

ANTI-GRAFT BODY JS committee blanks again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry yesterday discussed the proposed bill to set up an independent anti-corruption commission but took no decision.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed had earlier said the bill would be passed in the Jatiya Sangsad session that begins today.

"We discussed the bill and we will sit again on January 24 or 25 to discuss it further," Chairman of the committee Khandaker Mahbub Uddin Ahmed said.

The Jatiya Sangsad has extended

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Podium of protest erected at Khulna

STAR REPORT

A Pratibad Mancha (a podium to protest) has been erected at the spot where journalist Manik Chandra Saha was killed in a bomb attack here on Thursday with a call to top political figures to announce from the Mancha their commitments to take steps to stop killing of journalists and punish the killers of Manik.

The local press community, including editors of newspapers,

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ICC-B conference calls for trade talks restart

STAR REPORT

A high profile international business conference began in the city yesterday with a call to resume the stalled Cancun trade talks in a transparent and inclusive manner that enables the poorer economies to benefit from the multilateral trading system.

Inaugurating the conference as chief guest, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said multilateralism must be made to work for the good of all.

Observing that opening up to international trade has empowered many countries to accelerate their growth which they would have missed otherwise, Khaleda said: "However, it is also a fact that developing countries like ours gain less from trade than developed countries do. The Cancun may be considered a setback, but we still have opportunity to turn things around."

Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra made the keynote speech at the inaugural ceremony of the two-day conference on Global Economic Governance and Challenges of Multilateralism, organised by International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B) at the Bangladesh-China

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks to her Thai counterpart Thaksin Shinawatra at the launch of International Business Conference at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

RELAXED RULES OF ORIGIN

EU may consider option from March: Lamy

REHAUL KARIM BYRON

European Union (EU) Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy yesterday said his organisation will start weighing options to relax the rules of origin from March to facilitate the least developed countries (LDCs) benefit more from exports to common European market.

He acknowledged Bangladesh's concern over the inflexibility of the rules of origin, which leave the LDCs in a difficult position to derive trade benefit from the EU under the 'everything but arms' marketing facility, a duty- and quota-free system introduced last year.

Lamy told Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury in a meeting at the Secretariat yesterday that relaxation of the rules of origin will be considered and greater business opportunities will follow to boost the LDC economy in the post-MFA (Multi-Fibre Agreement) period.

The evaluation will be complete and followed with necessary directions, commerce ministry sources present at the meeting told The Daily Star.

Lamy was also curious to know how Bangladesh can cash in on the generalised system of preference



Pascal Lamy

(GSP) facilities.

"We can include you in the GSP, but what guarantee can you give us that you would be able to utilise it?" Lamy asked the commerce ministry officials.

The EU would also ensure that except for the LDCs no other country gets the GSP facility, he said.

The commerce ministry meanwhile discussed the proposal for reserving 30 percent of the EU import for the LDCs.

The commissioner spent a hectic morning before participating at the conference of the International Chamber of Commerce. In the morning, he met

leaders from the Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the commerce minister and then took part in a question-answer session organised by the Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute (BFTI).

In the FICCI meeting, foreign investors, mostly from the EU, vented their frustrations over the investment climate in Bangladesh.

Most investors observed that the state of law and order is dismal and that corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks severely impede their business operations. Some investors also alleged they have to spend 1 percent of their investment in kickbacks to run businesses.

Emerging from the meeting, FICCI President Mahbub Jamil told The Daily Star, "The pros and cons of investment climate in the country was discussed in the meeting, but no specific issue was brought up."

Later, Lamy told journalists, "Investors from the EU identified some problems in Bangladesh's investment climate. These problems have to be dealt with in order to increase foreign direct investment."

The trade commissioner brought

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MANIK MURDER

Family feels insecure, no headway in probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police have made little progress in uncovering the motive for the killing of prominent journalist Manik Saha and hunting down his killers despite raging torrents of protest against the killing and demands for exemplary punishment to the perpetrators.

"We are still in dark about the killing," a top police officer told The Daily Star yesterday, hours before the victim's family told the BBC Radio that it decided not to file any case because of profound insecurity.

"We're living under the shadow of insecurity after my elder brother's death within 50 yards of the press club in daylight. We demand justice, but if we file a case, who will provide us with security," said Prodip Saha, brother of Manik, senior staff correspondent of the New Age.

"I discussed the filing of case with my father, mother, uncle and aunt, and they all asked me not to file one."

Fifty-year-old Manik, also a BBC stringer, was heading home by rickshaw from Khulna Press Club when a hand bomb blew his head off on Mirzapur Road, sending shock waves among people across Bangladesh.

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Hartal enforced in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The day-long hartal enforced by Khulna journalists protesting the murder of their colleague Manik Saha passed off peacefully in the city yesterday.

The city wore a deserted look throughout the day as no vehicles or rickshaws plied the streets. Production remained suspended in mills and factories. No shop opened for business. Transactions stopped in all state-owned and private financial institutions. Academic institutions were closed. Rivercraft did not ply although trains ran from Khulna on time. Life came to a standstill.

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Noab condemns Manik Saha's murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Newspapers Owners Association of Bangladesh (Noab) has strongly condemned the killing of journalist Manik Saha in Khulna on Thursday.

In a statement yesterday, Noab said: "The brutal killing of Manik Saha, a journalist in the southwestern district of Khulna, was a horrendous crime aimed at suppressing and intimidating the free press. We,

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WORLD SOCIAL SUMMIT

Activists call for actions against US companies

AFP, Mumbai

The anti-globalisation movement was weighing its tone yesterday as its annual strategy meeting got underway with calls for action against US companies and appeals to find a new and more militant means of protest.

An estimated 100,000 activists crammed into an exhibition grounds off a Mumbai highway, with dozens of colorful demonstrations pushing their way over a pavement littered with flares for causes from all continents.

The most common cause at the World Social Forum, however, was opposition to US President George W. Bush, whose portrait was depicted across the wooded venue in assorted states of defacement.

Arundhati Roy, the Indian novelist and political essayist, launched the forum late Friday with a call for activists to select two US companies associated with the Iraq war and

launch a worldwide campaign to shut them down.

The World Social Forum is designed as a counterweight to the World Economic Forum of business and political leaders in Davos, Switzerland, which is due to open as the Mumbai meet closes Wednesday.

It is the fourth World Social Forum but the first to be held outside Brazil.

On Saturday, a small band of leftists opened the Mumbai Resistance, an alternative to the World Social Forum, which they said had failed to stop the United States from going to war to depose Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein.

"The WSF must take a clear position against the Americans and support the Islamist resistance in Iraq," said Tirina Vana, a 22-year-old Austrian selling the latest issue of the magazine Soviet at the Mumbai Resistance grounds.

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101 more items to get Thai tariff concession

Thaksin tells Khaleda during talks

BSS, Dhaka

Trade concession offered early last year by Thai government on 128 Bangladeshi items will come into force very soon.

"Our cabinet has finally com-

pleted the procedure to implement zero to five percent tariff concession soon," Thai Premier Dr Thaksin Shinawatra told Prime Minister Khaleda Zia during a meeting between the two Asian leaders in the capital yesterday.

The Thai prime minister said similar tariff concession will be given for another 101 items, in addition to the earlier 128 offered during Khaleda Zia's bilateral visit to Thailand in February last year.

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GAS PIPELINE SCAM Petrobangla investigators taken aback

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of Petrobangla investigators were flabbergasted yesterday after visiting the sub-standard installation sites of two 100-km pipelines under the Bangabandhu Bridge Approach Road Gas Pipeline Project (BBARGP).

They went to the spots to probe allegation of corruption by

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JS SESSION BEGINS TODAY

Amendment to constitution on agenda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad goes into its 11th session today with the main opposition Awami League still refusing to end its House boycott.

Some vital provisions of the constitution will be amended including raising the number of JS seats from 300 to 450, including 50 reserved for women. Several impor

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FIRST SPEECH TO PARLIAMENT

Musharraf faces quit demand from MPs

AP, Islamabad

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf was heckled yesterday by lawmakers shouting for him to quit office as he made his first-ever speech to Parliament since seizing power in a military coup more than four years ago.

Opposition legislators chanted "Go Musharraf, go Musharraf" and "Friends of dictators are traitors" as soon as Musharraf took the podium. They kept up the cry throughout his 40-minute speech. The noise worsened as Musharraf's supporters countered by thumping on tables in a show of applause.

Meanwhile, a bomb scare at Islamabad's airport forced the diversion of two domestic flights, said a Pakistan International Airlines official, Imran Gardezi. The detour prevented one high-profile opposition lawmaker from attending the speech.



Musharraf, who survived two assassination attempts last month, spoke of the needs to crush terrorism, to keep Pakistan's nuclear weapons secure and to prevent proliferation of atomic arms. He also urged a resolution of the long-standing conflict with India over the divided territory of Kashmir.

Security was extremely tight,

with armored personnel carriers patrolling and access blocked in a half-mile perimeter around parliament.

"A few people are committing the curse of extremism in our society... who want to impose their narrow-minded ideas on others," Musharraf said, swapping his army uniform for a white jacket for the occasion.

Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali complained about the heckling, saying "the opposition must learn respect for parliamentary values."

Tehmina Daulatana, a National Assembly member and vocal opponent of Musharraf, was on board a flight from Lahore that was forced to sit on the Islamabad runway for 50 minutes without disembarking passengers before being diverted to Peshawar. A separate flight from the southern city of Karachi was forced to return there.

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