

## World Trade Centre uncertain again

PM cancels today's programme to inaugurate ground-breaking ceremony

NURUL ALAM

Installation of much expected world trade centre by Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at Agrabad has become uncertain again with the cancellation of scheduled ground-breaking ceremony and change of chamber leadership, sources said.

All preparations were made for inauguration of the ground-breaking ceremony today (December 22) by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia as chief guest. But the inaugural function was suddenly cancelled before the election of CCCI, the main trade body of the port city, held on December 14.

The reason for cancellation of the programme by the PM could not be known immediately.

As a result, the outgoing CCCI president Amir Humayun

Mahmud Chowdhury, also younger brother of former commerce minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, was forced to postpone the programme that made uncertain the construction of long awaited twin tower like world trade centre here, sources added.

"We cancelled the programme as the PM regretted to attend the ground-breaking ceremony," said Amir Humayun.

Controversy over the tender bid for the construction of WTC might have led to the cancellation of the ground-breaking programme, sources said.

The controversy surfaced when some directors of the CCCI board had not accepted the costs offered by a construction firm selected for the project and it became an issue leading to a split among the chamber directors before the December 14 poll.

Under such a circumstance, the CCCI leadership could not sign agreement with the firm that initially offered the cost at Tk 266 crore.

The bidding firm brought it down to Tk 235 crore when some chamber directors protested the offer.

But the bidding firm after a meeting with the outgoing president Amir Humayun just one day before the chamber election agreed to reduce the costs to Tk 215 crore for doing the construction work of WTC, chamber sources said.

The outgoing senior vice-president Ershad Ullah who was all along against the offer, was re-elected a director in the new board while Amir Humayun Mahmud Chowdhury lost to Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed in the election. Javed is son of Awami League leader Aktaruzzaman Chowdhury

Babu.

Talking to The Daily Star Ershad said "We will not accept this tender bid as the offer was very high. New board of directors will float a fresh international tender for the construction of WTC."

"Earlier, the tender was floated without any feasibility study and the whole tender process was not transparent for which we stood against it," he added.

When asked, Amir Humayun said that the tender process was done properly as per decision of the tender committee of the chamber.

Amir Humayun lost the election battle this time following a split in board members over the issue of WTC, sources said.

The CCCI took a project for installation of WTC in 1995 and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia laid its foundation stone ceremonially the same year.

A JOYOUS VICTORY DAY



Students of Chittagong Government Arts College brought out a colourful procession celebrating of the Victory Day in the city on December 16.

## Fake ship furniture trade on the rise

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD

One of the thriving businesses in ship-breaking is fast waning in the port city as unscrupulous traders are using cheap local timber in the name of ship furniture.

Every year several ocean going ships are dismantled at different yards along the coast at Sitakunda to procure various items such as steel, electronic devices, oil, toilet-tries and furniture.

The business on old furniture or ship furniture started with the inception of ship-breaking at Sitakunda in the district in the early eighties.

Having the nearby ship-breaking industries as its prime source, the business grew up along over a ten-kilometer stretch of Dhaka-Chittagong highway from Pahartoli Colonelhat to Madambirhat under Sitakunda upazila.

Local businessmen used to

buy the furniture in a lot at auction from a ship grounded for dismantling. Each ship, particularly the merchant ship, has a lot of furniture, including beds, tables, sofas, chest of drawers, shelves and doors. Furniture were put on sale in original form and in a very few cases after a little repair of damaged parts if there was any.

The ship furniture with very simple but sophisticated designs and reasonable durability was of a tremendous demand. The furniture are also very light in weight and available here at cheap price.

People, particularly housewives, who had long been craving for household furniture but could not afford new ones, rushed for ship furniture. In the ship furniture shops a double bed (box typed plank) will cost around Tk 3000, a semi-double one Tk 2500 and a single-bed (divan like one) Tk 2000. The shops offered a



Ship furniture on sale at a roadside shop at Faujderhat in Sitakunda. (Right) Carpenters are making furniture using cheap local timber, but these will be sold as ship furniture.



dinning table at Tk 1500 and a chest of drawer at Tk 2500. The price of a set of sofa ranged from Tk 4,500 to 14,000, sources said.

They are also of a higher demand to the bachelors as the latter can easily buy furniture like single-bed, chest of drawers and reading tables within Tk 6 thousand.

But original piece of ship furniture is difficult to be found there now, users said.

They said that both the quality and design of the ship furniture had dropped remarkably.

The traders now reportedly make furniture of "kerosine" wood, partex like hardboards and plywood with formica in the name of ship furniture, they added.

One Saiful Islam said that once the ship furniture was known for their durability, but at present they are remade. Today the furniture develops cracks on it within a very short time and are

worn out in five years, he said.

Shah Nawaj, a professional in the city, said that most of the materials used in ship furniture were bought from the local markets while one Mamun of Sitakunda said that 10 percent of the materials of the ship furniture came from ship.

On the other hand, traders denying the allegation said that import of tankers instead of merchant ships was responsible for the non-availability of ship furniture in original forms.

Jamal Uddin, manager of a furniture shop at Pahartoli, said that a merchant ship brought for dismantling provided a lot of furniture while the tankers a few.

The original colour of ship furniture is also changed during the remaking, the users said.

The businessmen now redesign the furniture, coat them in teak colour removing the original sophisticated white-bony colour, they said.

## the week that was

### Constitute HR commission

Speakers at a discussion on Sunday urged the government to constitute a human rights commission to introduce laws in conformity with UN charters.

Bangladesh Institute of Theatre Arts (BITA) in association with USAID-run AED/BHRAP organised the meeting at the Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) auditorium.

Susan Ward, Chief of Party, AED/BHRAP, addressed it as special guest with BITA Executive Director Sisir Dutta in the chair.

Susan said human rights principles were being ignored or remained non-enforced here though the constitution had attached importance to it in line with the UN declaration of December 10, 1948.

She said around 50 percent of the women here fell victim to domestic violence. Project coordinator Nasim Banu presented a paper on BITA activities that focused on human rights education.

Aritur Rahman, Chief Executive of Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), elderly journalist Mohammad Idris, NGO leader Jasmine Sultana Paru, Chittagong City Corporation (CCC) ward commissioner Rehana Kabir Ranu, Swarna Talukder, Abdullah Al Mamun and Salim Nazrul also addressed the discussion.

### Aramit employees donate blood

About 150 employees of Aramit Group

donated blood in observance of Bijoy Dibash on Sunday at its head office at Kalurghat Heavy Industrial Area.

Managing Director and newly elected President of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed inaugurated the blood donation programme as chief guest.

Executive Director Md Ibrahim Khalil and president of Sandhani, Chittagong Medical College Unit Monoj Kumar Chowdhury spoke at the function.

overall activities of IDF that aims at the welfare of distressed people and I hope their humanitarian efforts will continue in future," the Swedish Ambassador said.

### Shishu Kishore Mela cultural function

The annual cultural function of Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, Chittagong city unit was held on Friday at Katalganj Primary School.

Shishu Kishore Mela Chittagong city unit President Ansarul Haq presided over the function. Central leader and Awami Sechhasabak League Vice-President Mafizur Rahman inaugurated the programme.

Chawk Bazar Ward Commissioner Syed Golam Haider Mirtu, Hazrat Ali, Sanjit Banik, Asif Kamal Chowdhury, Pintu Datta Tamal, Sumon Chowdhury and Delwar Hasan also addressed the function.

### Drishti art carnival ends

Speakers at the concluding ceremony of Drishti-Swad Art Carnival urged the guardians and parents to encourage their children in extra-curriculum activities like painting, dance and sports to enrich the children's world of knowledge.

The ceremony was held at Shishu

Academy auditorium on Saturday with Drishti vice president Masud Bakul in the chair. Former president of Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) Engineer Ali Ahmad was present as chief guest.

Journalist Pradip Dewanjee, Shahjalal Bank Ltd executive vice president MA Jabbar Chowdhury and brand in-charge of Swad, Saidul Azhar Sarwar, Drishti General Secretary Saif Chowdhury and sales officer of Abul Khair Group Abdur Rahman also spoke. Later, the chief guest distributed prizes

among the winners of art carnival.

Earlier, Fulki Principal and an artist of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra, Sheela Momen inaugurated the two-day carnival on Friday. A total of 210 participants from 54 educational institutions took part in the competition.

### Hawkers Samity AGM held

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) of

Chittagong Newspaper Hawkers Bahumukhi Cooperative Samity Ltd was held at its Cheragi Pahar office with president Hossain Ahmmed in the chair.

Former vice president Obaidul Haq Majumder was present as chief guest. Samity secretary Moqbul Hossain placed the annual audit report of 2003-2004 and the budget for 2004-2005.

Monir Ahmad, Nurul Alam, Arun Sen, Mostafa Khokan, Abu Taher, Joinal Abedin, Daudul Islam and Jahar Lal Nath also spoke.



Billy Stevens and Toni Stevens perform at a concert titled "The Billitones" at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), Chittagong auditorium on Monday. American Centre of the US Embassy in Dhaka organised the programme.



Chittagong Sangbadpatri Hawk's Bahumukhi Samabaya Samity held its 14th annual general meeting at its office on Monday.