



Moderate rain likely

UNB, Dhaka

Light to moderate rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind is likely at many places over Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions and at a few places over Khulna and Barisal divisions during the next 12 hours till 6pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country during the period, Met Office said.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 38.0 degree Celsius was recorded at Chuadanga and the lowest of 23.0 degree Celsius at Dhaka.

The sun sets in the capital at 6.49 pm today and rises at 5:19 am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
	Dhaka	31.9	23.0	80
Chittagong	30.0	24.0	80	78
Rajshahi	37.2	27.0	81	70
Khulna	35.5	26.0	81	--
Barisal	32.5	24.2	85	87
Sylhet	29.0	25.5	92	97
Cox's Bazar	31.8	24.8	89	89

Speakers at roundtable on gas pilferage Huge amounts siphoned off in the name of system loss

UNB, Dhaka

Addressing the function, M Fazlul Haq, a former MD of Titas Gas, suggested introduction of pre-paid meter system for domestic use of gas.

In last 11 months, Titas incurred a loss of about Tk 128 crore in gas purchase and Tk 306 crore in gas sale. Purchasing price of per cubic metre of gas for Titas is Tk 2.2 and average selling price Tk 5.27.

Apart from the huge losses caused by system loss, another concern for the Energy Ministry is court injunction following its bid for disconnection of an illegal line or the line of a bill defaulter.

"Titas customers now owe Tk 1,400 crore to the company. But it can neither realise the bills nor disconnect the lines as court injunctions come in the way," a frustrated state minister told the roundtable.

Out of the 930 customers sued by the government for nonpayment of bills or illegal connections, 450 have brought court injunctions.

In most cases, the users who get court orders in their favour are big shots — one user alone owes Tk 12 crore to Titas, the minister said. However, disconnection does take place in other cases. Mosharrar said the present taskforce disconnected thousands of illegal lines.

For infusing dynamism into the sector, he suggested dividing Titas into three companies and allowing the private sector to distribute gas and collect bills for certain zones on an experimental basis.

Addressing the roundtable, industrialist Abul Kashem Haider elaborated how the business people are lured by the government officials into not paying gas and electricity bills or VAT and tax.

Organised by weekly Sangbadda, the function was also addressed by Mosharrar Hossain MP, chief editor of the magazine M Abdullah and Titas Gas Jaliyatabadi Sraniik Karmachari Union general secretary Shahnoor Hossain.

Hasina slams

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are coming to invest in our country." Hasina alleged that the BNP-led four-party coalition is doing all these because it does not want a stable and prosperous country.

"An outcome of conspiracy, the four-party alliance grabbed power through a conspiracy in the last election. The exit of president Badruddoza Chowdhury was also part of a conspiracy," she said.

The opposition leader said her party was defeated in the last election through a conspiracy as she did not agree to export gas to India as dictated by the USA.

About the national budget for the current fiscal, she said it is an 'anti-people one' and an unbearable burden on the poor masses.

Hasina castigated the government for 'continued torture and repression' on opposition activists and 'torching and ransacking' of houses and shops of AL supporters by the ruling party men. They did not even spare a child, she added.

President over by district AL president Mohammad Ali Khan Abu Mia, the gathering was also addressed by district unit General Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, district Kirshak League President Noor Mohammad Dulu, Sadar thana AL President Noor-Zaman and Mahub Ali Khan.

Hasina is in Gopalganj on a two-day trip. She went to Tunipara yesterday afternoon and placed wreaths at the mazar of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Before returning to the capital today, she will attend a milad mahfil and quran khwani at the mazar.

Skull may shift evolution theories

MARK EVANS, Associated Press

In what may be the most startling fossil find in decades, scientists in central Africa say they have unearthed the oldest trace of a pre-human ancestor a remarkably intact skull of an apelike species that walked upright as far back as 7 million years ago.

The thick-browed, flat-faced skull was found in Chad, 1,500 miles west of pre-human discoveries in east Africa.

Exactly where the skull fits into man's family tree is not clear. But the skull's age, shape and location challenge basic beliefs about the evolution of man's earliest ancestors.

Among other things, the find could push back the date at which humans are believed to have diverged from apes. And it suggests that upright-walking human ancestors evolved not just on the grasslands, as anthropologists have long thought, but in forests as well.

Scientists nicknamed the specimen Toumai, or 'hope of life' in Africa's Goran language.

It was uncovered a year ago by a 40-person research team led by French paleontologist Michel Brunet

in a remote, wind-scoured stretch of desert that was a lush forest long ago. Details appear in Thursday's issue of the journal Nature.

It is the culmination of a lonely and sometimes dangerous search by Brunet that began 25 years ago, far from the most celebrated excavations in east Africa. Besides having to deal with the harsh climate, the researchers had to dig carefully around land mines left from decades of war.

"It's a lot of emotion to have in my hand the beginning of the human lineage," Brunet said in a statement. "I have been looking for this for so long."

Other scientists who have examined the skull said it is a landmark, but enigmatic, specimen.

"It's not what we thought we would find," said Bernard Wood of George Washington University. "If you at the back of it, it looks like a chimpanzee, and if you look at the front of it, it looks like something in the human fossil record unambiguously a couple of million years ago."

Harvard anthropologist Dan Lieberman said the skull raises "a wheelbarrow full of questions." He likened it to Raymond Dart's 1920s discovery of a skull of an "ape-man" in southern Africa, which lent the first

support to Charles Darwin's theory that the deepest traces of human evolution could be found on that continent.

"It's a major find," Lieberman said. "It will take many years for us to understand just how important it is."

Other researchers were more guarded. "This is a great extension onto the fossil record," said University of California paleontologist Tim White. "But that's what the real story is here it's an opening window."

Indeed, Toumai is the oldest addition to a growing array of recently discovered hominid, or pre-human, fossils that show human evolution was not an orderly progression.

Instead, Africa appears to have been widely populated with many different transitional species. How they got sorted into a new edition of the human family album could take years to settle.

Toumai was classified as a member of the newly dubbed species Sahelanthropus tchadensis and is thought to be between 6 million and 7 million years old.

That means it could be as much as 1 million years older than previously found hominid fossils, and at

least 3 million years older than the next-oldest hominid skulls. Brunet concluded Toumai walked upright because the hole for the spinal cord at the skull's base is shaped like those of more recent bipedal primates.

The skull appears to be the size of that of a modern common chimpanzee with a similar cranial capacity and smallish teeth. But facial details, such as a very thick bony eyebrow ridge, are like those of male hominids.

The specimen's age falls near a critical point when the human lineage split from apes. Relying on genetic evidence, scientists have assumed the split occurred 5 million to 7 million years ago; Toumai's appearance may push back the timeline.

Also, Toumai challenges the notion that human ancestors evolved only on the east side of the African Rift Valley running from the Red Sea to Mozambique.

The east side of the rift during prehistoric times consisted of savannah. Scientists believe that with few trees to climb, pre-humans had to walk upright to see over the tall grass.

Dress rehearsal for apparels

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fix the export target for the current fiscal.

Apparels and frozen foods are the two major items that fetch around 81 per cent of the country's total export earnings.

The quota restrictions on two major categories — 847 (trousers, slacks and shorts) and 331 (gloves) — were lifted in January 2002.

According to the ministry, export of category 847 items fell by 39.31 per cent in the first three months of 2002 compared to the same period of the previous year. While the figure was US\$ 8.8 million for the period this year, it was \$14.5 million in the previous year.

However, competitors like India and China have increased their exports in the same categories significantly during the period.

India's export in category 847 increased by 32.75 per cent during the period and China's export by 37.5 per cent.

Even the emerging apparel exporters like Russia, Ukraine, Rumania and Bulgaria increased exports phenomenally in the categories, snatching away Bangladesh's market share.

Russia fetched 157.9 per cent more earnings from category 847.

Rumania's export increased by 55.65 per cent, Ukraine's by 32.55 per cent and Bulgaria's by 10 per cent.

"This is basically a signal of what we may face after the MFA phase-out in January 2005 unless we gear up our efforts for technical advancement and move to up-market products. It would be difficult to retain the market share, let alone increase it," said Professor Mustafizur Rahman, research director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) in its analysis said, "It would be difficult for us (Bangladesh) to keep the market share once the quota restriction is withdrawn from any other apparel category under the globalisation process."

However, the situation may not be the same in the case of knitwear, commented Rahman.

The story is the same for category 331. The export of category 331 items dropped by 26.86 per cent during January-March period in 2002 compared to same period in the previous year.

On the other hand, China's export of category 331 items increased 44.11 per cent during the period. But India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan saw slump in these items with a negative growth of 17.88 per cent, 20.59 per

cent and 16.4 per cent respectively.

Despite price advantage, Bangladesh is losing its market for frozen food to its competitors, the EPB said.

Export earnings from frozen shrimp to Japan — one of the major markets — dipped 53.76 per cent during July-March period in fiscal 2001-02 compared to the same period of the previous fiscal.

The country fetched \$ 9.71 million through frozen food export to Japan during the period in fiscal 2001-02 against \$ 21 million during the same period in the previous fiscal.

However, Bangladesh offers the lowest price of \$ 7.74 per kg of shrimp on average. On the other hand, Hong Kong exports each kilogram of shrimp at an average price of \$20.06, Australia at \$ 18.02, Taiwan at \$ 17.92, Pakistan at \$ 15.82, Thailand at \$ 14.38 and India at \$ 10.90.

"Price is not the factor for the Japanese consumers. They are very much quality, health conscious. So, the solution for the country's frozen food exporters is to address these issues rather than banking on low price," Rahman said.

DCC budget 20pc higher

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an increase of about 72 per cent which was the case in the last budget. Of the total development expenditure Tk 250 crore is expected from the government, Tk 171.10 crore from foreign aid, while the rest Tk 190.26 crore would be generated from the DCC's own fund.

The DCC targets to earn Tk 249.74 crore revenue during the 2002-03 fiscal.

It expects to earn Tk 17.50 crore from advance and rent, over Tk 15 crore from trade license, Tk 7 crore from cattle market, Tk 15 crore from road digging, Tk 10 crore from bus terminal and Tk 4.60 crore from transfers fees.

The corporation aims to earn Tk 2 crore from renewal of rikshaw licenses by enhancing fee of license renewal.

Khoka expressed his resolve to bring about discipline in the financial and administrative management of the corporation.

He alleged that the corporation carried out development works worth Tk 307 crore against an allocation of Tk 124.35 crore. Of the total, Tk 152 crore has already been spent while works worth Tk 155 are

ongoing.

"It is very unusual to recklessly spend such a huge fund on unnecessary works in the name of development activities," he said.

The recently elected city mayor also promised to investigate the financial irregularities in line with law. He sought cooperation from ward commissioners and officials of the corporation for successful completion of the investigation.

The DCC has enhanced the allocation for mosquito control by over 83.50 per cent to Tk 19.27 crore from Tk 10.50 crore in the fiscal 2002-03 from Tk 10.50 crore.

The mayor said the corporation would send leaflets and posters to teachers and hall provosts at schools, colleges and universities to raise awareness about the Aedes mosquito responsible for the deadly dengue fever.

He called upon the city dwellers to destroy abandoned pots at the dwelling houses in the city where Aedes mosquitoes breed.

Khoka said there are 2,100 acres of wasteland in the city and the corporation has increased three times the allocation to Tk 30 lakh for

sports and cultural activities.

Like his predecessor immediate past mayor Mohammad Hanif, Khoka proposed formation of a 'metropolitan government' to bring about dynamism, reduce hassle and enhance cooperation among the organisations engaged in the development of the city corporation.

He sought effective steps in this regard from the prime minister and the local government and rural development minister.

Replying to a question regarding the dismantling of the footovers in the city, the mayor said the corporation plans to use light steel on the existing structure of the already erected footovers.

"I have directed the engineering department of the corporation to draw necessary designs and think about using light steel structures in the footovers," Khoka said.

Replying to a newsmen's question regarding encroachment on footpaths for building markets, the mayor said he will use his office to keep the footpaths, city parks and open spaces space free from encroachment.

Flood

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said the Sathkira district administration.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre said the Brahmaputra again rose by ten centimetres at several points.

The Jamuna at Chilmari is likely to rise by another five centimetres and the Bahadurabad by six centimetres.

FBCCI

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or two.

Like the minister, Latifur Rahman was also reluctant to give details of the recommendations, on procedural grounds. But he said the government would look into the suggestions before bringing any amendment.

"Indirect election is well as per the Companies Act. It is a global practice," Rahman said, arguing that the recommendations, if implemented, will bring transparency in the trade bodies. However, neither of them could say when the amendments would be made.

Next election to the executive committee of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) is due on November 15.

Meeting sources said the committee recommended that 30 elected directors, equally from chamber group and association group, and six nominated directors would elect the president and the vice-presidents from among themselves.

The government will select three chambers and three trade associations, on the basis of their contributions to the national economy, to nominate one director each for the executive committee of FBCCI, they said.

None of the representatives from the six trade organisations will be able to compete from chamber or association groups.

As per the recommendations, if the president is elected from one group (chamber group or association group), the vice-president will be elected from the same group and the first vice-president will be elected from the other group for a two-year term. For the next term, the election process will be vice versa.

No individual will be entitled to represent more than one trade organisation in the general council of the federation.

Under the existing system, federation members directly elect their president, one vice-president and 30 directors (15 from chamber group and 15 from association group).

Awami League terms Chair 'biased', walks out

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points of order and they spoke uninterrupted although their statements were delivered in a manner similar to that of the opposition lawmakers.

In their brief speeches, the AL lawmakers tried to draw the Chair's attention to the notices they had earlier submitted with the parliament secretariat for general discussions on law and order, closure of the Adamjee Jute Mills and price spiral of essentials among other things.

Before the AL lawmakers staged the walkout, Deputy Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Abdul Hamid, who was also the acting opposition leader of the House, sought floor. But acting Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui did not allow him to speak.

As soon as the question-answer session was over, former home minister Mohammad Nasim took floor on a point of order and spoke about law and order on which he had given notice earlier.

Nasim said he had no intention to put anyone in the dock, but the parliament should have discussions on some important issues like law and order and closure of the Adamjee Jute Mills for national interest.

He alleged that the BNP-led coalition government has turned the entire country into a killing field in its

repeatedly asking him to finish and at one stage, switched off his mike.

The Chair then allowed Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, who requested the acting speaker to accept the points if those are in line with the rules of procedure.

Almost all the AL lawmakers, including the deputy opposition leader, at that time rose to their feet seeking the floor. But the Chair ignored them and went about the day's business that prompted the opposition members to stage the walk out. Agitated AL lawmakers shouted at the top of their voice and Chief Whip of the Opposition Abdus Shahid threw some papers at the Treasury Bench.

Once taking up other business of the day, the acting speaker again allowed Treasury Bench members to speak on point of order after the opposition members went outside the House.

Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and Mashirur Rahman and Shah Mohammad Ruhul Qudus of the Treasury Bench were given floor after the opposition walkout.

AL press briefing

The Awami League said that last night's walkout was in protest at repeated refusal by "a biased Speaker" to let opposition lawmak-

ers speak on public interest issues in the Jatiya Sangsad.

The AL legislators stormed out of the House at 7:53pm after the Speaker had switched off the microphones, cutting short speeches of a number of opposition lawmakers as they spoke on points of order, and also denied the deputy leader of the opposition the floor.

"They (the government) have gagged the opposition with a biased Speaker," the AL leaders later said while briefing newsmen at the Sangsad Bhawan.

A meeting of the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) would now decide whether the party lawmakers would go back to the House or not, they said.

"In absence of the Leader of the Opposition in the parliament, we expected that the Chair would at least allow me to speak when I sought floor. But he did not even allow me the floor," said Deputy Leader of the Opposition advocate Abdul Hamid.

While the Speaker did not allow "our lawmakers to speak on points of order although they mentioned specific articles of the rules of procedure, the treasury benchers spoke freestyle for unlimited time without even mentioning any articles," he added.

The former Speaker said even the promise of the leader of the House that opposition lawmakers

Export target

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than the actual performance of the last fiscal." Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury said after a meeting with leading chambers and exporters at his office yesterday.

"But industrial raw materials and capital machinery imports have increased significantly over the months, indicating that exports will go up shortly. Besides, industrial credit has also increased, which will push the exports up," CK Hyder, secretary general of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), told the meeting.

Chaired by the commerce minister, the meeting was attended by Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmed, MCCI President Tapan Chowdhury, CK Hyder, and President of the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association (BKMEA) Monjurul Hoque.

The minister said the government is making all-out efforts to explore new avenues to increase the country's exports. "Canada and Norway have already offered free access to our products. Besides, we hope our exports to Myanmar and Thailand would go up significantly as we are going to start account trade with them shortly."

The Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) will fix the sectoral targets later. The meeting also decided that the chambers and associations would review the quarterly performances and send reports to the commerce ministry.

Raising question about the present system of setting the export target, the MCCI president said only exporters know which countries have export potential for Bangladeshi products, not the EPB. "Exporters should be consulted before fixing any target for exports but it had not been done," he added.

But it is already late for the current fiscal, the meeting pointed out. It decided that the targets would be fixed after consulting with the respective associations for the next fiscal.

Tapan Chowdhury also felt that the government should create an export-friendly environment to increase the country's exports.

Monjurul Hoque underscored the removal of the present problems facing the knitwear exporters. "Whatever the export target is, the government should take measures to pay cash incentives immediately and withdraw the ban on yarn import through Benapole border," he said.

Cheney sued

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of the defendants' pervasive fraud... plaintiffs have suffered injury and damages in that they were fraudulently induced to purchase securities at artificially inflated prices and lost some or all of the actual or projected amounts and value of their investments," the suit alleges.

The plaintiffs seek "damages in the maximum amount authorized by Texas law," an amount Klayman put at "millions and millions of dollars."

The suit alleged the fraud largely resulted from Andersen's strategy "of fostering 'inventiveness' and promoting client success through value creation as measured by increased market capitalization" — instead of focusing on "more traditional roles of independent and objective accountant and auditor."

Cheney used his position atop the firm to convince other executives to implement the strategy, and even participated in a promotional video for Anderson, the suit alleges.

The lawsuit comes on the heels of a slew of corporate scandals undermining investor confidence, as well as growing scrutiny of Bush's own past as a Texas oil executive.

Klayman said Judicial Watch was considering taking action against Bush in connection with an

insider trading scandal at the now-defunct Texas-based Harken Energy Corporation.

"There are questions to be answered by the president as well," Klayman said. "We're not done; let the world go out that no one is above the law."

Klayman dismissed Bush's proposed steps to root out corporate crime as "cosmetic" and said they appeared intended "to deflect attention away from his and his vice president's own alleged improper business practices."

"These scandals show you what is going on in American politics today," added the director of the conservative watchdog, which also dogged the Clinton administration over campaign contributions and how raw FBI files of prominent conservatives ended up at the White House.

"The politicians get their hands into these companies. The companies are all too happy to put the politicians on their boards of directors and make them CEOs. They want that influence in Washington... they want Washington to look the other way."

Train turns ablaze

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rushed to the spot and cordoned off the area. Traffic movement on the Airport Road came to a halt as smokes drifted in.

Eight fire tenders from Kurmitola, Tejgaon, Tongi and the Fire Brigade headquarters reached the spot about half an hour later and doused the fire.

Train movement on the route was suspended as the track bent from the heat of the fire. It was fixed up at around 6:00pm. The other track which was not damaged opened to train movement at about 3:45pm.

The road communication from Malibagh to the airport remained suspended till 4:00pm.

Among the injured, Saiful Islam, 25, was admitted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) and Nazrul Islam, 48, a staff at the power car, Samsar, 16, and Siddiqur Rahman were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). Shamsar was in a critical condition.

Sources said over 30 people

were taken to the CMH and were given first aid treatment.

Railway officials refuted allegations of negligence to duty of the gatekeeper and said it takes about 450 yards for a speeding train to stop. The Subarna was only 50 yards off the crossing when it was signalled to brake.

They said a committee