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**COMMITTEE TO People's Right to Know**

## Free anti-graft body bill passed after change

### Govt approval not needed to prosecute public servants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad last night passed the much-talked-about Anti-corruption Commission Bill, 2004, in an amended form, making way for institution of an independent body to fight graft.

A last-minute amendment to the bill took the yet-to-be-formed independent anti-corruption com-

mission out of government control unlike its predecessor the Bureau of Anti-corruption (Bac).

Now, the commission would not require government approval beforehand to launch a probe and prosecute a public servant for graft charges.

The House passed the bill, introduced on July 10 last year, amid a continuous parliament boycott by

the main opposition Awami League and the second largest opposition, Jatiya Party (Ershad). The lone opposition lawmaker present at the time -- Kader Siddiqui of Bangladesh Krishak Samik Janata League -- walked out in protest at the rejection of his amendment proposals on the bill.

"After getting home, I'll ponder on whether to rejoin the House,"

said Kader after staging the walkout at 8:45pm, barely half an hour before the passage.

The House rejected several other amendments brought by Kader and independent lawmaker MM Shahin. It also turned down by voice vote Kader's proposal for sending the bill to the search committee and eliciting public opinions on it.

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## TIB slams bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The anti-corruption commission bill does not reflect people's demand for a free and neutral commission, Transparency International, Bangladesh (TIB) said hours before the bill was passed in parliament with a last-minute amendment yesterday.

"We are disappointed at the bill that we fear will not let the commission work freely and neutrally as the nation expected. So we are not accepting it," TIB Chairman Professor Khan Sarwar Murshid said at a press conference at the corruption watchdog's office in Gulshan.

He quoted Sections 25 and 30 of the bill that empower the government to decide on the commission's

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## Fertiliser factory gas leak kills 100 cattle

### CUFL releases waste into pipelines

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Nearly 100 cattle, mostly buffaloes, died from toxic gas poisoning following a leakage at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) at Barasat Union in Anwara Upazila on Mondaynoon.

Sources said the animals died between 12.00 and 3.00pm Monday after drinking poisonous water of a canal directly linked to the CUFL pipelines to release industrial waste.

The CUFL authorities used to pump out industrial waste through

the pipelines that end in the canal, sources said.

"The authorities generally take precautions such as warning the neighbourhoods on the loud speaker to prevent environmental hazards or casualties before releasing the industrial waste but this time they ignored the precaution," alleged Barasat UP Chairman Mohammad Hasan Chowdhury while talking to The Daily Star on the phone yesterday afternoon.

"As a result, the canal water had developed concentration of ammonia gas and became toxic soon and

the animals died after drinking the water," he said. At least 40 families were affected by the incident, he added.

A CUFL official on condition of anonymity denied any negligence and claimed the incident as a mere accident. "One of the underground pipelines through which we release industrial waste leaked suddenly and the canal water might have become a little bit poisonous due to this mixing," he reckoned.

The UP chairman said he immediately informed the authorities

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## Saifur blasts NGOs for high interest on microloans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday sharply criticised certain NGOs for charging high rate of interest on micro-credit, comparing the practice to extortion.

"Micro-finance institutions [MFIs] should not take advantage of poverty for making profit. But some NGOs are doing just that, which is not acceptable," he said while speaking as a plenary discussant at a workshop held at Hotel Sheraton yesterday.

The workshop titled 'How Parliamentarians, Advocates and Other Leaders Can Get High-level Government Commitment to Micro-credit Programmes and the Summit's Goal' was organised as a part of the Fourth Asia Pacific Region Micro-credit Summit.

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## Lower interest, better governance stressed

### Speakers suggest at plenary sessions of microcredit summit

STAR BUSINESS REPORT

Speakers at the regional micro-credit summit yesterday underscored the needs for cutting interest rate on small loans and reducing operational costs, improving governance and bringing transparency in micro-finance institutions (MFIs) for creating better access to finance for the poor.

They felt it a must to ensure that

the MFIs were not inefficient and undue pressure was not put on small borrowers.

The observations were made at two plenary sessions on 'Creating Autonomous National and Sub-Regional Microcredit Funds' and 'Building Better Lives: Sustainable Integration of Micro-finance and Education in Child Survival, Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS Prevention for the Poorest

Entrepreneurs' of the four-day summit that began in Dhaka Monday.

Speaking at the first session, Saarc Secretary General QAMA Rahim said a feasibility study was being commissioned by South Asian Development Fund for putting together regional poverty-alleviation priority projects under the Saarc umbrella. Microcredit is

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## AL calls hartal on Feb 28

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has taken up a 15-day agitation programme from February 22 that includes a countrywide hartal on February 28 as part of its agitation to oust the government for its 'absolute failure' to govern the country.

The main opposition party is going to enforce hartal for the fourth time this month.

The AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) at an emergency meeting chaired by party chief Sheikh Hasina at its Dhanmondi office yesterday drew up the agitation programme, which includes processions and rallies in Dhaka and adjoining areas.

The party will announce from a procession in the capital on March 7 its next programmes to dislodge the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government, the meeting decided.

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PHOTO: STAR

Cows lie dead after drinking water of a canal in Barasat Union in Anwara Upazila that became polluted after Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited released waste into it on Monday.

## 2 killed in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unidentified assailants gunned down a Dhaka University (DU) employee at Tejgaon and a metal scrapper at Sutrapur yesterday and shot a Jubo Dal leader at Lalbagh Monday.

Mir Ali Newaj, 36, joint secretary of Dhaka Mahanagar Jubo Dal (South) and member of central Jubo Dal, was shot and injured in Lalbagh.

Newaj was talking with a few of his fellow activists in front of his house at Sheikh Saheb Bazar at 9:45pm when a gang of about eight showed up, opened fire on him and fled, said his brother Sarfat Ali Sapu.

His another brother Mir Ashraf

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## MURDER OF TRAVEL AGENT

# Striking shop-owners demand killers' arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 200 shop-owners of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in Tejgaon kept their shutters down from 4:00pm to 6:00pm yesterday, demanding arrest of killers of fellow trader Mostafa Kamal.

The 35-year-old travel agent was gunned down on February 9 apparently for refusing to pay extortion money.

His killers are members of a local extortion racket who have gone unchallenged for a long time, sources said.

The extortionists have also threatened to kill other traders of the area unless they pay up. "The extortionists called most of the businessmen over phone Monday and demanded money," a trader told this correspondent.

"We are scared even to bring out

any protest procession as the killers are roaming around freely in the presence of law enforcers," another trader said.

Leaders of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue Businessmen's Welfare Association Limited met with local lawmaker Abdul Mannan at his Gulshan residence Monday and sought his help in ridding the area of crime.

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## BNP-JP meet ends with no result

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government-sponsored meeting with the Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) yesterday to bring it back to parliament ended without any positive results as JP's preconditions were not met.

Chief Whip Khandokar Delwar Hossain initiated the meeting on instruction from the prime minister.

Twelve JP legislators led by Raushan Ershad attended the meeting with the chief whip at his Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban office. The party earlier made a four-point demand as

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## Ten 'robbers' lynched in Fatikchhari

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Angry villagers lynched at least 10 suspected bandits in Fatikchhari on Monday night over a spate of crime, including abduction of three women and looting, police and witnesses said.

Several hundred villagers launched the vigilante attack after an armed gang of 20 robbed about 30 people of money in a string of raids since midday in Lambabil close to Bariadhala Road that links Haraulchhari with Sitakunda.

Witnesses said the criminals hauled three women out of home

under the cover of dark for apparent gangrape in the hills that skirt Rangapania tea garden, incensing the villagers to kill a gang member instantly. Details about the abduction were sketchy.

The villagers, alerted to the snoop of the bandits by the public address system of the local mosque, carried out the attack with sticks and knives at about 8:30pm.

"People of nearby Lambabil, Sujanager and Rangapania villages raced to the scene," local Union Parishad Chairman Hasan Sarwar Azam Chowdhury told

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## Kidnapped hotelier yet to be rescued after 3 weeks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Despite assurance from two state ministers, law enforcers have failed to rescue abducted hotelier Hasan Mahbub Bablu, three weeks after he was kidnapped from Bandarban.

Government sources said efforts were on to recover the manager of Hillside Resort, a unit of Guide Tours Limited.

During his visit to Bandarban on February 8, Mir Mohammed Nasir Uddin, state minister for civil

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## U-19 WC CRICKET

# Hosts stay in race



PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh U-19 opener Nafees Iqbal clobbers one over mid-on against Scotland at Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh kept their hopes alive for a super-eight berth in the Fifth ICC U-19 Cricket World Cup when they thumped down a nine-wicket defeat on Scotland at the Fatullah Stadium yesterday.

Smarting under a heart-breaking two-wicket defeat against New Zealand on the opening day, the junior Tigers did exactly what they needed before going into their final 'Group C' match against India on February 20 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Top two finishers from each group will play in the Super League while the bottom half in the 16-team meet will play for the Plate honours.

The boys of Australian coach Richard McInnes relied on the raw pace of Shahadat Hossain and the international experience of left-arm spinner Enamul Haque (Jr) to shoot Scotland out for 95 in 30.2 overs.

Nafees Iqbal and Naeem Islam then combined together to put on 94 runs for the second wicket as Bangladesh reached the victory in just 12.2 overs.

But the day's lowest total was recorded at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, where Uganda were bundled out for 46 while chasing England's 259-7. It was the second victory for the former champions.

Elsewhere, favourites Pakistan and Sri Lanka also ambled to their

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## PAWAR TELLS MORSHED

# India values friendship with Bangladesh

UNB, Dhaka

President of Indian National Congress Party Sharad Pawar made a courtesy call on Foreign Minister Morshed Khan at his office yesterday.

The foreign minister welcomed Pawar to Bangladesh and briefed him on the socio-economic development of the country.

The Congress leader lauded the success of Bangladesh in the fields of population control, empowerment of women and rural development.

"Both government and political

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## Saber sent to London for treatment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, political secretary to Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, was sent to London last night for treatment on advice from a medical board.

Saber, also organising secretary of the main opposition party, left Dhaka by an Emirates flight with his wife accompanying him, family and hospital sources said.

He suffered head injuries in police action in the capital during

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## Nuke rivals agree on Kashmir talks

AP, Islamabad

Nuclear-armed rivals India and Pakistan yesterday reached a broad agreement on the timetable for sustained peace talks on disputed Kashmir and other tough issues separating the South Asian neighbors, diplomats from both sides said.

Pakistan's foreign ministry said "a broad understanding was reached for the modalities and timeframe" of future talks. The agreement will be formalised today during a final meeting between the two nations' foreign secretaries.

Neither side would reveal the specifics of the timetable, but diplomats close to the talks said technical level discussions about a bus service in divided Kashmir and another bus and train route from Pakistan's Sindh province would take place next month. With Indian elections scheduled for April, no major breakthroughs were expected from the peace process anytime soon.

However, Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was expected to win the vote and continue the dialogue.

The three-day talks are expected to establish eight groups to settle issues that have festered for a half century and led to three wars, and almost caused a fourth in 2002 before international mediation averted the conflict.

Arun Kumar Singh, leader of the Indian Foreign Ministry team, met

with Pakistani Foreign Secretary Riaz Khokhar yesterday and reviewed the progress made in the talks so far.

The two delegations then drove to Murree, a hill resort 30 miles northeast of Islamabad, the Pakistani capital, for luncheon talks, where the agreement was reached.

Future talks will focus on Kashmir, confidence-building measures in the nuclear field, terrorism and drugs, economic cooperation and a river dispute. The agenda for resolving decades of enmity was first agreed to in 1997 but failed to make any headway.

Even before the timetable agreement, there was optimism about a "new momentum" in their talks.

"There is realization in India and Pakistan that war is not an option, that you have to look at ways to find a peaceful resolution of the outstanding disputes between the two countries," Pakistani spokesman Masood Khan said Monday after a meeting between Foreign Ministry officials of the two countries.

Vajpayee and Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf agreed to resume the dialogue last month. A July 2001 summit in Agra, India, failed to make any progress.

The talks represent the first real test of flexibility on long-entrenched positions, such as the disputed Kashmir region -- the cause of two of the countries' three

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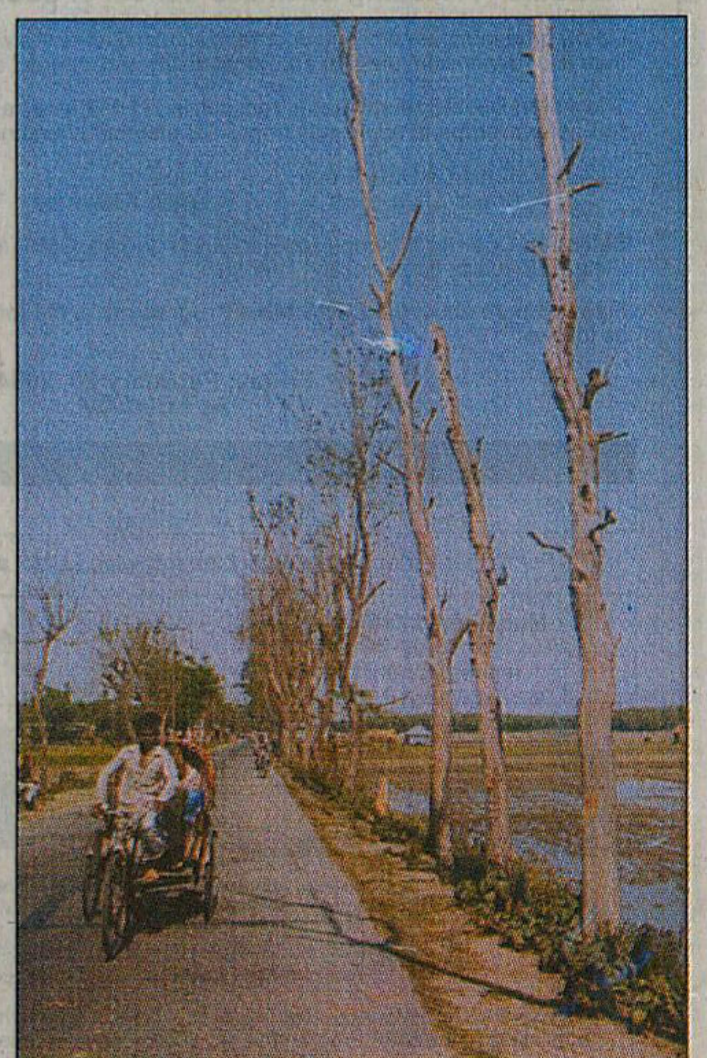


PHOTO: STAR

Trees lining Syedpur-Nilphamari Road in the north are withering away because of an unknown plant disease, threatening ecological balance of the area.

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