

### Titas unionists set agenda for officers' assoc meet

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Officers' Welfare Association of Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company has called a meeting of its executive committee today in the face of growing pressure from the pro-BNP trade union in the company.

The "all-powerful" trade union in the state-owned company has "dictated" the agenda of the meeting, due to be held at 4.01pm, sources in the association said.

The agenda a fresh election to the officers' body aims at replacing the incumbent leaders with those preferred by the trade unionists, the sources said.

The two-year term of the executive committee is due to expire in July next year.

But, the pro-BNP trade union that seized "control" of the Titas trade union in October last year ousting three other union activists



Haphazard traffic in front of the city's Willes Little Flower School with no parking lot leaves vehicles in a bumper-to-bumper gridlock every day. Yesterday was no exception.

## No PSC extension for UMC, Ocean Energy

**SHAHRIAR KARIM**

Petrobangla shrugs off lobbying

The Petrobangla has rejected a proposal by two US companies -- the UMC and Ocean Energy -- to extend their production sharing contract (PSC) for block 22 in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

A PSC termination letter will soon be sent to the companies, which had failed to fulfil their minimum work commitment even getting their contract extended twice, according to official sources.

Meantime, the companies have mustered political support to lobby for the extension of their contract. They have also plans to sell their Bangladesh operation to an Indian company, GAIL, according to industry sources.

Petrobangla is still unaware of such a sell-out plan, while the UMC officials are tight-lipped. Industry insiders said as per contract the government cannot block such a sell-out once the PSC is extended.

However, a vested quarter in the energy ministry is in favour of the PSC extension, ministry sources said.

According to sources, some officials of GAIL visited Bangladesh early this year and discussed its 'planned take-over' with the UMC and Ocean Energy in case the PSC is extended, the sources said.

Earlier, British company Cairn sold out half of its concern in Bangladesh to Shell Oil amidst strict secrecy and US Company Occidental also sold its operation to an Indian company, GAIL, according to industry sources.

## Downward revision for food reserves target

**REAZ AHMAD**

The food reserve security level has been revised down to 8.5 lakh MT from 10 lakh MT.

The decision was made at an inter-ministerial meeting at the food ministry yesterday, as the food supply under the public food distribution system (PFDS) has been on the wane following a shift in some government programmes.

The shift, for instance, from the food for education (FFE) programme to the cash for education programme will give much relief to the PFDS, as the government granaries no longer need to stockpile around 2.5 lakh MT foodgrains required earlier under the FFE, sources said.

The new food reserve security level was set also in the wake of alleged irregularities in wheat procurement under the extended one lakh MT target.

The two-and-a-half-hour meeting of the food planning and monitoring committee (FPMC) with Food

Minister Abdullah Al Noman in the chair has said that the government has over 10.5 lakh MT foodgrains in reserve.

It is alleged that despite good reserve and decrease in wheat production, the government purchased an additional one lakh MT wheat besides the initial three-lakh MT target towards the end of the 135-day internal procurement drive with the July 31 deadline.

The government silos bought imported substandard wheat, when local growers exhausted their stock.

Earlier, an FPMC meeting made an upward revision of wheat procurement target, which gave birth to irregularities.

However, the food minister defended the decision saying, "The wheat procurement target was raised to save the foreign currency reserve and not to waste the forex in meeting import bills."

Agriculture Minister Motiur Rahman Nazami, State

# BAC unearths biggest ever 'tax evasion'

70 identified in Tk 570 crore scam

**RAFIQ HASAN**

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BAC) will press charge against 70 people, including a former chairman of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), for the biggest-ever tax evasion.

The BAC has already completed the investigation into the evasion of about Tk 570 crore in tax by two companies of the Akij Group -- Dhaka Tobacco and Asian Tobacco -- and is waiting for the prime ministerial approval for submission of the chargesheet, said sources.

The BAC sent two case-summaries to the Prime Minister's Office for approval, as there were some first class officials in the list. Upon approval, the chargesheet would be sent to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

It is alleged that Dhaka Tobacco evaded Tk 536.88 crore and Asian Tobacco Tk 32.05 crore in value-added tax (VAT).

Dhaka Tobacco supplied 8,251.23 million Navy and 5,500.82 million Five Star brand cigarettes to markets off-the-books to evade tax.

Asian Tobacco imported huge tobaccos and showed a less amount of

supplies to the market to evade VAT and supplementary duty.

The companies also used forged documents and money receipts for this purpose.

Of the 70 accused, 55 are customs inspectors, three former customs and VAT commissioners, a former NBR chairman and 11 directors of the two companies, including Chairman of the Akij Group Sheikh Akij Uddin.

The other accused directors of the group are Sheikh Mohiuddin, Sheikh Mominuddin, Sheikh Amin Uddin, Sheikh Afil Uddin, Sheikh Aziz Uddin, Sheikh Nasir Uddin, Sheikh Basir Uddin, Sheikh Jamal Uddin, Sheikh Jasim Uddin and Sheikh Shamim Uddin.

The three former customs and VAT commissioners are Tajul Islam, Sheikh Hafizul Kabir and Shahjad Hossain, former additional commissioner.

The BAC started investigation upon filing of two first information reports (FIRs) with Tejgaon and Tongi police stations several months ago against Dhaka Tobacco, Asian Tobacco and three tax commissioners. The FIRs were filed on the basis of the primary inquiry by a BAC team led by its Deputy Director Abdul Malek.

### Hearing on Bushra case begins

**COURT CORRESPONDENT**

The Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka, yesterday framed charges against 'top listed criminal' Kamal Pasha alias Pasha and his driver Mahbubur Rahman in the sensational Mohammadpur double murder case.

Both were produced before the court under tight security.

Judge Mollah Mostafa Kamal fixed August 27 for hearing of the case.

Two brothers- Syed Asfaq Hossain alias Jewel, 27, and Syed Mohammad Ali alias, 23, - were called out of their Noor Jahan Road residence in Mohammadpur area of the city by Pasha at about 8.00 am on May 5, 2000. Then he shot them dead at nearby Lalmatia.

The victims' father, Syed Amjad Hassain, filed a murder case with

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### Errant ex-cop on remand

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Prakriti Ranjan Chandra, a retired police officer was arrested Sunday by Detective Branch of Police and placed on a five-day remand for his alleged involvement in subversive acts.

Plainclothes police picked up Chandra from the Dhanmondi area in the early hours of Sunday. He was placed before the CMM's Court, Dhaka and taken on a five-day remand for interrogation in connection with various charges including his alleged role in worsening the law and order as well as his alleged involvement with some Marwari businessmen in swindling bank money, police said.

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### DCC suspends canal filling

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has temporarily suspended the earth filling of the Haikkar canal in the city's Mohammadpur area following the reports in The Daily Star.

In spite of that the contractor of the project and the Commissioner of Ward-46, Abu Sayed Bepari continued to fill up this natural canal at night. Over the last few days the canal have been filled with several barges of earth which must be removed to ensure the proper flow of the canal, local people said.

Commissioner Abu Sayed Bepari went on to block the passage of the canal by dumping slabs in the water under the small culvert. The Haikkar Khal is one of the last remaining and fast flowing canals in the city, which



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia plants a nim tree in Banasraya on her office premises yesterday.

### Medicinal plant garden opens at PM's office

**BSS, Dhaka**

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday inaugurated a garden of medicinal plants named "Banasraya" on the Prime Minister's office premises.

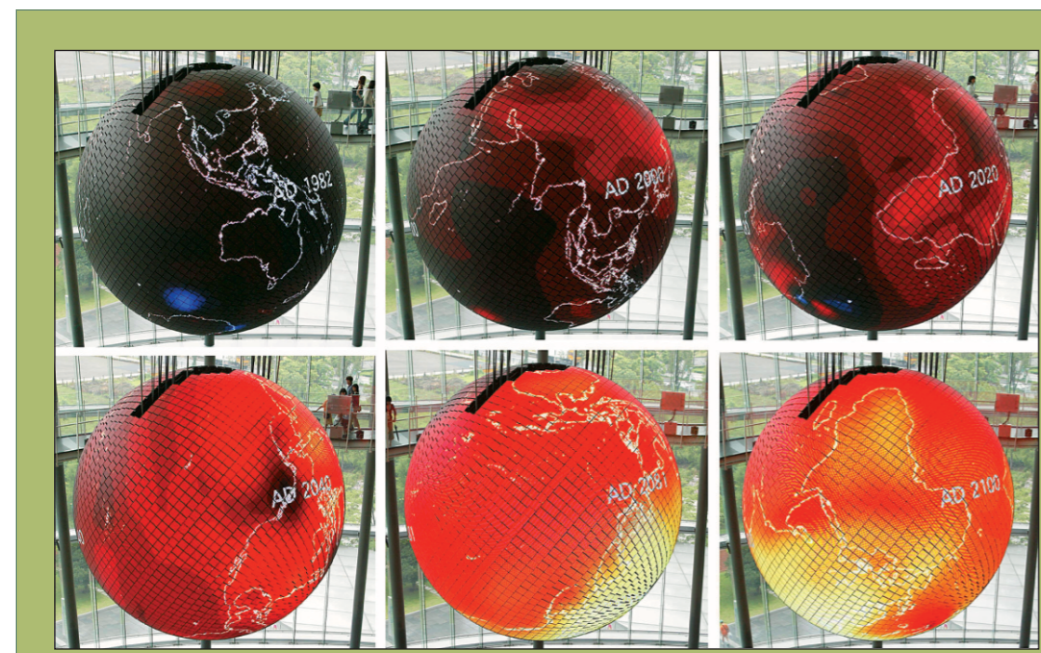
The prime minister planted three medicinal saplings in the 'Banasraya' which is 456 feet long and 66 feet wide. The saplings were: 'basak' (adhatoda zeoilanic), 'neem' (Azadirachta Indica) and 'Kalomeg' (Andrographis Paniculata).

Ministers, prime minister's advisors, secretaries and officials and employees of the prime minister's office joined in planting saplings in the new garden.

A total of 1,500 saplings of medicinal plants, shrubs and herbs of 67 species were planted in different vacant and unused land on the PM's office premises. Of them, 650 saplings were planted in the "Banasraya", organised by the department of forestry.

The idea, as broached by the Prime Minister herself, is aimed at inspiring people to plant medicinal plants across the country to avail the usefulness of herbal or "alternative medicine" to ensure people's access to medicinal plants and species.

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### Too warm for comfort

Combo photos of the Geo-Cosmos, a 6.5-metre diameter globe, showing effects of global warming from 1982 to 2100 at the MeSci (National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation) in Tokyo on Sunday. Red colour signifies a three-degree increase in the temperature of the air just above the surface from its level in 1990, while black represents no change. Nearly all the globe becomes red when the simulation reaches the year 2100.

## BNP UP chairman blamed for Pran plant closure

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The first project taken up with the government's much-talked-about Equity and Entrepreneurship Fund - Pran Agro Ltd - has been thrown into a state of total uncertainty as threats and attacks on its officials and workers by a section of ruling party men continued without any action in this regard, the factory management alleged.

They said officials and workers of the factory - located in Ekdla area of Natore Sadar - were threatened not to join work if the project management did not agree to provide financial and other benefits to men of local BNP leader and Tebaria Union Parishad Chairman Golam Sarwar. He has the backing of some BNP high ups from the area, they feel.

"The factory started trial production recently and was scheduled to go into commercial production soon. The local administration is

yet to take any action against the accused despite filing of cases against them," managing director of Pran Group of companies Major Gen (retd) Amjad Khan Chowdhury told a press conference at the Jatiya

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Aug 20		6-29 pm
Aug 21	5-35 am	

Prayer Timings		
August 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-30	5-00
Zahr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-34	6-39
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation