

Trade ministers from LDCs meet today

# Free access of goods high on agenda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Trade ministers and officials from 38 least developed countries (LDCs) begin a three-day meeting in Dhaka today to set common agenda in the run-up to the WTO ministerial meeting in Mexico in September.

Among the LDCs, 23 are represented by their ministers to make it their largest such gathering in 10 years, officials said. Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will address the closing session of the meeting that will make a "Dhaka Declaration".

Market-related issues such as duty- and quota-free access of goods from the LDCs to developed

countries will figure high on the agenda at the meeting, beginning at 9.00am at Sonargaon Hotel.

"The meeting is expected to forge a common position of LDCs on the WTO (World Trade Organisation) issues and international trades," Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

The LDCs will call for lifting of restrictions on temporary movement of 'natural persons', moratorium on imposition of anti-dumping and countervailing duties on products from the LDCs by developed countries.

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Civil society to put forward 13-pt demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The outstanding implementation issues in favour of LDCs should be resolved at the Cancun conference, an international civil society forum demanded yesterday.

Free access to markets will not be meaningful if LDCs are required to compete with the treasuries of the richest countries, the forum said in a declaration at the end of the two-day meeting on 'Advancing LDCs'.

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# 'Godfathers' resurfacing to grab AL party posts

REAZ AHMAD

The prospect of a political comeback by some Awami League (AL) leaders having 'godfather' image is now haunting the main opposition party as it plans to restructure some of its key units prior to launching a movement for snap polls.

Twenty months after its debacle in the October 2001 parliamentary polls, the AL is going to form fresh

committees of some of the most important units through holding councils next month. These include Dhaka city, Narayanganj city (organisaational) and Narayanganj district units.

Against this backdrop, the 'godfathers' are now surfacing again to clinch vital party positions.

Senior AL leaders told The Daily Star yesterday that party chief Sheikh Hasina, who is now on a trip to US and Europe, had already made it clear that she wanted to see 'clean people' in the leadership of party units.

But the reality, party sources noted, is that people having highly dubious political past are now out to manipulate the councils of Dhaka city, Narayanganj city and district units of the party in their favour.

Shamim Osman, an ex-MP and AL leader of Narayanganj, who left the country after the AL's polls debacle and remained quiet politically all these months, is now trying to make room in party politics there.

Last week, Osman gave an interview to the local press by making phone calls from New York and some of his old associates have become active again to launch a campaign so that he gets a position in the new party committee in Narayanganj.

Similarly, former minister and incumbent General Secretary of Dhaka city AL Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, who had earned condemnation from party men and others for alleged criminal activities of his son Dipu, is now desperately trying to secure the top post of the city unit.

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## Toxic threat shadows gastronomic delight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A highly toxic chemical smuggled from India is being widely used for artificially ripening and maturing fruits and vegetables, posing serious health hazards.

Experts said the chemical

with the brand name Ethrel 39SL contains chloroethyl phosphonic acid and is a 'plant growth regulator'. If swallowed, it can cause 'chemical poisoning' with no antidote.

The label on the plastic bottle

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PHOTO: STAR

Look is sometimes deceptive. Ripe papayas may contain deadly toxic substances, widely used for maturing fruits and vegetables.

# Education budget curves down, standard nosedives

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Education budget has been on a decreasing curve since independence of Bangladesh.

The allocation for education slid to 16 per cent in the current fiscal 2002-03, down from 21.14 per cent in 1972-73.

Education accounted for Tk 6,871 crore out of Tk 44,854 crore in the current fiscal. But the allocation was reduced substantially in the revised annual development programme, sources said.

However, the allocation for the fiscal 2002-03 was a little higher than 15.71 per cent in 2001-02.

In the fiscal 1972-73, the allocation for education was Tk 45.06 crore (21.14 per cent) out of Tk 213.11 crore.

Teachers' salaries and infrastructure gobble up a big chunk of educational spending and the expenditure is not enough to raise the standard of education, say experts.

The sector had the lowest allo-

cation of 11.13 per cent or Tk 1,494.23 crore out of Tk 13,431.24 crore in the fiscal 1990-91 during the rule of HM Ershad.

The budget for education was 12.76 per cent or Tk 98.21 crore out of Tk 769.31 crore in the fiscal 1976-77 during the rule of late president Ziaur Rahman.

Although the government claims to allocate the highest budget to education, the part of the amount is spent on religious affairs -- infrastructure for mosques and mosque- and temple-based librar-

ies, experts said.

Moreover, a huge amount of funds is channelled to defence education, depriving the mainstream education, said Professor Anu Muhammad of the economics department, Jahangirnagar University.

The allocation did not increase in comparison with the number of students and institutions, says another expert. Although the sector

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PHOTO: AKM MOHSIN

Hassle-free travel through the Sylhet-Fenchuganj-Moulvibazar road seems not to be in near future as construction of two vertical pillars and girders of the Tk 31 crore bridge on the Kushiara river has not yet been completed.

Fresh bid to push in 42 foiled in Panchagarh

BSS, Panchagarh

The Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and frontier villagers foiled a push-in attempt by the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on Atoari border in Panchagarh district in the early hours of Thursday.

Forty-two Bangla-speaking Indian citizens including women and children were pushed back into India within 40 minutes of their expulsion by the BSF into Bangladesh territory through the Ramzanpara border, sources at the BDR's Giragaon Company headquarters said yesterday.

People in the border areas are now deeply apprehensive that the BSF will start staging the inhuman push-in drama across the north-western border like it did during January through March this year.

Hundreds of Bangla-speaking Indians have reportedly been assembled in small and large groups in the bordering Indian villages at different points along the northwestern border.

The BSF are frequently moving these groups from one point to another especially at the dead of night in an effort to push them into Bangladesh, residents of the frontier areas alleged.

A similar BSF attempt to push in 62 Indian nationals through the same border point was foiled last Saturday, BDR sources and frontier people of Panchagarh border areas said.

JCD, Jubo Dal men attack AL office in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Jubo Dal attacked the district Awami League (AL) office yesterday, leaving a party leader and four activists injured.

Sources said about 100 JCD and Jubo Dal workers made the attack when a party meeting of was going on. Those injured included Organising Secretary of the district AL Talukder Mohammad Yunus.

Kotwali police rescued Yunus and took him to the police station.

AL sources alleged that Yunus was arrested under pressure from local BNP leaders.

The officer-in-charge of the Kotwali Police Station however declined to say whether he was arrested.

# Robberies send city dwellers on nerves

Siddheswari case handed over to DB

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A sense of serious insecurity dogs city dwellers, as law enforcers have failed to check robbery and burglary, let alone arresting culprits.

Although police claim that they have mounted patrol and kept their forces on alert, people do not feel relieved as crime rate shoots up every passing day.

Meanwhile, detectives were

yesterday assigned to investigate Tuesday's robbery on a Siddheswari apartment, the latest in a series of incidents that sent a wave of fear among Dhaka residents. Police picked up three guards of the building for questioning.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) now plans to transfer all sensational robbery cases to detectives.

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AL leader shot in N'ganj

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

An Awami League leader was shot and critically injured by unidentified gunmen at Mandanpur under Bandar police station here Thursday night.

The victim Jasimuddin, 40, secretary for agricultural affairs of Bandar thana unit of Awami League, was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital with a bullet in the chest.

Sources said Jasimuddin was waiting for a Dhaka-bound bus in Madanpur bus stand on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at about 7:30pm when a group of men in an autorickshaw fired three rounds of bullets on him.