

JS body for speedy trial

FROM PAGE 12

sub-committee headed by former state minister for land Kabir Hossain to make a draft bill for exchanging land between Bangladesh and India. The sub-committee is to submit its draft in 30 days.

Commenting on the meeting's outcome, Mahbubur Rahman said, "The Ministry of Land agreed with all the recommendations of the parliamentary committee. The minister and the secretary of the ministry supported the decisions."

Earlier, on December 28, Mahbubur Rahman at a press briefing at his office at the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) Bhavan gave details of a report, based on information gathered by the JS body from the land ministry and authorities concerned. He said the government land constituted about 10 lakh acres of state land, six lakh acres of vested property and two lakh acres of abandoned property.

Of that, eight lakh acres of land worth Tk 70,000 - 80,000 crore are occupied by grabbers when the government controlled only four lakh acres. The rest six lakh acres of land still remain unused and ungoverned, he said.

Considering the dismal situation, the parliamentary body yesterday recommended to the government for taking up an initiative to amend the Speedy Trial Act in order to pave the way for trying the land grabbers in the speedy trial courts. "We asked the ministry to take steps to amend the Speedy Trial Act in the coming session of the Jatiya Sangsad on January 18," the committee chairman said.

The deputy collectors and magistrates were also asked to evict illegal occupants and establishments from the state lands and vested and abandoned property. For this, the committee emphasised using the Special Powers Act and criminal legal procedure instead of civil legal procedure against the land grabbers.

The parliamentary body also recommended to the government to take measures for returning the lands under different ministries and departments to the land ministry after fulfilling the former's demands. The meeting maintained that other ministries or departments were not entitled to lease out public lands.

Hasina visits Benin plane crash victim's house

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday visited the house of Warrant Officer Shafiqul Islam killed in the Benin plane crash along with 14 other Bangladesh Army officers.

Shafiqul's mother, sister, wife and children broke in tears to see the former prime minister at their house at Hatkhola in the city.

The Awami League chief tried to console the bereaved family and asked them to have patience. She also prayed for the army officers killed in the tragic accident.

Hasina later visited the house of late Ziauddin Ahmed Poltu, president of the AL ward No. 81 unit. She stayed some time with his family and prayed for the departed.

Party leaders lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Major General (ret) AMSA Amin, Major General (ret) Subid Ali Bhuiyan and Sayeed Khokon accompanied her.

Saddam's WMDs may never be found: Blair

AFP, London

British Prime Minister Tony Blair suggested yesterday that Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction may never be found in Iraq.

"In a land mass twice the size of the UK it may well not be surprising you don't find where this stuff is hidden", Blair told BBC television.

The prime minister, US President George W. Bush's staunch ally in the war against Saddam, added: "You can't be definitive at the moment about what has happened."

Asked if he had been wrong in highlighting the threat of weapons of mass destruction, whose pursuit by Saddam was cited as a main justification for the war launched in March, Blair replied: "You can't say that at this point in time."

"What you can say is that we

received that intelligence about Saddam's programmes and about his weapons, that we acted on that."

"But I don't know is the answer."

Blair again insisted the US-led Iraq Survey Group scouring Iraq had already uncovered evidence of secret weapons programmes.

Paul Bremer, the US official charged with running Iraq, last month rejected Blair's claim that the group had unearthed "massive evidence of a huge system of clandestine laboratories".

However, Blair said Sunday: "What they have found already is a whole raft of evidence about clandestine operations that should have been disclosed to the United Nations, a network."

"You are entitled to ask, 'What was the point of having all these elaborate concealment mechanisms if there was nothing to conceal?'"

CNG 3-wheeler 'scam'

FROM PAGE 1

"For the sake of natural justice, the complainant can never be the investigator," he told committee Chairman Syed Monjur Hossain, mentioning that he has serious reservations about some decisions taken on January 7 by the committee that formed a probe body.

The minister said committee members Advocate Nadim Mostafa MP and Ataur Rahman Khan MP, who had alleged sleaze in the sale of CNG autorickshaws, were made investigators that natural justice does not permit.

"It was very surprising that Nadim Mostafa was made convenor of the inquiry committee and another complainant, Ataur Rahman Khan, member. It's not acceptable under the purview of the law," said Huda, who by profession is a lawyer.

Besides, he said, the two members are also party to it as both in the meeting had mentioned that they were involved in procuring CNG three-wheelers. He requested the standing committee chairman to ensure a proper inquiry by neutral investigators.

On the allotment of ministry's land for CNG-refuelling station, Huda wrote that the state minister for communications alone is responsible for the matter. "He (state minister) can reply to any allegation or query in this regard."

For the sake of accountability, he suggested that the state minister for communications (Salahuddin Ahmed) can be called by the parliamentary body.

The minister in the letter also elaborated on the background of introduction of CNG autorickshaws for pollution-free environment.

Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 1

utility bills, Tk 20 on land registration for every Tk 20,000 and Tk 20 on driving licence.

The ministry said the measures would pool funds for the crucial bridge.

PSI scrap

FROM PAGE 1

scheme is no longer needed as the customs authorities have developed valuation data-base and that they can now obtain transaction prices from the internet, they said.

Such an idea is misleading as the customs' present valuation database is based on the Clean Report Finding (CRF) data provided by the PSI companies.

If the PSI scheme is scrapped, such data will not be forthcoming and the present database of the customs will become obsolete within three months of discontinuation of the scheme, they stated.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Abdul Awal Minto, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Kutubuddin Ahmed, Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Mahubul Islam, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association President Quazi Moniruzzaman, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Fazle RM Hasan, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury, Bangladesh Textile Mills Association President MA Awal and Bangladesh Aushad Shilpa Samity President SM Shafiqul Islam signed the statement.

It is true that there were some anomalies in the first scheme of the PSI, for which it has been misused in some cases but these have been overcome in the second scheme, which should help yield increased revenue to the exchequer, the business leaders observed.

The recent announcement also contradicts an earlier government decision to continue with the PSI scheme which was taken in line with the recommendations made by a

He said 55,000 two-stroke three-wheelers were phased out from the capital and 10,000 environment-friendly CNG three-wheelers introduced. The limit to the number of CNG vehicles was made as per capacity of the city in order to overcome traffic congestion.

"Anyone with the permission of the commerce ministry is free to import 10,000 CNG three-wheelers for the capital and any number of the four-stroke three-wheelers for elsewhere in the country," he said.

In this era of free market economy, he noted, government does not fix price -- it is determined by demand.

Telenor CEO

FROM PAGE 12

and are expected to leave for Bangkok on Tuesday, says a press release.

Telenor that owns 51 percent share in GrameenPhone has a stake in cellphone business in three South and Southeast Asian countries -- Bangladesh, Malaysia and Thailand.

An international telephony and communications group, headquartered in the Norwegian capital of Oslo, Telenor operates in the Nordic region.

It is the leading telecoms company in Norway and one of the largest companies listed with Oslo Stock Exchange with an annual turnover of NOK 48.7 billion in 2002.

Telenor is also listed with Nasdaq (National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotation System).

Telenor has an extensive international company portfolio, with the largest operations in cellphone communication via companies in 12 countries in Europe and Southeast Asia with more than 30 million customers, and is the leading satellite broadcaster in the Nordic region.

Telenor is also the world's third largest provider of satellite services via Innmarsat system and one of the leading television distributors in the Nordic region.

committee consisting of the representatives of trade and industry and headed by the member (Customs) of the National Board of Revenue (NBR), they said.

The business leaders mentioned that the GAIT (general agreement on tariff and trade) valuation rules require that any price information should be current, for which the government issued the statutory regulatory order in 2002 stating that price information cannot be related to any period beyond 90 days.

Secondly, the internet sites do not provide transaction data. Any data to be used for price analysis have to be obtained from paid sites and it requires expertise which the Bangladesh authorities reportedly do not have at this time, they argued.

It will not be helpful to the economy, which is under pressure to be more and more competitive in the prevailing globalisation process. In all likelihood, it will also cause loss of revenue for the government, the business leaders warned.

The overall growth of the NBR-collected revenue in the pre-PSI period was 3.09 percent and it is 8.18 percent in the post-PSI period. This achievement is all the more remarkable as there have been significant reductions in the rates of customs duties and composition of import basket in the recent years, they said.

PSI has thus protected and, in fact, helped enhance the government's revenue, which is acknowledged by the NBR in the letter of invitation for the recent PSI tender, the statement added.

Moreover, the PSI scheme service charges turned out to be a substantial source of revenue for the government. The PSI service charges which are paid by the importers yield about Tk 45 crore a year as surplus, it said.

Lawyers' body formed to back B Chy

UNB, Dhaka

Supreme Court lawyers have formed an 81-member committee to extend support to former president Badruddoza Chowdhury's vision of alternative politics.

Syed Matilul Islam Mantu has been made convenor of the new forum, Bikalpadhara Supreme Court Lawyers Committee, with Mustafizur Rahman as its member-secretary.

The committee was formed at a meeting at the Bar Hall on Saturday afternoon in the presence of a large number of lawyers, says a press release.

The meeting in a resolution expressed solidarity with Dr Badruddoza in his political ideas of freeing the nation from crime and corruption.

Another resolution said the 81-member committee was formed to extend the fullest support to his alternative stream of politics.

Mizanur Rahman, M Anwaruzzaman, Mofizul Islam, Moshfequddin Bakhtiar, Dr Tareq MR Chowdhury, Qamrul Islam and Fariduddin Ahmed are joint convenors of the committee.

The meeting urged all district bar associations to form similar committees to extend support to the former president.

5 more districts

FROM PAGE 12

Canada at the reduced rate from Saturday.

The BTB knocked down its overseas call charge for land telephone owners to Tk 7.5 a minute from December 30, initially for the capital's callers.

Rate for calls over cellphone to USA, Canada and Malaysia will also be Tk 7.5, but charges for call over both cell and fixed phones to Australia and the UK will be Tk 7.50 and Tk 18 a minute.

"The newly introduced call rates are expected to be expanded throughout the country within next three months," a BTB announcement said Sunday.

To make a call at the reduced rate, the subscribers have to dial access code 012 and then country code, area code and telephone number.

The country code of both the USA and Canada is 1 while for UK it is 44, Australia 61 and Malaysia 603. Call can be made from phones having both ISD and NWD facilities. Moreover, overseas call can be made in direct dialling system, meaning one need not call the operator for booking.

To avoid entertaining illegal calls, users should lock their telephones through a code and instructions for locking and unlocking phones can be found overleaf of the telephone bill.

Stretched

FROM PAGE 1

life is that the progresses in medical science have increased people's life expectancy. Therefore, people no longer need to retire at 57, as they still remain fit at that age.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman chaired the committee meeting yesterday which also discussed decentralisation of administration, scrapping of the Official Secrets Act and ways to speed up the decision making process.

The cabinet committee has asked a secretary-level committee on administration reforms, headed by Cabinet Secretary Saadat Husain, to submit its recommendations on these issues by end-February.

Discussing the agenda of decentralisation of administration, the meeting considered possibilities of decentralisation at geographical as well as tier levels. Explaining, a high official of the Cabinet Division told the press, "We are considering decentralisation division- or location-wise. For instance, Chittagong divisional administration may be bestowed with certain degrees of powers that it doesn't hold at present. The other consideration is to diffuse and delegate authority and power among the lower administrative tiers."

The meeting also discussed changes in all government forms through incorporating new formats. After the meeting, Saifur told journalists, "We have discussed ways to bring more transparency, accountability and mobility in the administration."

PM asks cops

FROM PAGE 1

Police Week 2004. A total of 122 SPs, including six women police supers, attended the meet.

The PM expressed her satisfaction seeing the women police supers and assured that female cops would be given more responsible jobs.

Referring to the new uniform of varied colours for different disciplines of the police force, the PM said she intends to see a new police for the new century and new millennium.

"Not only the change of dress, the police force will have to go for overall change of its image, as an aide and friend of the people," she said.

She also appreciated the performance of police in the last two years.

Khaleda asked them to take stern action against anyone involved in terrorism and criminal

activities without any fear and hesitation. "None shall be spared," she told the police officers.

She also asked the police to ensure fast and fair investigations for quick disposal of cases but warned them to be careful so that innocent people are not harassed.

She listed various activities for the improvement of police force and facilities to improve their lifestyle, such as police recruitment, arming them with modern equipment, new vehicles, providing standard training and ongoing construction of three 20-storied buildings in Dhaka for housing.

Home Minister Altf Hossain Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babor, PM's political secretaries Harris Chowdhury and Mohammad Maksud Ali, IGP Shahudul Haque and other senior police officers were also present.

They pledged to carry out the instructions of the prime minister.

AL to join JS

FROM PAGE 12

framing of Awami League leaders, including lawmakers, and workers in false cases."

On the ruling BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's recent offer for the speaker-mediated or direct talks to resolve parliamentary standoff, Hamid said, "Discussions will not be necessary, if the ruling party meets our demands."

He questioned Bhuiyan's authority on meeting the AL demands but said he would make him aware of AL's position on the Jatiya Sangsad boycott.

The AL presidium member, Suranjit Sengupta, echoed his voice.

"We have seen the coalition's two and a half years in office, but no important issues like crime, rape, killing and law and order downside were discussed in parliament," Suranjit said.

Dubbing BNP's election office, Hawa Baban, as a symbol of cor-

ruption, Suranjit said the government wanted to use to disband such centres to make parliament functional.

The AL lawmakers walked out of the eighth session of the eighth parliament, over the switching-off of the leader of the opposition's microphone by Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui.

The ninth and 10th sessions of the House also went through AL's boycott.

The AL demanded an apology from Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for declaring a non-MP BNP newcomer, Shah Mohammed Abu Zafar, a de facto lawmaker in Faridpur.

It also demanded apologies from Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar for his comment that parliament runs smoothly without the opposition and from State Minister for Public Works Alamgir Kabir for using derogatory words against Hasina in the House.

Sustainable high cropping

FROM PAGE 12

threat to farm sustainability in Bangladesh and stressed replenishing the fertility level with organic materials instead of applying too much of chemical fertilisers.

Crop diversification is a fitting solution to the problem of agricultural sustainability in Bangladesh, the expert noted.

The agrarian economy of Bangladesh badly needs more international assistance for the farm sector. So, the Planning Commission should put agricultural projects top on agendas while seeking aids from bilateral or multilateral donors, he thought.

Iwanaga, who previously served in important capacities in Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical and International Potato Centre, was speaking to The Daily Star on Thursday at CIMMYT's regional office in Dhaka at the end of his four-day official visit to Bangladesh.

Headquartered in Mexico, the CIMMYT is one of the 16 apex centres of agricultural research run by the Washington-based Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Other commonly known CGIAR centres include International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), International Food Policy and Research Institute (IFPRI) and International Potato Centre (CIP).

"Bangladesh is unique in the world in terms of population density. The number of small-hold farmers is too many here for obvious reasons of land fragmentation and poverty. The situation will worsen if per unit yield is not enhanced keeping the farming sustainable at the same time," he observed.

Iwanaga suggested that Bangladesh farmers should go for cash crops like potato instead of cereals only.

Referring to the dietary pattern of the Bangladeshis and Japanese, Iwanaga, who is from Japan, said, "In 1951, Japan was one of the poorest countries in Asia. The Japanese used to consume 130 kilograms of rice per person per year. Today we're one of the most buoyant economies in the world and an average Japanese eats only 65 kilogram of rice a year."

He pointed out that Bangladeshis consume 150 kilogram of rice per person per year.

Ramos supports Dhaka-Manila academic link

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed yesterday emphasised the need for exchange programme for university teachers and students between Bangladesh and the Philippines Fidel V Ramos, former president of the Philippines, called on him at Bangabhaban.

"To ensure public welfare, sharing of knowledge and ideas is essential in today's world," Iajuddin told the visiting former president, said a Bangabhaban press release. Supporting Iajuddin's proposal, Ramos said any linkage programme between Bangladeshi and Filipino academics and students would surely benefit both countries.

The president also hoped the relations between Bangladesh and the Philippines would be strengthened.

Lauding the success of micro-credit programmes in Bangladesh for poverty alleviation, Ramos said his country has adopted Grameen Bank's concept for its rural areas for socio-economic development.

Jose Lin B Guerrero, Filipino ambassador to Bangladesh, and Dr Carmen Z Lamagna, vice-chancellor of American International University, Bangladesh, were also present during the meeting.

Charges framed in Rumi murder case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal, Khulna yesterday framed charges against four accused in the Rumi murder case.

Judge Mohammad Shahinour Islam framed charges against Sajjad Hossain Roy, Hasan, Taimur Rahman and Mizanur Rahman for their alleged involvement in the crime, sources said.

Trial in the case would start on Wednesday, they added.

Earlier, the case was shifted from the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

On April 14 last year, college girl Farzana Afreen Rumi, 22, hanged herself from a ceiling fan at their residence at Pabla under Daulatpur Police Station when the accused allegedly attempted to rape her.

'Mobile' Kader's petition rejected

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday summarily rejected the petition of 'Mobile' Kader who stands accused of murder in the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

He sought to transfer the case to another court, alleging bias of the trial court, but Attorney General AF Hassan Arif submitted that the petitioner failed to give sufficient grounds for transfer of his case.

The HC division bench of Justice Mohammad Awlad Ali and Justice Abdul Awal passed the order following submissions of both sides.

Earlier, the court had dismissed the prayer for stay of proceedings of the trial court.

Mobile Kader is on bail by the HC in the murder of Maulana Abdul Kader, gunned down in Dhaka in October 2001.

On transfer of the case to the tribunal, the trial is now nearing completion with deposition of 15 prosecution witnesses.

Advocate Mahbubur Rahman appeared for the petitioner.

Eco-park

FROM PAGE 1

Development Project in the 3,000-acre heart of the sal forest, sparking angry protest from indigenous people who live in the forest for ages and fear the project will destroy their peace.

Hamid came down heavily on the government policy of development which he said was characterised by killing people who protest.

"The government took the indigenous people's protest as a flimsy excuse and wanted to silence them at the barrel of gun," he added.

"Now the forest guards and police are framing innocent ethnic minority in false cases in a fresh wave of harassment," he alleged.

Hamid asked the government to drop the charges or not to follow the cases filed against the indigenous people in the wake of Piren's killing.

He demanded allocation of the lands, enjoyed by indigenous people for generations, among themselves.

Bhola said any development scheme in the area should be taken in consultation with the ethnic Garo or Koch people.

Promod, lone lawmakers from the Garo community, said repression on the community began before independence by the Pakistani regime and peaked after the promulgation of the Special Atia Forest Ordinance.

He said Garos lived in the area for ages and paid taxes to the Zamindars, but the Pakistani government stopped taking taxes from them in 1952-53.

Since then the people of the community are living under the shadow of land insecurity, he said.

Hamid asked the government to form a high-powered committee to resolve the land disputes in the areas inhabited by indigenous people.

Ahmadiyya book ban

FROM PAGE 1

satellite television channels, under a guideline with a motive to control them.

"In this era, the media cannot be controlled," she said, adding, "The move brought to light the government's autocratic face."

On the ban on Ahmadiyya publications, she said if there were anything to ban they were the publications of Moududi, ideologist of the Jamaat-e-Islami. "There are many derogatory remarks against our prophet Mohammad (SM) in Moududi's books," she claimed.

She accused the coalition government of encouraging religious fanatics through the decision.

She asked the religious zealots, campaigning for declaration of the Ahmadiyya sect as non-Muslim, to stand by the oppressed Palestinian Muslims.

"If you have any good will, then go to Palestine and save Muslims from Israeli persecution," she said.

The AL chief said her party believed in secularism and in people's rights to freedom of expression.

She termed her party's charter of 15 demands as 'demand of time' and urged all to join hands to achieve the objectives.

Focussing on her party's plan, she said the AL would reorganise the party and go for an all-out movement against the government simultaneously.

Editor of the Daily Jangtor Golam Sarwar, The Bangladesh Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan

Chowdhury and acting Editor of the Daily Ittefaq Rahat Khan also spoke on the occasion.

Senior journalists Habibur Rhaman Milon, Haroon Habib, Swapan Saha, Shafiqul Kabir, Azizul Islam Bhuiyan, Ashraf Ali, Abeer Hasan, Akhter Ahmed, Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan, Noim Nizam and Shyamol Sarker also took part in discussion, among others.

Editor of the Daily Sangbad Bazlur Rahman, Editor of the Independent Mahbulul Alam, Chief News Editor of ATN Bangla Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul and senior AL leaders were present.

1,200 Mongla

FROM PAGE 1

from the finance ministry that the money would be released very soon," Shipping Secretary Zulfikar Haider Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday.

Currently, there are some 3,700 registered workers under dock management board at the country's second seaport.

After the golden handshake, the remaining 2,500 would handle the existing volume of goods at the port, he observed.