



PHOTO: STAR

Hundreds of passengers got stranded at the Sadarghat launch terminal yesterday as the authorities barred plying of river vessels because of inclement weather.

## EPZs to have TUs from 2006

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Limited trade union activities will be allowed in the exclusive industrial areas, the Export Processing Zones (EPZs), from November 1, 2006. Until then the existing Workers' Welfare Committees in the factories will protect employee rights, according to a draft law approved by the cabinet yesterday.

The draft of the law titled "EPZ Workers Association and Industrial Relations Act, 2004" will be placed before parliament in the next budget session for its passage.

According to the proposed law, the existing welfare committees will work to pave the way for trade unions until October 31, 2006.

The committees will not have the right to call strike or work abstention in factories. They will not have the right to hold rallies or demonstrations in support of any demand.

In the limited form of trade unionism, each industrial unit may have one union without any political affiliation. A trade union must have the support of at least 30 percent of the workers.

To elect a leader, at least 50 percent of the workers have to cast votes and a leader will have to get 60 percent of the votes cast.

"The draft was formulated in consultation with all parties concerned including the US embassy, AFLCIO (a US labour union body) in Washington, the World Bank and

the foreign investors in the EPZs," Law Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed told journalists after the cabinet meeting.

Six EPZs have a total workforce of around 1.30 lakh. South Korea is the leading investor in the zones with a stake of around \$600 million.

The government took the decision to allow trade union in the EPZs after a prolonged pressure from Washington. Foreign investors, however, were against the move as they thought it would hamper their interest.

The cabinet also endorsed a proposal to raise the minimum age of children to be charged with criminal offence to nine from seven years.

## Govt closes Taiwanese office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has decided to close down Taipei Representative Office in the capital, according to Chinese embassy officials in Dhaka.

Foreign affairs ministry formally communicated the decision to the Chinese government on May 19, according to a message from Chinese foreign ministry made available to The Daily Star by fax yesterday.

"We have a copy of the statement sent to the Chinese foreign ministry," said a Chinese embassy official in Dhaka.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Liu Jianchao told reporters at a press conference in Beijing, "On May 19, Bangladesh formally informed the Chinese side of the Bangladesh government's decision

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## Paris airport roof collapse kills 6

REUTERS, Paris

Six people have been killed after a roof collapsed at a new terminal at Roissy-Charles de Gaulle international airport near Paris, triggering a search for trapped survivors and questions about safety.

Slabs of concrete and metal crashed onto a seated waiting area in the less than one-year-old show-case terminal 2E just before 6:00 am British time yesterday, bringing down a raised walkway at one of the world's busiest airports.

The collapse left a hole of 50 metres (yards) by 30 metres in the long, tunnel-like building. Rescue workers with dogs searched through glass, concrete and metal and listened for anyone trapped underneath.

"Time is a factor. We have to get to the injured as quickly as possible," said Paris fire brigade spokesman

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## Portfolios delayed as Indian allies race for key posts

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's new cabinet held its first meeting yesterday but Prime Minister Manmohan Singh delayed allocating portfolios as allies within his coalition lobbied for more powerful posts.

Singh, the architect of the country's economic reforms, was almost certain to keep the key finance ministry for himself but members of his Congress party and allies were fighting over other portfolios, coalition leaders said.

"Final negotiations are on, that's why it is taking time," one minister said.

A government spokeswoman said an announcement on the portfolios was likely on Sunday night, more than 24 hours after

ministers took the oath. Portfolios are usually announced almost immediately after ministers are sworn in.

Singh, 71, took over as prime minister of the world's biggest democracy on Saturday, completing the return of the Congress party to power after a surprise election win.

A team of 67 ministers, decided after marathon negotiations, was also sworn in to form a left-leaning government to replace the Hindu nationalists who were voted out. Twenty-eight were of cabinet rank.

The cabinet met during the day and decided to call a session of parliament from June 2-10, with a vote on the floor of the house on June 10.

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## 15 cases against Proshika chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) filed 15 cases against Proshika President Qazi Faruque Ahmed and others with Pallabi Police Station on May 16.

Following is the case highlights:

Faruque took Tk 74.13 lakh from Proshika to cover his son Kazi Rubait Ahmed's tuition fees in an American university. Vice President Mahbul Karim drew Tk 19,40,685 from the

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## AL's labour wing to call 24hr hartal for June 5

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As a seven-day ultimatum for the arrest of assassins of opposition lawmaker Ahsanullah Master expires today, main opposition Awami League's (AL) labour front Jatiya Sramik League is set to enforce a countrywide 24-hour hartal and industrial strike on June 5.

The Sramik League will announce the shutdown -- from 6:00am of June 5 to 6:00am of June 6 -- from a press conference this afternoon, its leaders said.

Opposition sources hinted that the upcoming programme will be a prelude to a fresh wave of anti-

government agitation over issues like the lawmaker's assassination, emergence of religious extremists in the northwestern districts and bomb attack on the British envoy to Bangladesh at Hazrat Shahjalal Shrine.

The AL is trying to win support from pro-left political parties in its latest bid to pull down the BNP-led coalition government from office, the sources added.

The main opposition party has decided not to focus its agitation solely on the capital, unlike on previous occasions. Instead, the AL will involve its different units and

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## Altaf terms FBCCI article change a non-political move

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commerce Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury yesterday dismissed the suggestion that the recent government order for incorporating a clause in the Memorandum of Articles of Association (MAA) of the FBCCI was politically motivated.

The minister told a press briefing at his office in Dhaka yesterday, "The government does not intend to make any new rule. The order was issued only to make a clarification of a provision that is already there."

The commerce ministry on May 17 issued a letter to the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) president, asking him to take steps to incorporate a clause in Article 14

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## HC order to reconsider 'Kula' for Mannan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the returning officer (RO) for Dhaka-10 by-election to reconsider allocation of "Kula" in favour of the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate Major (retired) Abdul Mannan.

The High Court division bench, comprising Justice Abdul Matin and Justice Tariq ul Hakim, also issued rule asking the RO to explain by three weeks why the decision allocating "bench" instead of "Kula" as the election symbol would not be declared illegal.

The division bench delivered the judgment following a writ filed by Abdul Mannan, a day after filing an appeal with the Election

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## Israeli minister sees Gaza attack to Nazi action

AGENCIES, Jerusalem

An Israeli cabinet minister yesterday said the army's demolition of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip reminded him of actions the Nazis took against his family during World War II and called for a halt to the policy of destroying homes.

The remarks by Justice Minister Yosef Lapid, a Holocaust survivor, sparked an uproar at the weekly Cabinet meeting, officials at the meeting said.

The ministers were discussing Israel's demolition of homes in the Rafah refugee camp. Dozens of homes have been destroyed or damaged during an ongoing offensive along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Lapid was quoted by officials at

the meeting as saying a picture of an old Palestinian woman on the rubble of her home reminded him "of my grandmother in the Holocaust."

The statement outraged hard-line Likud Party ministers, who demanded he recant.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said such comments add "oil to the fire of incitement."

Lapid said he was not comparing Israel to the Nazis but there "is no forgiveness for people who treat an old woman in this way."

Meanwhile, Israeli Defence Minister Shaul Mofaz, in an interview published yesterday, apologised for his troops opening deadly fire on Palestinian demonstrators in the southern Gaza Strip, but said Israel was determined to continue

operations to halt arms smuggling. "It was unintentional. We are sorry," Mofaz told Newsweek magazine when asked to comment on the killing of at least 10 Palestinians, most of them children, when Israeli forces opened fire on a demonstration in the Rafah refugee camp in Gaza.

The shooting prompted the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution Wednesday condemning the killing of Palestinian civilians and stressing Israel's "obligation not to undertake demolition of homes" contrary to international humanitarian law.

But Mofaz said Israel was not destroying houses without a reason. "The houses that we have

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## Fenchuganj gas field goes into production

UNB, Dhaka

State-run Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (Bapex) has started producing gas at Fenchuganj gas field in Sylhet from Saturday.

Bapex engineers began pumping 25 million cubic feet gas from the site every day on an experimental basis, said a press release.

"The Bapex had taken up programmes to develop the field and recently went into production at the well for the first time," it added.

State-run Bangladesh Oil, Gas and Mineral Resources Corporation (Petrobangla) discovered the field in 1988, the press release said.

Petrobangla officials hoped the produce of the new well would help improve gas-supply situation in the country in the wake of growing demand for gas.

## 5 Indians placed on remand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The five Indian nationals, who were arrested Saturday after they holed up in a Bangladesh Biman aircraft at Zia International Airport (ZIA), were placed on a 10-day remand for interrogation.

Pargas Singh, Nirmol Singh, Manjeet Singh, Mangas Singh and Sandeep Singh, all aged between 25 and 30, were found on the roof of a toilet 16 hours after the Biman flight had arrived from Hong Kong on Friday night.

Police produced them before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka at about 3:30pm with a prayer to place each of them

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Prayer Timing		
May 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-45
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation