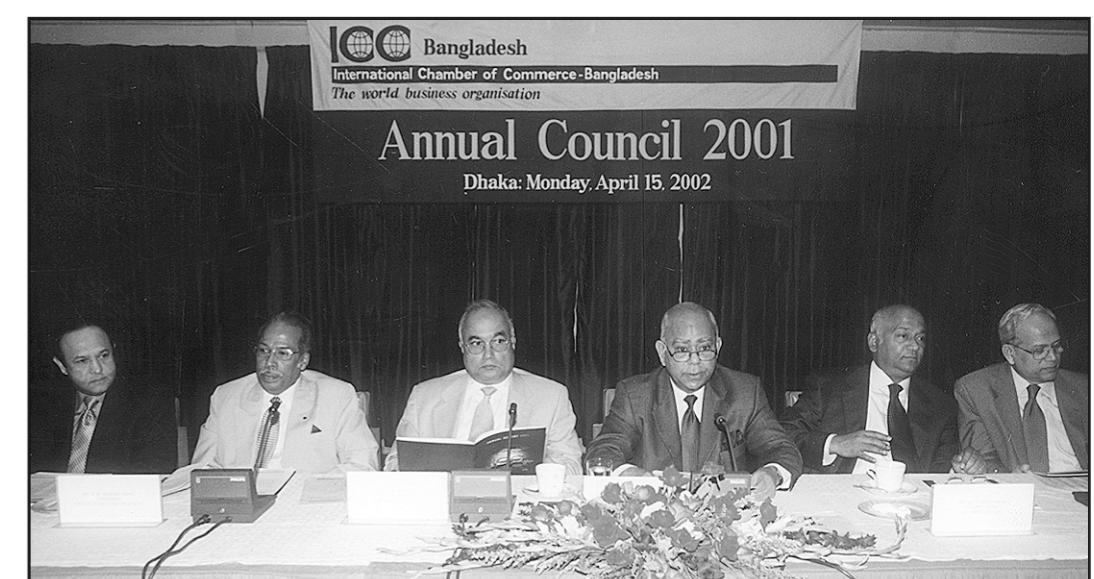
The ICC, B President observed the government should give priority to bringing down the huge losses incurred by state-owned enterprises (SOEs), improving revenue mobilisation and implementing a wide range of structural reforms.

Talking on the issue of globalisation, he said the developing countries and LDCs are finding it difficult to counter criticism against their trade liberalisation when leading preachers of globalisation themselves raise protectionist tariff wall to save their own industries and employment.

He said weaker developing

countries and the LDCs in particular are not getting fair deal from the developed economies. Some of them, he said, are still pursuing protectionist policies.

He advised Bangladesh and other LDCs to get prepared adequately to tap the full potentials created from time to time. Taking part the discussion, both Jamal Uddin Ahmad, former deputy prime minister and MCCI Secretary General C. K. Hyder put emphasis on in-house capacity building of the ICC, B in order to put forward national position at international forums.



International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Bangladesh President Mahbubur Rahman speaks at the Annual Council 2001 of the Chamber in the city yesterday. ICC, B Vice Presidents Latifur Rahman and ASM Quasem, FBCCI President Yussuf Abdullah Harun, MCCI Secretary General C. K. Hyder and Chairman of ICC, B Election Board AM Mubash-Shar are also seen.

PHOTO: ICC, B

Drastic measures under way for privatisation of SOEs

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday said as the nation cannot sustain Tk 4,000 crore annual losses incurred by the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), drastic measures will be taken to privatisate the SOEs.

"We have to take drastic action to privatisate the SOEs because people are paying for the loss incurring units", Chowdhury told a discussion on 'Privatisation: Gains & Pains' organised by Economic Reporters' Forum at the National Press Club in the city.

The government has decided to offer 40 per cent discount in order to attract non-resident Bangladeshis (NRBs) to buy the enterprises if they pay the money in cash dollar, he said, adding that local entrepreneurs who will pay the total amount

at a time in taka will get 35 per cent discount.

"It is not that donors are putting pressures on us to expedite privatisation. We have to do this for our own interest and to stop bleeding of the economy."

One-third of the SOEs approved for privatisation is making some profits but the rest two-third is incurring losses, he said, adding that the list of loss incurring units is becoming long day by day.

The decision regarding privatising some big SOEs like Adamji Jute Mill and Chittagong Steel Mill, besides Rupali Bank is yet to be taken. "We have to make special arrangement for divesting these large SOEs. There is also an option that the site of Adamji can be turned into an export processing zone," he said.

"We want to avoid negotiation in privatising the SOEs for the sake of transparency. Highest bidder will be encouraged to buy an enterprise. We want to maintain transparency and for this no changes will be made from now in the tender conditions," he stated. "Negotiation may create a non-transparent environment. That's why we are no more interested in negotiation."

Presently, the Privatisation Commission does not have any monitoring cell to see how many SOEs are closed or still running. But the Commission has taken initiatives for evaluating this, he added. "We are also thinking to divest the profit making units."

The government has approved the privatisation of 78 SOEs and the Privatisation Commission Chairman hoped 80 per cent of them will be divested in the current calendar year.



Mohammad Aminul Haque, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Prime Bank Limited, addresses the 7th annual general meeting (AGM) of the bank in city yesterday. M A Khaleque, Vice Chairman of the Board, Mafiz Ahmed Bhuiyan, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board, Dr R A Ghani, Firoja Amin, Quazi Sirazul Islam MP, Md Shahadat Hossain, Nasim Anwar Hossain, Muslina Shireen, Md Sirajul Islam Mollah, Md Abdul Quasem, Parvez Matin, Masud Reza Bhuiyan, Directors of the Board, and Syed Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, Acting Managing Director, are also seen in the picture.

Top Pentagon official under investigation in Enron case

AFP, Washington

The FBI is investigating US Army Secretary Thomas White for possible insider trading involving energy giant Enron prior to its bankruptcy last year, The Wall Street Journal reported Monday.

According to the report, Federal Bureau of Investigation agents have questioned White's friends and former colleagues over whether he sought or acted on inside information from them on the company's

financial condition.

White was an Enron executive before he joined the Pentagon.

Investigators appear to be focused most closely on calls and contacts White had last October, when he sold off more than three million dollars in stock -- or half of his holdings -- as the company's condition worsened. The Journal reported, citing lawyers close to the case.

White has publicly admitted discussing Enron's plight with former colleagues but denied seeking any inside corporate information.

Under government ethics rules, White had to divest himself from Enron after taking the job of army secretary.

But the investigators are looking into whether he sought information that would have helped him maximize the return from these sales, according to The Journal.

White also is facing questions about his use of a Pentagon aircraft for personal business.



President of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce & Industry (FICCI) Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan speaks at a pre-budget discussion of the chamber with the officials of the National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the city. Seated on his right is Chairman of NBR Dr Shoeb Ahmed.

Prime Bank declares 30pc cash, 20pc stock dividends

Prime Bank Limited declared 30 per cent cash and 20 per cent stock dividends for its shareholders at its 7th annual general meeting (AGM) held at a local hotel in the city yesterday, says a press release.

Mohammad Aminul Haque, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the bank presided over the meeting.

M A Khaleque, Vice Chairman of the Board, Mafiz Ahmed Bhuiyan, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Board, Dr R A Ghani, Firoja Amin, Quazi Sirazul Islam MP, Md Shahadat Hossain, Nasim Anwar Hossain, Muslina Shireen, Md Sirajul Islam Mollah, Md Abdul Quasem, Parvez Matin, Masud Reza Bhuiyan, Directors of the Board, and Syed Naser Bukhtear Ahmed, Acting Managing Director, are also seen in the picture.

The bank earned operating profit of Tk 75.61 crore as against Tk 59.32 crore in 2000 registering an increase of 27 percent.

The bank's deposit rose to Tk 1325.99 crore at the end of year 2001 as against Tk 1116.87 crore in 2000 registering an increase of 19 per cent.

The foreign exchange business volume increased by 15 per cent to Tk 2761.42 crore as on December 31, 2001 from Tk 2402.95 crore in the preceding year.

Capital adequacy stood at 17.50 per cent against the statutory requirement of 8 per cent at the date.

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