

## ACC secretary

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to contact later. On the other hand, all through yesterday, Maj Gen (Retd) MA Matin worked as the director general (DG) and acting secretary to the commission as usual.

"I'll continue working as the DG and acting secretary as long as the commission wants me to," Matin told reporters while leaving the office at about 3:30pm, it being Thursday.

Sources said Reza did go to the ACC office yesterday and had an hour-long close-door meeting with some top commission officials but did not join.

Commissioner Maniruddin said it was not even a [formal or official] meeting, as the newly appointed

secretary was yet to join. "He came here just to see us and left after some casual talks."

The government, ignoring the commission's selection of Matin as its secretary, named Reza, a former acting secretary, for that post, sources said.

The government on March 6, 2002, contracted Matin as the DG of the now defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) for a two-year term. After his service contract expired in March last, the government issued a notice asking him to carry on at the office until further orders.

He was absorbed into the ACC and has been serving as its DG since its formation on November 21. The commission also asked him to work as its acting secretary.

ACC Chairman Justice Sultan Hossain Khan also sought government approval of Matin's appointment as the ACC secretary, but has not received any response yet. The government rather cancelled Matin's contract on December 11.

In a move against the cancellation, the ACC chief instructed Matin to continue working as before, saying it is for the commission to decide about his job.

"During its formation, the commission was authorised to absorb all the Bac staff and to decide whom to allow to continue here," Justice Sultan had asserted earlier.

An ACC high official on condition of anonymity yesterday said, "The commission is to choose its secretary and the government to approve it. But, in this case, it is the government that takes the decision, even without the commission's knowledge."

Many of the ACC officials apprehend the very independence of the commission would be thrown into question if the government in this way imposes its decision on it.

Justice Sultan yesterday declined to make any comment on the appointment of Reza. "Everything will run in line with law," was his only remark to the journalists on duty at the ACC office.

Talking to the BBC Bangla Service yesterday evening, Commissioner Miah said the commission would decide its stance on the issue after scrutinising the legal aspects.

Asked whether there would be two ACC secretaries from now on, Miah said, "No. The man who had been appointed later was told to come later."

## PM orders completion of Saarc preparation

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday directed all concerned to complete the preparations for successful holding of the forthcoming Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit.

She gave the directive while presiding over a meeting held at the International Conference Centre (ICC) to review the overall preparations, particularly the progress of the activities of different sub-committees formed for the 13th Saarc Summit to be held in Dhaka January 9-11.

After an opening statement by Foreign Minister M. M. Hossain, Chief of Protocol of the Foreign Ministry Brig Gen Monirul Islam gave a presentation on the activities of the sub-committees on the overall preparations for the summit.

Ministers and senior officials concerned attended the meeting.

## Soft-launch of BTTB cellphone on Dec 28

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The much-awaited cellular phone service of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) will be launched on December 28 with a tariff rate higher than expected.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will formally inaugurate the service styled as 'Teletalk' at a function at the International Conference Centre at the Prime Minister's Office.

This will be a soft-launch of BTTB's mobile phones, which will be made available to public by early next year, sources said.

The BTTB will initially provide 2.5 lakh cellphone connections of GSM (global system for mobile communications) technology.

The call tariffs of BTTB's mobile phone have meanwhile frustrated the prospective customers who expected lower rates from the state-owned company.

Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC), the telecom watchdog, has already approved the tariff rates for BTTB's mobile phone.

BTTB will charge Tk 5 per minute for peak hours (8:00am to 8:00pm) and Tk 2 per minute for off-peak hours for its post-paid package.

The zonal call tariff will be Tk 3 per minute and inter-zonal Tk 5 per minute, sources said. The subscribers will be able to call to zonal fixed phones also.

The call charge for prepaid phones will be Tk 4 per minute during peak hours and Tk 2.6 during off-peak hours. All the tariffs are excluding value-added tax (VAT).

Post-paid subscribers will have to pay a monthly rent of Tk 350 plus VAT.

The BTTB will charge Tk 4,500 for a post-paid connection and Tk 3,000 for a prepaid connection, excluding the price of handset.

## Narasimha Rao

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A widower, Rao leaves three sons, one of whom is PV Ranga Rao, a former minister in Andhra Pradesh, and five daughters. Youngest son PV Prabakar Rao was at his bedside when he died.

Rao, who was Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister for three years in early 1970s, had held various portfolios including External Affairs, Defence, Home and HRD, in the governments of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

After demitting office as Prime Minister in 1996, Rao also suffered the humiliation of facing criminal cases including charges of bribing MPs to secure a majority in the Lok Sabha. He was, however, acquitted in all the three cases.

Hospital sources said Rao's health condition deteriorated on Wednesday night and was put on dialysis. This morning his blood pressure dropped after which he was given massage therapy. While the blood pressure normalised, Rao suffered a sudden cardiac arrest, doctors said.

## Diesel

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Rural people consume 30 percent of the diesel and most of the kerosene. Both these products are used largely in the agriculture and transport sectors, and constitute a major cost factor in food production and transportation.

Bangladesh is already facing a high inflation rate of nearly 8 percent. Economists fear the hike in diesel and kerosene prices will further fuel the inflation rate. They argue that the government has other options to avoid the price hike.

The government argues that when diesel and kerosene sell at Tk 20 a litre in Bangladesh, they sell at Tk 34 in India, which is why they are smuggled out of the country in significant amount -- a point the government makes every time it hikes the prices.

Now with both fuel oils selling at Tk 23 a litre in Bangladesh, the price difference still remains significant.

Diesel and kerosene account for over 90 percent of the petroleum products consumed in Bangladesh, making it easy for the government to generate huge revenues by slightly hiking their prices.

The government controls the prices and imports of petroleum products through Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation that is set to incur a loss of Tk 2,200 crore. It pays the government more than Tk 3,500 crore as import duties yearly.

## Rupali Bank to find

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bank has a large national network of 493 branches in all districts. It has been in business for over 33 years and is widely recognised and regarded by depositors and borrowers alike.

Rupali, a share market-listed corporate entity, also has access to significant low-cost deposits, enabling it to fund loan and other credit products at competitive rates.

"Bangladesh will be regarded by many investors, particularly those from outside the country, as having a difficult and challenging political, security, economic and banking environment," warns the GBRW, while identifying the risk factors.

Parliament functions with difficulties, with the government facing non-selective opposition to almost all its policies and initiatives, it further observes. Serious deterioration of law and order is another risk factor. Some banks, like the NCBs, suffer from political interference, corruption and union influence.

Frequent major flooding, uncertainty in the garment export sector arising out of the post-Multi-Fibre Arrangement regime, continued weakening of taka against the US dollar and Bangladesh's image as the world's most corrupt country also pose major risks to investors.

Overstaffing, union problems, negative attitude to privatisation and failure to hold shareholders' meeting and pay dividends cloud the image of the Rupali Bank.

Rupali is regarded to have a board of directors that has failed to operate in accordance with modern corporate governance standards, making the bank less competitive, the consultant notes. The investor interest will depend critically on the restructuring and the treatment of the problem loans and addressing the deeply entrenched board and management weaknesses.

The consultant says other than interested banks, the following institutions should be considered as potential investors. These are

## Dipping Dhaka

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organised by the Department of Environment (DoE) and Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS).

The report showed that between December 2 and December 31, 2002, groundwater table fell by 0.34 metre or about one foot. It was 46.24 metres below the surface in 2003.

The water table in Dhaka was on an average 42 metres below the surface in 2002, 37.78 metres in 2001, 34.18 metres in 2000, 34.86 metres in 1999, 30.45 metres in 1998 and 28.15 metres in 1997 and 26.6 metres in 1996.

The report pointed out that population of the capital is increasing fast and the water table is declining. The demand for water in the capital, the fifth largest city in the world with a population of over 12 million, is now 2,000 million litres per day (mld) as against 1,345 mld in 1998.

Experts said withdrawal of groundwater by deep tubewells is a major reason for fall in the groundwater table. In 1998, the number of deep tubewells was 234 but now the number is 381.

The number of deep tubewells is actually much higher as the owners of almost all the high-rise buildings have installed them, a top official of Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) said seeking not benamed.

The environment report said concentration of heavy metals including cadmium, lead, mercury, chromium and aluminium in rivers

International Finance Corporation (IFC), Asian Development Bank (ADB), Agha Khan Fund for Economic Development (AKFED), Commonwealth Development Company (CDC), German Development Company (DEG), Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO).

These institutions have already invested in various financial institutions. For instance, the AKFED owns 70 percent of Investment Promotion and Development Co (IPDC). The ADB acquired 20 percent of United Leasing Company, and the IFC and Housing Development Finance Corporation of India each owns 15 percent of Delta-BRAC Housing Finance Co.

Some of them have already invested in banks. The FMO, for instance, owns 30 percent of the Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd., the IDB 7.5 percent of Islami Bank and the IFC 20 percent of BRAC Bank.

The government appointed the GBRW last in May, tasking it with releasing a set of information of memorandum in the next month for formally seeking funding from interested investors.

## Draft 3-yr

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adopted under donor pressure in early 2002. The IPSP is the guiding force of the government's anti-poverty measures, for which the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have already given more than \$700 million in loans.

The donors have said their future loans to Bangladesh would be given on the basis of the PRSP's directions.

The government earlier this year formed the national steering committee to design the PRSP and assigned Planning Commission Member Meshbahuddin Ahmed to serve as the focal person. The committee held discussions at national and regional levels with cross-section of people and organisations, and gathered feedback from representatives of the poor in drafting the paper.

## PM opens Hajj flight

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday inaugurated the Hajj flight--2005 of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, praying for safe journey and performance of holy Hajj by the pilgrims.

The day's first flight carried 274 pilgrims to Jeddah.

The prime minister requested the pilgrims the guests of Allah--to pray for peace, welfare and prosperity of the country and the Muslim Ummah.

This time, Biman will operate 85 Hajj flights, including 15 for ballotee pilgrims, to carry nearly 25,000 pilgrims. As in the past, Biman will also operate 12 direct Hajj flights from Chittagong.

Besides carrying Bangladeshi pilgrims, Biman this time has also made arrangements to carry 750 foreign pilgrims from Kolkata, Hong Kong and Thailand, and another 250 from Myanmar to Jeddah under the government management.

The Hajj flights will continue till January 15 while the return flights will start from January 25 and continue till February 18.

Addressing the inaugural function at the departure lounge at Zia International Airport at noon, the prime minister said they had asked Biman Bangladesh Airlines not to charge excess fare despite recent increase in oil price worldwide.

This time, Biman is charging same fare from both ballotee and non-ballotee Hajj pilgrims, she told the function attended, among others, by Hajj pilgrims, ministers, dean of the diplomatic corps and Saudi ambassador in Dhaka.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharraf Hossain Shahjahan and State Minister for Civil Aviation Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin also spoke at the function, which was followed by nujat.

Later, the prime minister went aboard the Biman aircraft prior to its departure for Jeddah and exchanged greetings with the pilgrims.

## Babar asks Rab

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Later, at a meeting with the Rab officials the state minister said Rab's role in law and order related matters is very limited. Rab was actually assigned to take measures against the real criminals after gathering sufficient intelligence information, he said.

The minister advised the Rab officials to be fully professional in their target-oriented operations. Law and order is such a problem where one may get emotional or misguided, he said and cautioned the Rab members against this.

Babar said the Rab members should not be involved in matters like land dispute and price hike of essentials.

The state minister said both Rab and police during the last few months arrested many listed criminals and seized huge cache of firearms that created a competition between Rab and police to fight crime that ultimately benefited the peace-loving people.

Talking to journalists after the meeting, Babar said all the criminals irrespective of their political identity, would be held and brought to justice.

## Int'l agencies

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overcome, it pointed out.

Whether an exporting country experiences export expansion or contraction after quota removal depends primarily on whether its production cost is lower or higher than its main competitors, the IMF thought.

The World Bank (WB) said competitive labour costs, trainable and abundant labour, open market access to European Union and experienced cutting and making producers are the strength of Bangladesh garment industries.

High dependency on buyer's agents, perceived weak market image, low labour productivity, limited backward and forward linkages, long lead times, limited management skills and severely restricted foreign direct investment are however among the weaknesses, the WB said in a draft concept note on 'Challenges and Opportunities in a Post-MFA World Strategies and Options for Bangladesh Ready-made Garment Sector'.

Annisul Huq, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), said, "We don't expect any fall in export orders next year, although it will be crucial for us for many reasons. We are getting more and more orders. We have already gained reputation as a reliable supplier."

He went on, "Importers don't want to try uncharted water. China may be a giant force, but it has its drawbacks."

The BGMEA chief pointed out, "The year 2005 will be crucial for us and our performance during the time will determine if we will be able to retain our market."

He said however, "A big relief for us is the special clause that the US has applied against China on some vital categories such as trousers and shirts. This will halt the Chinese march and give countries a leeway to grow."

The US ambassador's talks with the former prime minister lasted for nearly one and a half hours, but he declined to say anything more about the talks.

Thomas wished merry Christmas to Christine, wife of Sajid Wazed Joy. "She is my fellow citizen. So, I came to wish her merry Christmas," he said.

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US envoy

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the States. So, I came to meet her and her son, Joy, whom I didn't see for a long time," he said.

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## Tigers go down

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left-arm pacesman Irfan Pathan having been hit on his gloves with the previous delivery. Rafique flashed hard to another delivery from Pathan but Yuvraj at point leaped into the air and with his natural hand at full stretch caught the ball which was surly heading for the boundary.

Bashar found an inspiring partner in another Chittagong boy Aftab Ahmed (30 off 49) and the pair put on 62 crucial runs before Aftab holed out to Harbhajan Singh at long-off. Aftab had shown the urgency needed with two fours and a straight six but Rajin Saleh failed to carry on the momentum.

Bashar also perished when he tried to clear the boundary but during his 65, he became the second Bangladeshi batsman to reach 1,000 runs in both forms of the game after Mashud.

Debutant Sriram was India's most successful bowler with three for 43.

Earlier India found themselves in trouble at 45 for three having elected to bat first.

Skipper Sourav Ganguly was out for nought in the first over when he dragged a Baisya delivery on to his stumps. Then came the big one when a Nazmul Hossain inswinger took Sachin Tendulkar (19) inner edge to Mashud.

Yuvraj also went without making too many leaving the ever-dependable Rahul Dravid and Mohammad Kaif to consolidate with a crucial 128-run partnership for the fourth wicket.

David reached his 55th half century in the 37th over off 74 balls hitting four boundaries but it was Kaif's 80 off 111 balls that mainly helped India to post the winning score.

## Opposition activists

FROM PAGE 12

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) participated in the fasting as a gesture of solidarity with the hunger strikers in front of the AL's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

Addressing a rally at the end of the hunger strike by several hundred Jubo League workers, opposition leaders expressed dissatisfaction over the pace of progress in investigations into the August 21 grenade attack. They alleged that the government stands totally indifferent to identifying the criminals behind the attack because its own people had masterminded the attack.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil urged people to intensify the combined opposition movement to oust the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition.

"Force the ruling coalition to quit and help to form a secular and democratic government," he said asking the party leaders and workers to prepare for the December 30 human wall from Sunamganj to the Sundarbans.

"The government and its law enforcing agencies have failed miserably to nab a single person involved in the August 21 attacks," Jalil added.

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon accused the religious extremists of carrying out the August 21 grenade attacks and other bomb blasts across the country. "We need to gear up the movement of 14 progressive opposition parties to overthrow the government and also to uproot the religious extremists."

Without mentioning name of any

## HR groups asks IGP to punish rapists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rights and women's organisations yesterday submitted a memorandum to the inspector general of police (IGP) demanding punishment of the policemen for gang-raping a housewife in Chuadanga on December 18.

Protesting the outrage by 14 policemen, the leaders of the organisations expressed their concern over repression of women in the country.

They said the policemen stationed at Gokulkhali camp in Alamdanga held the housewife when she was returning to her house and raped her on the camp's roof.

The culprits later left her in a rickshaw-van and forced a villager to keep her at his house, they added.

In the memorandum, they also expressed deep concern over the murders of Sabera Begum, headmistress of Shiddheshwari Girls High School, her daughter Shampa and Bikhi Begum, house help of Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain.

The leaders demanded proper investigation into the incident, urging the IGP to take stern departmental action against the accused.

## Rumsfeld

FROM PAGE 12

investigating how the attacker was able to penetrate the base.

Evidence at the site indicated that the assault was likely a suicide attack with a homemade bomb, instead of a rocket attack, according to a preliminary investigation by US-led forces in Iraq.

## Bank guard slaughtered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A security guard of Uttara Bank English Road branch was found slaughtered inside the bank on Shaheed Nazrul Islam Sarani in Dhaka last night.

Police suspect the killing of Golam Mostafa, 35, might involve women but the bank manager and owner of the building ruled out the suspicion.

Police said the killers took nothing from the bank but the manager said a computer was missing.

Police picked up the woman cook of the bank, Jahanara Begum, on suspicion.

Informed by building owner, Khairuddin, bank officials including manager Siddique Rahman rushed to the bank and found Mostafa lying naked and slaughtered on the floor. His clothes were found few yards away. There were stab wounds in his whole body.

Kotwali police retrieved the body and sent it to Mitford Hospital for autopsy.

party of the opposition alliance, Menon said, "We should never let any confusion hamper the greater opposition unity for any partisan interest."

He said the people have showed no confidence in the government through the human wall of December 11 and they will do so again on December 30.

Referring to the ongoing agitation programmes, he said, "It's only a prelude to the future programmes that we would take to force the government to quit," he added.

Joint-General Secretary of JSD Shirin Akhter said the 14 opposition parties would keep the unity intact and go ahead until the alliance regime steps down.

Senior AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Obaidul Quader, Abdul Mannan and Jubo League Chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanok and General Secretary Mirza Azam, among others, addressed the rally.

Later the Jubo League leaders and activists broke the fast with AL leader Zillur Rahman offering them water.

Among others, AL's Advisory Board Member ASH Saadeq, Dhaka University Teachers Association President (DUTA) AAMS Arefin Siddique and university teacher Dr. Golam Samad and cultural activist Golam Quddus joined to express solidarity with the hunger strike.

## Patients suffer as doctors go on excursion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Treatment has been disrupted for the last three days at Noakhali General Hospital and other health complexes in the district, as a number of doctors have gone on an excursion to the Sundarbans.

As many as 35 doctors led by Civil Surgeon AKM Jahangir Chowdhury have gone on the excursion along with their families Tuesday.

The doctors -- 19 of them from the general hospital -- are on three days' leave, but scheduled to stay there five days, civil surgeon office sources said.

Several patients have left the hospital, upazila health complexes and sub-centres in the wake of absence of duty doctors. The patients who remained have been under the care of hospital staff, sources said.

Only two outdoor doctors yesterday struggled to provide treatment to hundreds of patients at the general hospital. They provided medicare to some 178 patients.

Indoor patients at different wards alleged no doctor visited them in the last three days.

Meantime, there are allegations that the doctors collected Tk 10 lakh from a number of drug companies on the occasion.

They harassed a sales agent when denied contribution to the tour, the marketing officer of a company said asking not to be identified.

Despite several attempts, the civil surgeon could not be contacted over cellphone.

## Palestinians vote

FROM PAGE 12

Armed police could be seen on patrol as polling booths opened at 8:00 am (0600 GMT) in Abu Dis after being granted permission to bear weapons for the day by the Israeli authorities, an AFP correspondent reported.

Although vote counting would finish three hours after the polls closed, the final results would not be officially announced until Saturday, local election commission spokesman Firas Yaghi told AFP.

The participation of Hamas has given the election an added importance, serving both as a test of its popularity beyond its powerbase in Gaza and in comparison to the mainstream Fatah movement.

Hamas boycotted the first Palestinian general elections in 1996 and has also excluded itself from the January 9 election to find a successor to the late Yasser Arafat as Palestinian Authority president.

PLO chairman Mahmud Abbas is overwhelming favourite to win next month's ballot having been nominated as Fatah's candidate.

Qorei said he was pleased that Hamas was taking part in the election.

"We view their participation in the municipal elections favourably. They say they want to take part in decision-making process," he said.