

Raise rice output to meet growing demand: PM

UNB, Gazipur

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said rice production must be further increased for alleviating poverty and building up food security in the country to avert any unforeseen crisis.

"Otherwise we may have to face disaster for food crisis. Our scientists and policymakers will have to work in unison from now to meet a growing food demand in the future," she said inaugurating a function in celebration of three decades of founding of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI).

Since its inception in 1970, BRRI has evolved 41 high-yielding varieties (Ufshi) of paddy, including one hybrid variety. Now paddy cultivation land of Ufshi has increased to 65 per cent from 5, which covers 78 per cent of paddy output in the country.

The rice research institute was set up in 1970. After independence, the East Pakistan Rice Research Institute was renamed Bangladesh Rice Research Institute.

Addressing the scientists, researchers, and staff of BRRI at its auditorium, the prime minister said she came to know that so far the institute had developed technologies for high-yielding paddy seeds mostly suitable to friendly environment.

"From now on more stress will have to be given to developing technologies for paddy cultivation suitable to unfriendly environment," she told the function calling for evolving rice that can be produced in all weather conditions, fair of foul, in order to meet any exigencies for natural calamity.

Khaleda noted that a huge amount of money is spent for producing paddy seeds, irrigation and fertiliser, and said researchers and scientists would have to think deeply how to reduce the production costs further.

She observed agriculture production in the country is largely depend on the nature as crop loss in droughts, excessive rain, storms and floods are still a perennial feature here.

"So you have to try to develop more high-yielding varieties of paddy for growing when the weather remains good," she told the BRRI scientists and researchers, adding that the nation expects more contribution from them as an advanced segment of society.

"So there is no scope for complacency for the previous successes," she told her audience.

Later, the prime minister visited an exhibition of varieties of high-yielding rice plants, seeds and agricultural equipment evolved by BRRI.

Danes admit

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inland water sector this year has been withdrawn and will not be reallocated.

However, sources indicated that Denmark would carry forward all sorts of co-operative in other areas. Assistance in such areas as agriculture and pest management is also likely to be made by Denmark besides normal sectors.

The Danish charge of corruption whipped up a diplomatic storm and embarrassed the government.

The Danes first brought 'intention of corruption' charge against the shipping minister in a letter written to Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman on February 15.

Later on, they also pursued the matter with Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and Communication Minister Nazmul Huda.

Immediately after the April 13 press conference, where the Danes brought the corruption charge, the Danish envoy was summoned to the foreign office.

On April 17, Dhaka sent a note of protest to Copenhagen through its mission in Dhaka. Ambassador Munk was summoned to the foreign ministry and handed the protest note.

A day after the Danes brought

the charge, Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain convened a press conference and refuted the allegation, saying it was a move to 'interfere in internal affairs'.

Just after the press conference, Akbar was summoned to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Later on April 15 and April 16, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia held lengthy meetings with her senior cabinet colleagues.

At the time, the finance minister and the foreign minister said the Danish act was 'devoid of diplomatic norms'. They also said that the matter was related to the country's prestige and that they would not compromise on the issue even if it meant a freeze on foreign grants.

Rajshahi

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seen picketing at different points since the morning. Police arrested at least 10 pickets.

All modes of transports excepting rickshaws went off the city roads. The city's markets excluding the kutcha bazars remained closed, attendance at the offices was thin and transaction in the commercial banks and other financial institutions was limited due to the hartal.

Passport crisis

FROM PAGE 12
Agaarga passport office in the city.

"This is the root of the problem," said one official of the home ministry yesterday. He elaborated, "Our regular contractor challenged the move and is preparing for a legal action against it since the government cancelled the contract before expiry and has awarded it to another party."

Meanwhile, delivery of more than 20,000 applications including those under urgent category has been held up due to the crisis. An estimated 10,000 or more applicants in the headquarters, 5,000 in Sylhet office, 2,000 in Chittagong office and some 1,000 in Barisal office are awaiting delivery of the passports.

According to officials, about 1500 books are issued everyday from the headquarters, 500 from Sylhet regional office, 300 from Chittagong regional office and 200 from Barisal regional office. In fact, issuance of new passports has almost stopped due to the crisis.

The banks where fees are deposited with for the books have been asked not to take any deposits until further notice.

A 'very urgent' passport, which is usually supposed to be delivered in three days at a fee of Tk 3,150, is being delivered after 16 days. An 'urgent' passport normally delivered in 11 days at a fee of Tk 1250 is being delayed by up to 60 days.

Meanwhile, the police had to be deployed at the Sylhet regional passport office premises recently to bring order. "We may have to take similar measures if the government

fails to deliver the passports in time," one official anticipated.

Although people are having a tough time, a section of the passport office staff and *Dalal* or middlemen are taking cashing in on the crisis, charging twice as much for delivery of a passport applied for earlier.

They arrange delivery of passports much ahead for 'fees' ranging from Tk 2000 to Tk 3000.

"Amidst the current crisis one cannot guarantee the delivery. We can bribe officials to get passports in advance but the price is heavy," said Hossain, one of the *Dalal* at the Agaarga passport office.

Acknowledging the crisis, Md. Wahidul Haq, director general of the Agaarga passport office, said, "We do not have enough books in stock and for that reason we are facing a temporary crisis, which we expect to overcome shortly."

But he said to rationalise distribution of passport books all offices have been asked to issue passports sparingly.

"We have formed a three-member committee to figure out the genuine urgent cases and on the basis of the recommendation of the committee banks will receive deposits or fees," said Haq.

"Since we now have limited stock of books, those are being distributed on priority basis to serious patients, students and employment seekers.

We are asking people to submit relevant documents along with the application so that the committee can carefully evaluate the applications," said the director general.

customs duty and 76 for supplementary duty at the meeting.

In response to the proposals, Saifur said: "Revenue measures, especially the tariff structures, must be in line with WTO trade regime, whether we like it or not."

State ministers for finance and planning Shah M Abul Hossain and Anwarul Kabir Talukder, National Board of Revenue Chairman (NBR) Dr Shoeb Ahmed, FBCCI President Yusuf Abdullah Harun also spoke at the meeting.

The NBR chairman said duties on raw material of the industries would be reduced in the next budget and the VAT collection system would be easier.

The FBCCI president said the country could be self-dependent if misuse of Tk 7,000 crore in SoEs, gas, petroleum and power sectors could be stopped.

The meeting, organised jointly by the NBR and the FBCCI, focused on different measures for direct and indirect tax prior to formulation of the 2002-03 budget.

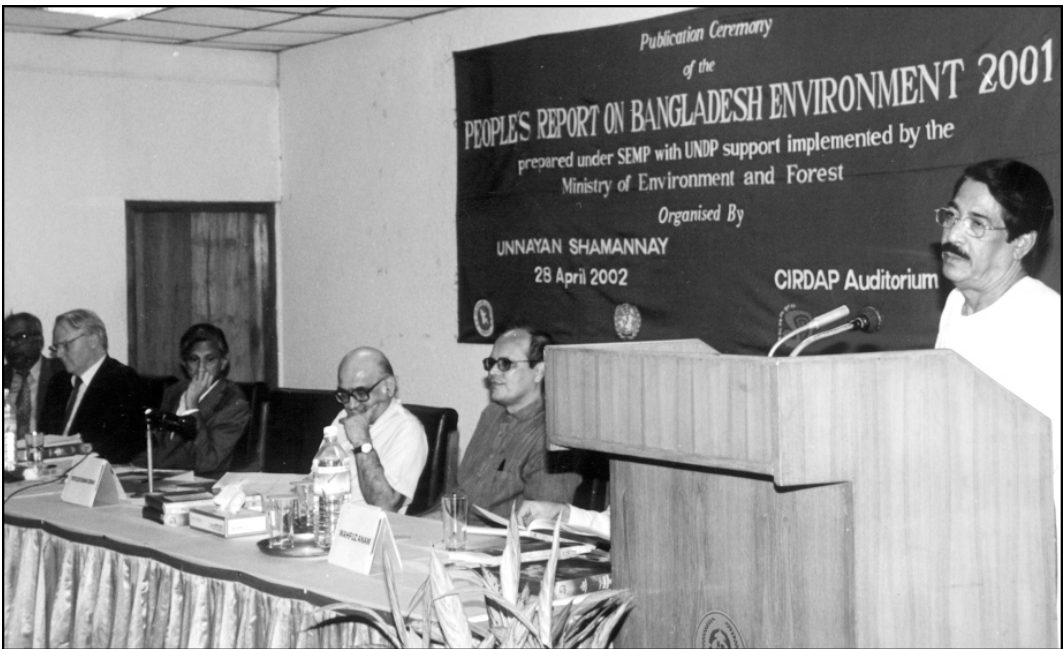


PHOTO: STAR

Environment and Forest Minister Shajahan Siraj speaks at a publication ceremony at the CIRDAP auditorium in the city yesterday.

End deadlock, make JS effective

Speakers urge govt, opposition at seminar in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a seminar in the city yesterday appealed to the government and the opposition to make serious efforts towards ending the current deadlock in parliament and the hostile relation between them in order to make the parliament truly responsive for the betterment of the people through democracy.

The seminar titled 'Beyond Patronage: Rights and Responsibilities of Members of Parliament' was jointly organised by Legislative Support Service Project (LSSP) of Manabick Sahajya Sangstha (MSS) in collaboration with the European Commission and National Democratic Institute (NDI) of USA. It was the second of a series of five scheduled seminars on 'Making Parliament Responsive'.

The speakers stressed the need for changing the behavioral attitudes of the leaderships of the major parties in a democratic manner to strengthen the country's democratic process.

Participants who took part in the discussion included MPs from both sides of the present parliament. They emphasised the need to bring suitable amendments to article 70 of the constitution to give the MPs a wider legislative status so that they could practice actively in the process of formulating necessary laws.

Referring to article 70, MPs said they are not involved either in legislation or development process, and are not allowed to speak against any bill placed in the house by their respective parties even if it goes against the interest of common people.

Article 70 of the constitution bars floor crossing by the MPs and voting against party decision in the parliament.

Referring to the roles and responsibilities of the MPs, speakers pointed out that the function should be apparently divided into three categories where they would work as legislators, as representa-

tives of his/her constituency and as a responsible person of the country.

Two keynote papers were presented in the seminar -- one by Prof Dilara Chowdhury, Department of Government and Politics, Jahangirnagar University, and the other by Barrister Ziaur Rahman, an MP of the parliament.

In her keynote paper, Dilara Chowdhury recommended greater emphasis on the democratisation of the internal political structure of political parties in order to make the parliament responsive. She also specified that administrative and management reforms should be undertaken with specific focus on controlling patronage and corruption.

On the other hand, Barrister Ziaur Rahman in his paper said that the MP's role as legislator is still very much in its infancy as they get very little chance to influence a bill due to article 70 as well as the lack of democratic practice within the party.

Demanding changes in the rules of procedures, he also demanded necessary logistic support for the MPs, including research assistant, office in the parliament building, computer etc.

Terming the local government as the heart of democratic process, speakers also emphasised the need to strengthen them.

The programme was moderated by Dr Alauddin Ahmed, an MP and former vice chancellor of Jahangirnagar University while noted academicians and politicians took part in the discussion.

Among others, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Faruk Khan MP, Zahir Uddin Swapan MP, Haider Akbar Khan Rono, Prof Dalem Chandra Barman of Dhaka University, and Akbar Ali MP were also present in the occasion.

Dominic Cardy, senior programme officer of NDI coordinated the seminar while Feroz M. Hassan, president of MSS gave the vote of thanks to the participants

Police-mob clash leaves 20 hurt at Khagrachhari

UNB, Khagrachhari

At least 20 people were injured in a police-mob clash at the district council office here on Saturday.

Witnesses said the clash erupted at noon when the police were trying to prevent the mob from ransacking the district council office.

Two police personnel, SI Lutfor Rahman and Subedar Fazar Ali, were also injured during the clash.

About 5,000 people, who applied for financial assistance to the district council went on the rampage and attacked the office as the relief officials stopped distributing money after payment to some of them, witnesses said.

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lines ready so that calibration, setting and functional tests of the angiocardio gram machines could be carried out.

The letter categorically stated that the machines could give trouble if they remained idle for a long time after installation. 'We request you to arrange for power supply on an emergency basis,' the letter appealed.

The installation was however completed in early December. But the NICVD authorities refused to sign the hand-over documents, as the two machines were yet not commissioned due to lack of the required power lines.

The supplier sent two other letters to the Director of Stores and Supplies of CMSD on December 26 and 27 last year, to the effect that it had received no reply from the CMSD and that the installation site was not ready as per Siemens design. As such, despite satisfactory installation, commissioning and functional tests were not possible due to lack of power lines in the

rooms housing the machines.

Two more letters followed on January 27 and February 12, stating that the power lines necessary for commissioning of the equipment was not in place despite repeated requests, and that "hand-over of the equipment could not be completed, as there was no electric line available."

According to engineers, the grid line for power supply is not ready and it would cost an estimated Tk 21 lakh to have the power line extended to the NICVD.

"We have informed the Public Works Department (PWD) about the lack of power line and they are working on it," said Prof Nazrul Islam, Director of NICVD.

Director of CMSD, Brigadier General Md Abul Kalam Azad said, "We are not responsible for giving power connection. The engineers responsible for the job are working on it. I have also informed the health secretary about the matter and hope the problem would soon be over."

Financed by the World Bank, the Tk.10-crore equipment are sup-

Monk murder

Police preparing to hand over case to CID

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police are now preparing to hand over the charge of investigation into the killing of Buddhist Monk Ganojyoti to the CID, a highly placed source in police said.

The weekly funeral of the Buddhist monk was held at the Hingala Woara Puyan Buddha Bihar yesterday.

Buddhist people under the banner of 'Ganojyoti Bhiyum Murder Justice Movement Committee, Bangladesh' meet the Home Secretary at the local Circuit House in the afternoon.

They submitted a memorandum to the Home Secretary demanding formation of a judicial committee to investigate killing and punishment to the persons involved.

Traders

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The following day, the shopkeepers decided to keep the shutters down in protest at the armed attacks. All shops in the area remained closed throughout the day.

Policy shift

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However, following intervention by the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers' Association (BGMEA), the foreigners were ultimately issued visas.

"Such overnight changes in policies are discouraging the foreign investors," Lissner said in his introductory speech prior to releasing the economic and social survey report-2002 of the ESCAP (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) in the city yesterday.

The report said the flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) amounted to US\$ 166 million in FY 2001, down 14.4 per cent from the previous year.

The government restricted the on-arrival visa process on April 10, which was open to encourage investors.

Home Ministry sources had said that such restriction came as the government felt that visitors were misusing the option of the on-arrival visa.

But other sources said such restrictions were triggered by a report in the Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER), which alleged that a silent revolution of armed fundamentalists backed by international terrorist groups was taking place in Bangladesh.

The government rejected the report and felt that it was part of a conspiracy to portray a negative image of the country before the international community.

Apart from serving the purpose of encouraging investors, the on-arrival visa was mainly open for visitors from countries where Bangladesh does not have any consulate. (A detailed report on this appears on today's business page on 6).

100 hurt as rival groups clash in Habiganj

UNB, Habiganj

More than 100 people, including four policemen, were injured in a fierce clash between rival groups over harvesting crops on khas land at West Bulla village in Lakhai upazila yesterday.

Witnesses and police said the trouble began in the morning when Chairman of Bulla Union Parishad Shamsul Haq Alam tried to prevent one Sohrab Fakir of Singho village from harvesting Boro paddy on a khas land occupied by him.

Supporters of the two from Singho, Kamrapur and East and West Bulla villages clashed for about three hours. Police reached the scene at about 10am.

Charged baton on the clashing groups, lobbed seven tear gas shells and fired 34 rounds of blank shots to bring the situation under control.

Local leader of BNP Abdul Wadud Talukder Abdal was injured in police action.

The feuding groups hurled brickbats at the police, leaving OC Alam Sarker and constables Abdur Rahman, Ahad and Zahangir injured.

7 extortionists

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brought against the two could not be substantiated.

In the chargesheet, 25 people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

In the FIR, filed with Mohammdpur thana, it has been alleged that seven local extortionists went to the Nabinagar Housing Project in Mohammdpur area at about 11.00 am on April 21 and demanded Tk 50,000 from contractor Abu Hanif.

As Hanif refused to oblige, the extortionists shot him, the FIR said.

Local people chased the gang and caught Rana with a pistol. The other members of the gang managed to flee.

Police rescued Rana and took him to Mohammdpur thana. He was later sent to jail hajat by the court.

Hanif's brother Mohammad Abdul Halim filed a case with Mohammdpur thana under the newly enacted law against nine persons including Rana the same day.

Another case under the Arms Act was filed against Rana with the same thana.

Meanwhile, the conducting Magistrate Al-Mamun accepted the chargesheet.

The court also issued warrant of arrest against the absconding accused and ordered for attachment of their moveable property.

The court fixed May 3 for next hearing of the case.

PDB condition

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equipment at the port in the presence of TPE officials. If any item is found faulty, the PDB would not accept it and the TPE would have to take it back to Russia at its own cost.

A team of five PDB engineers will visit Russia to verify the origin of the equipment.

The TPE would bear all demurrage, port charge and other costs and the warranty period would be counted from the date of commissioning of the power plant.

The contract with Techno-promexport, signed in May 2000, was suspended initially due to gross procedural violation. Later, the suspension was withdrawn, but the contract remained ineffective. The TPE imported the heavy equipment in January last and asked the PDB to accept them.

But the PDB refused to do so on the ground that the contract was still ineffective as the company did not submit any bank guarantee and fulfil other obligations.

The PDB signed the US\$ 17.7 million contract bypassing the Economic Relations Division (ERD) for the Ghorashal power units 1 and 2 rehabilitation project under suppliers' credit scheme in May 31, 2000. Following this, an irritated ERD objected and an inter-ministerial investigation was undertaken. The contract was also suspended.

Saddam

FROM PAGE 12
Arab leaders would publicly protest but secretly celebrate Mr. Hussein's downfall - as long as the operation were decisive - and that ousting him would actually ease the job of calming violence between Israel and the Palestinians, the Times says.

However, according to the newspaper, others at the State Department and the White House argue that efforts to topple Mr. Hussein would be viewed by Arabs as a confrontation with Islam, destabilising the region and complicating the broader campaign against Osama bin Laden and his network, Al Qaeda.

The parallel strategy in Iraq would involve the Kurds in the north and the Shiites in the south. But Hussein's military, while only one-third its strength from before the Gulf war, is strong enough to defeat any confrontation by proxy, officials told the Times. Meanwhile, senior military officers said the military requirements for changing the government in Baghdad would be vastly different than the Gulf war mission, which was to drive an entrenched enemy from a large occupied area.

"We would not need to hold territory and protect our flanks to the same extent," one officer said. "You would see a higher level of manoeuvre and airborne assault, dropping in vertically and enveloping targets - less sloggish mile by mile through the desert."

Industrial pollution

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Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam spoke as the main discussant. Unnayan Shamannay Chairman Dr Atiur Rahman gave a synopsis of the report and UPL Managing Director Mohiuddin Ahmed gave the vote of thanks.

The minister said setting up of waste treatment plant first will be made compulsory for owners while relocating tanneries outside the city from Hajariabag.

Noting that 70 percent of the brick kilns in the country were set up without government permission, the environment minister said, "Next month we'll hold a meeting with the owners and stop operation of all unauthorised brick kilns."

He also disclosed that his ministry and the communications ministry will jointly launch a programme within fifteen days for catalytic conversion of vehicles emitting black smoke.

Shajahan Siraj asserted that his ministry would do everything to bring about relief in urban life that has been affected by air pollution and resultant diseases.

Responding to a proposal from Jorgen Lissner and Dr Atiur for introducing Green Taxing (duty on pollutants), the minister said he will take it up with the finance minister.

Prof Rehman Sobhan urged the authors of the environment report to prepare another report containing a list of polluters and their political identities or links.

He said success of good initiatives will not entirely depend on the environment ministry. "Rather, it's a question of the state of governance and the vested groups' power to override the regulators."

Mahfuz Anam said, considering the land-population ratio, people's relationship with nature and envi-

ronment is very crucial in Bangladesh.

He stressed the need for saving the dying rivers from hands of grabbers and freeing urban people from the curse of unbearable level of air pollution. He also put emphasis on replacement of chemical fertiliser by natural fertiliser.

Jorgen Lissner lauded the report for its pro-people approach, saying policy planners need to know people's views if democracy has to work. He said introduction of Green Tax will have a positive impact on improving the environment.

Sabihuddin Ahmed gave a brief evaluation of the environment report. He said man should not exploit the environment infinitely for consumptive needs.

Army officer found dead in his room at Comilla Cantt

UNB, Dhaka

An army officer was found dead in his room at Comilla Cantonment officers mess yesterday afternoon, said an ISPR release.

The victim was identified as captain Manzurul Kabir-Ibn-Majhar, 23.

Primary investigation revealed that his death was 'unnatural,' the release said, adding that local police station was informed about the incident and necessary legal steps was under process.

Journalist 'missing'

FROM PAGE 1
Star correspondents visited some clinics and tried in vain to contact the victim's brother over mobile phone.

When our Kushtia correspondent contacted Bhiza's family members, they said they do not know his whereabouts.

According to eyewitnesses, Bhiza was mercilessly beaten up by some goons over a previous feud. The goons, SM Kaderi and his two brothers Tam and Sobu, allegedly attacked Bhiza at his business establishment, Antora Watch and Recording Centre, at Thana Para area in the town on Saturday at around 12:30pm.

The gang then handed him over to the Sadar police saying he was an 'extortionist'. They also filed a case against him on behalf of a so-called 'Businessmen Welfare Association'.

Bhiza's condition deteriorated in police custody and he was taken to the Kushtia Sadar Hospital.

According to Officer in Charge of the Kushtia Sadar Police Station Shorab Hossain, Bhiza got interim bail against a bond signed by Kushtia Municipality Chairman

Israel Hossain Afu and Bhiza's elder brother Shajahan. Later, he was sent to the DMCH at the advice of doctors at the Kushtia General Hospital.

Bhiza's elder brother also filed a case with the Sadar Police Station against Sakil and his gang members. But the police did not take initiatives to nab them.

Meantime, local journalists demanded arrest of the criminals who beat up Bhiza.

Case withdrawn

FROM PAGE 12
Dhaka District and Sessions Judge, Metropolitan Sessions Judge and Chief Metropolitan Magistrate during a procession on August 20, 2000.

The accused brought out the procession protesting the killing of Advocate Habibur Rahman Mondal.

Assistant Commissioner Nazrul Haq Chowdhury the investigation officer (IO) of the case, submitted a chargesheet to the CMM's Court, Dhaka on November 5, 2000, against the accused.

JS standing body

FROM PAGE 1

A steering committee meeting of the UNDP-financed 'Strengthening Parliamentary Democracy' project held at the Sangsad Bhavan earlier this month expressed deep frustration at the non-formation of the parliamentary standing committees and the main opposition's abstention from the parliament.

Jorgen Lissner, UNDP resident representative to Bangladesh, and Merlin Udho, advisor to the project, also had a meeting with Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina at her Dhanmondi residence in the city to discuss the issue.

Asked about the delay in committee formation, Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain said he had written to his opposition counterpart three months ago, seeking names of the Awami League lawmakers to represent the opposition in the committees.

"But, instead of giving the list of names, they wanted their lawmakers to head 10 committees," said Delwar.

"When the AL was in power, they did not create any precedence by allocating even a single post of committee chairman to us. Now, how could they demand this?" Delwar asked.

He said the government would try its best to form the standing committees during the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad.

On the other hand, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid told The Daily Star that the government should allocate the posts of chairman and other members in different standing committees according to representation of political parties in the parliament.

With its 58 lawmakers, the AL is now asking for chairmanship in one fifth of the total number of committees.

The opposition chief whip recalled that the AL government had amended the parliamentary rules of procedure to replace ministers by non-minister lawmakers to head different standing committees on ministries to ensure transparency.

DU gets money wise

FROM PAGE 12
With the market extended, it will house 364 shops in total along the busy road.

He said the university is also planning to build a four-storey commercial structure in front of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) on the footpath on the western side of the DU central playground. This time too, the authorities did not seek any planning approval for the structure where drug stores, doctors' chambers and diagnostic centres would be housed.

"These commercial ventures are taken up to increase the DU's incomes," reasoned the acting chief engineer. "We have planners. We draw the schemes ourselves and build the structures on the campus."

The engineer said the actual Kataban Market with dozens of pet shops along the Kataban Road was built by the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) and later handed over to the DU.

Recently, the DU has decided to extend the market by adding more shops to the first floor. The rent of each shop is Tk 1,500 per square feet.

A BUET architect and town planner said the 'shopping complex' is another blow to the city planning and management. When all shops start functioning, the area would become chaotic. The pet shop and other shop owners at the market are already creating nuisance by encroaching on the footpath and roadside, he said requesting anonymity.

The authorised officer of Rajuk, SM Asaduzzaman, told The Daily Star that when the authorities were building