

JS resumes session today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Sangsad resumes its session tomorrow at 4:30pm after an 11-day recess, but the main opposition is unbent on its boycott decision despite the government's effort to resolve the stalemate.

Parliament sources said an amendment to the constitution seeking to introduce 45 reserved Jatiya Sangsad seats for women was

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INDIAN RIVER-LINK PLAN

Dhaka expresses concern at UNSCD meet

BSS, Dhaka

Bangladesh expressed its grave concern over India's proposed inter-river linking project at United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (UNSCD) meeting in Paris.

Talking to journalists at Zia International Airport, Water Resources Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed disclosed this after he returned home from the two-day

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POWDERED MILK

15pc suppl duty cut

STAR REPORT

The government has withdrawn 15 percent supplementary duty on imported bulk powdered milk in a bid to slash its prices, a National Board of Revenue (NBR) statement said yesterday.

The duty will now come down 22.43 percent to 56.5 percent from 78.93 percent, the statement added.

The government also reduced supplementary duty on imported energy-saving light to 15 percent from 40 percent to promote its import, as it provides light four times the electricity consumed.

The NBR also said the government decided to cut 75 customs duty on imported soyabean and sesame in an attempt to encourage entrepreneurs to set up such industries.



Authorities created a separate lane for rickshaws along Mirpur Road by the New Market, but that has never been in use and garbage and shops block it now. It summarises the age-old story of bad planning and waste of funds.

PHOTO: STAR

Law, order improvement, curb on graft key to fighting poverty: Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Poverty alleviation measures can never witness success without improved law and order and curb on corruption, Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman said yesterday.

"All the initiatives towards poverty alleviation will fail if improvement in the country's law and order and an end to corruption can not be ensured," the finance minister told an assembly before a meeting organised for suggestions before preparing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

The Planning Commission, the assigned body to prepare the PRSP, organised the meeting, first of its kind at national level. Academics,

policy makers, government and private sector officials and non-governmental organisation (NGO) members, among others, took part at the discussion.

"If a trader has to face extortion on the street while bringing rods for his economic operation or if a dishonest businessperson spends Tk 100 crore for a work of Tk 50 crore, how can you expect a better economy?" Saifur said, resenting the country's overall situation.

He asked the Planning Commission to put emphasis on proper allocation of resources to different districts.

"Our experience shows that areas having a number of influential persons receive more funds for development works than those having less or none, which causes deformity to the country's limited resources."

He also stressed continuation of

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help reduce poverty momentarily. Saifur said ensuring good governance at all administrative levels is required to raise the present economic growth to a satisfactory level.

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The announcement came just hours before polls were to open

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Spain blasts Tape claims al-Qaeda link

AB, Madrid

In a videotaped message, a man purporting to represent al-Qaeda claims the terrorist network was behind bombings that killed 200 and wounded 1,500 in Madrid, the Spanish interior minister said early yesterday.

The tape along with the arrest of three Moroccans and two Indian suspects provided the strongest indication yet of an Islamic link to the attack on one of Washington's stanchest allies in Iraq. The Spanish government, however, said it could not confirm the tape's authenticity.

The announcement came just hours before polls were to open

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2 women 'take life' in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two women allegedly committed suicide at Sutrapur in the capital yesterday.

Doctors declared 30-year-old Doly Begum, wife of Munna, dead when three neighbours including Rahima and Nazrul Islam Sagar brought her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at 3:15pm.

Rahima and another unidentified neighbour left the body at the DMCH to inform the victim's relatives of the incident while police held Sagar for quizzing.

Sagar told police that they found the victim hanging from the

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Defamation case against Prothom Alo adjourned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday adjourned proceedings of a defamation case against the Prothom Alo's Editor Motiur Rahman, Magura Correspondent Kabir Hossain, and Publisher Mahfuz Anam, said a press release.

Local BNP leader Mesbah Uddin Kayes filed the case in a Magura court after the newspaper ran a story titled "Terrorism and extortion in the name of BNP in Magura's Mohammadpur" on December 21, 2001.

The Division bench of Justice M Awlad Ali and Justice A Awal adjourned the proceedings after preliminary hearing.

Prayer Timings

March 15

Fajr 5-15 Azan 5-45

Zohr 12-45 1-15

Asr 4-30 4-45

Magrib 6-12 6-16

Esha 7-30 8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Powell tours S Asia this week

Indo-Pak peace, nuke proliferation and hunt for Laden on agenda

REUTERS, Washington

The hunt for Osama bin Laden, Pakistan's nuclear proliferation, Indo-Pakistani peace talks and Afghanistan's nascent democracy top Secretary of State Colin Powell's agenda as he visits South Asia this week.

Powell, who was scheduled to leave Washington yesterday, makes his first trip to India and Pakistan since July 2002 as the United States has begun a spring offensive in Afghanistan to try to catch the accused Sept. 11, 2001 mastermind.

Given Pakistan's porous border with Afghanistan, the help of Pakistani President Pervez

Musharraf is thought vital if the United States is to catch bin Laden and defeat his al-Qaeda network and their former Taliban supporters in the region.

"They want bin Laden and they want Musharraf to survive because they think it's the only chance of getting bin Laden," said Jim Steinberg, a foreign policy analyst and a former deputy national security adviser under US President Bill Clinton.

While pressing Musharraf for every possible assistance in the "war on terror," Powell is also expected to privately seek maximum information on the activities of Abdul Qadeer Khan, the Pakistani scientist who has admitted selling nuclear secrets to Iran, Libya and North Korea but was pardoned by Musharraf.

The United States has chosen not to criticize Khan's pardon partly out of fear that a public trial could implicate many in the Pakistani elite and undermine Musharraf's rule. But it also wants every scrap of information about what Khan did.

"If I were asking ... I would say where did he go, when did he go there, who did he see and what did he share?" said Karl Inderfurth, a former assistant secretary of state for South Asian affairs who expected the issue to be raised in private.

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4 more US soldiers killed in Iraq

MURDER OF WATCH SELLER

Family, colleagues clueless about motive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Traders of the city's Patuatuli watch market will form a human chain on Patuatuli Road at noon today protesting the recent murder of fellow trader Rezaul Karim Selim.

The protesters will wear black ribbon and fly black flags atop their shops in mourning for the slain watch seller.

Selim, a resident of Sutrapur and watch trader at Patuatuli's Azizul Karim Market, went missing yesterday afternoon.

Police recovered his severed body parts from different places in Srinagar and Sadar upazillas over the next three days.

Selim's wife Parveen Akhter went to Srinagar Police Station to file a case after Kotwali Police in Dhaka refused to register her case on the grounds that the murder took place in Srinagar.

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Khaleda reassures pledge to improve armed forces

UNB, Bogra

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday reaffirmed her government's commitment to continuing its efforts to modernise and build up the country's armed forces, as she formally hoisted the standard of a new army brigade.

She was addressing the soldiers at a 'darbar' in Maghnia Cantonment here on the occasion of flag raising ceremony of the newly raised 26th Infantry Brigade and foundation of the brigade headquarters.

The new 26th Infantry Brigade gave a full shape to the 11th Infantry Division, one of the seven divisions of the Bangladesh Army. The 11th Infantry Division was raised with one armoured, one artillery and two infantry brigades in 1976 by late president Ziaur Rahman.

The prime minister said the 26th Infantry Brigade is one of three infantry brigades raised by the present government.

Khaleda in her speech lauded

the role of the armed forces in various social-welfare activities apart from their duty of safeguarding country's independence and sovereignty.

"Their roles in disaster management, relief operation, embankment building and making houses for the rootless are laudable," she said.

Khaleda, who is also in the charge of defence ministry, appreciated the role of Bangladeshi troops in different peacekeeping missions abroad by saying, "The role of the armed forces in UN peacekeeping missions has brightened the image of the country."

GOC of the 11th Infantry Division Maj General Fazle Elahi Akbar also spoke on the occasion, while Chief of Army Staff Lt General Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury was on the dais.

State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Maj (Retd) M Kamrul Islam also attended the ceremony.

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Tk 1 crore goods looted from travel agency

BSS, Chittagong

Air tickets, passports with visa and cash reportedly, in all, worth over Tk 1 crore were stolen from a travel agency at Old Telegraph Office Road in Hazaribagh under Kotwali thana yesterday.

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hoists the flag of 26th Infantry Brigade of the army at Bogra Cantonment yesterday.

