

Revised bill for constitution amendment tabled in JS House to run until May 17

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Constitution (14th Amendment) Bill 2004, which proposes to introduce 45 reserved seats for women in parliament and increase retirement age of judges, among others, was tabled in the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) last night.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed placed the bill before the House incorporating some new provisions in it, three days after withdrawal of a previously placed bill.

The bill, first introduced before parliament on March 17, was withdrawn on April 25 to incorporate two new provisions. The renewed form got the cabinet's nod Monday.

It was decided yesterday that the current session of parliament, scheduled to be prorogued on May 6, would now run until May 17 with a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Cheated job-seekers mum on recruiters

TAWFIQUE ALI

The hope to crack the riddle behind how 13 Bangladeshi youths could be sent to Iraq on April 17 via Jordan, when there were no visa issuing authorities of Iraq in Dhaka, appears elusive, as the victims keep media at bay allegedly under threat.

"We have been under threat since we divulged the matter to the media," said Titu, brother of a victim, Delwar, by phone on Sunday. He has since kept his cellphone switched off.

Delwar's brother-in-law Majid, who was present at the Jatiya Press Club last Saturday when the 13 young men recounted their weeklong plight, declined to disclose Delwar's whereabouts, saying he did not know his in-law's address.

Conflicting views also came from the officials. When Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mobin

Chowdhury says the embassy of Iraq in Dhaka is not operational at the moment, Director (Visa) Nadira Begum says the embassy might be working but the travellers could not have passed through the immigration at Zia International Airport without proper visa.

"At present, the Iraq embassy is not functional in Dhaka. So, issuance of visa is out of question," the foreign secretary said. "Authorities are trying to find out how they were taken to Iraq," he added.

On how a group of 13 youths bound for Iraq with transit through Amman could pass through the immigration to board a Gulf Air flight unchallenged, Nadira said, "As there is no government embargo on travel to Iraq, the immigration did not find anything unusual with the trip, provided the travellers had valid papers."

Director General of Passport and Immigration M Wahidul Haque

declined to talk about the matter.

"The Iraq embassy in Dhaka closed down in 2003. But the youths could easily travel to Jordan with valid visa for that country," said Assistant Secretary Rahat Bin Zaman of the foreign ministry.

As there is no embassy of Jordan in Dhaka, the same in New Delhi has been accredited to deal with the country's foreign affairs in Bangladesh, Rahat said.

A top official at the External Publicity Wing, requesting anonymity, said, "Bangladesh embassy in Amman informed us of the matter and their repatriation was arranged easily as we took it up." "I cannot give you any more details about it," he said.

Rahat said the Bangladesh mission in Tehran also co-operated for the safe repatriation of the youths.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

A man carries wedding items for his sister's Gaye Holud on a rickshaw van yesterday as the traditional pre-marriage ceremony coincided with AL's two-day hartal.

GINGER PRICE HIT NEW HIGH

Price hike of ginger has surpassed all previous records with local ginger selling at Tk 78 per kg, up from less than Tk 68 per kg a week ago at the Karwan Bazar wholesale market.

PHOTO: STAR



Dhaka will join submarine cable in July next year: PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will join the submarine cable in July 2005 and the ruling coalition started working on it immediately after it was voted into office, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said yesterday.

Bangladesh signed a treaty to join the network with 13 other countries, including France, India, Italy, Malaysia, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and UAE, Khaleda told parliament during the prime minister's question time.

Khaleda said a consortium of 16 international organisations from 14 countries would implement the project of over Tk 657 crore.

The prime minister pointed out development in international telecommunications, information

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Poverty-cut plans boost Bangladesh economy

ADB sees growth at 5.7pc this year, says post-MFA outlook 'worrisome'

AFP, Manila

Bangladesh's economy has been strengthened by the policies adopted in completing its first-year of the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility programme with the International Monetary Fund, the Asia Development Bank (ADB) said yesterday.

"Deepening of reform efforts that would foster greater investment and the availability of additional concessional aid has improved the outlook for growth which is projected to increase to 5.7 percent this year and 6.0 percent in 2005," the ADB

said in its annual report.

It noted that the outlook for the garment and textile industry and employment generally in the post-multi-fibre agreement (MFA) environment is "worrisome" as Bangladesh happens to be a major textiles producer.

Generally, growth in South Asia this year is forecast to be 7.0 percent slightly, up from the 6.9 percent recorded for 2003, the ADB said.

The forecast assumes that breakthrough talks between India and Pakistan that began last year continue and that there is no deterioration in the security situation in

Afghanistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

India's gross domestic product growth for this year is forecast at a buoyant 7.4 percent and at 7.6 percent in 2005.

"Despite this remarkable overall performance and the fact that India is becoming one of the fastest growing economies in the world, it appears that it will not quite achieve the eight percent target the government has set for rapid poverty reduction," the ADB said.

Pakistan's outlook is also for stronger growth of 5.5 percent this year and 5.8 percent in 2005.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Customs houses, ICDs to run during holidays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka, Chittagong and Benapole customs houses and the inland container depots (ICDs) at Kamalapur, Dhaka and Chittagong Port will remain open tomorrow, Monday and Tuesday despite weekly and public holidays.

The government has decided to keep the offices open on those days at the request of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BGMEA) for providing services towards export-import activities, a BGMEA press release said.

The service sections of BGMEA's Dhaka and Chittagong offices will also remain open Monday and Tuesday, the government holidays on account of Eid-e-Miladunnabi and Buddha Purnima.

Govt mulls forming cell to execute NEC suggestions

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The government is, for the first time, considering formation of an implementation cell to execute the recommendations of the National Education Commission (NEC).

Education Minister Osman Faruk disclosed this at a meeting with NEC Chairman Prof Moniruzzaman Miah, education ministry officials said recently.

The ministry took the initiative following a directive from Prime Minister Khaleda Zia when the NEC submitted its report to her last month.

Most recommendations of all six previous education commissions

were not implemented.

The NEC in its report recommended formation of a permanent education commission.

"Formation of a permanent national education commission is vital for reforming the education system. It is not possible for a temporary education commission to keep a watch on the latest developments in education," Moniruzzaman told The Daily Star.

Education reform is a continuous process, so a permanent commission should monitor and simultaneously suggest reforms in education, he said.

All governments in the past faced

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

DMCH burns unit to become specialised hospital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday announced a plan to upgrade the new plastic surgery and burns unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) to a full-fledged specialised hospital.

The 50-bed unit will be refurbished as a 100-bed separate hospital to facilitate accommodation for more burn victims, a government notification said.

Burn patients on average require at least one month's hospital stay to recover from wounds, physicians said.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

CTG ARMS HAUL CID makes progress

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Criminal Investigation Department (CID), tasked with probing the largest-ever arms seizure case, has stumbled into clues to the involvement of some people.

"We're making especial efforts to nab the people and we'll let you know about everything once we arrested them," said CID Additional Superintendent of Police Kabir Uddin, investigation officer of the case.

The CID on Monday took over the case under Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) from the officer-in-charge of Karnaphuli Police Station.

Prayer Timings		
April 29		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-29	6-34
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

Vajpayee vows to go ahead with river-link

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister Tuesday pledged to go ahead with a controversial plan to divert 37 rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal for irrigation and electricity projects.

Neighbouring Bangladesh, one of several countries which may be affected, has claimed that the plan violates international laws on sharing water from rivers which flow through more than one country.

It has demanded India halt planning for the project until an agreement is reached between the two countries.

But Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee warned of a "great water crisis" in India unless the multi-billion dollar project was put into action.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

2 cops, 1 Ansar hurt in bomb attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two police constables and an Ansar member were seriously injured when suspected underground operatives hurled two powerful bombs on a police van in the city's Phulbari Gate area at around Tuesday midnight, sources said.

Constables KM Mizanur Rahman, Ashish Chandra Dey and Ansar member Tariqul Islam suffered grave splinter wounds in the explosions that rocked the entire Phulbari area. The victims were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH).

Sources said a team of joint forces came under attack as it was returning to Kartikkul camp after an anticrime operation near Khulna University of Engineering and Technology under Khanjahan Ali Police Station in Khulna city.

Tamizuddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP), blamed

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

INDIAN POLLS Campaign blitz on to woo voters

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

As the close race for power in India gathered steam, two main contenders ruling BJP-led alliance and Congress and its allies yesterday launched a campaign blitz in a bid to secure maximum possible seats in the next two phases of parliamentary polls on May 5 and 10.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and other senior BJP leaders moved the might of their final campaign to the key heartland state of Uttar Pradesh to swing voters and win a majority.

On the other hand, top opposition leader and Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi also addressed election rallies in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh where the stakes for the rival alliances are high in their attempt to rule India for the next five years.

The shift in gears midway through the staggered, five-stage polls came after TV exit polls following Monday's third round of voting showed the BJP and its allies would struggle to reach the halfway mark of 273 seats to form a government.

Although all opinion and exit polls have predicted a hung house, neither BJP nor Congress is publicly ready to accept this and claim each will get comfortable majority and form the next government. Public posturing is no doubt aimed at keeping up the morale of their respective rank and file for the next two phases of polling.

A meeting of BJP leadership presided by Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani here zeroed in on a three-pronged strategy for the campaign blitz to maximise its gains in the remaining phases of polling: (1)

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Fossils reveal oldest wildfire

BBC ONLINE

Scientists have discovered evidence for the earliest known wildfire in Earth's history, the journal Geology reports.

It comes in the form of small plant fossils preserved as charcoal, which were unearthed by researchers near the town of Ludlow on the Welsh borders.

The plant remains date to the Silurian Period, about 443 to 417 million years ago, say a Cardiff University team.

Previously, charcoal was known only from the later Devonian Period, which saw an explosion in plant diversity.

But in the Silurian, plants were generally quite small, which would have restricted the fuel source for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

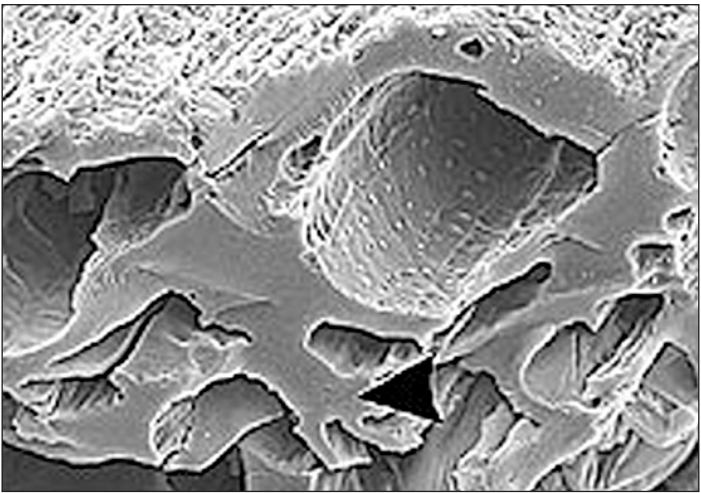


PHOTO: COURTESY

Partially charred fossils may indicate lower atmospheric oxygen.