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REGD. NO. DA 781 • VOL. XIV NO. 340 • DHAKA MONDAY JANUARY 3, 2005 • POUH 20, 1411 BS • JILKAD 21, 1425 HIRI • 20 PAGES PRICE: TK 7.00

www.thedailystar.net

## Anti-poverty plan sees lower export growth

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Despite a 15 percent export growth achieved in the last fiscal year (FY), the draft Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) projects only an 8 percent growth for the current FY, apprehending adverse impact of the phase-out of Multi-fibre Agreement (MFA).

The PRSP has even lower export growth estimates, of 6 percent and 7 percent, for FY 2005-06 and FY07 in the quota-free regime.

The authors of the paper however hold the low projections to be 'realistic' and say, even with such

export increase, the country will have a 6.5 percent GDP (gross domestic product) growth in FY07.

The national steering committee on the PRSP at a press briefing yesterday said, considering the economic realities, they have designed a realistic poverty alleviation plan.

"If we follow this plan efficiently, avoiding wastage, it will take the nation out of poverty by 2015," said Kamal Siddiqui, chairman of the committee and principal secretary to the prime minister. "We have prepared this document on our own. There is no donor prescription

here."

"It is not ambitious, it is doable," said Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan, one of the committee members.

Another committee member explained the reason for the lowered export targets: "As there is an uncertainty about our export opportunities in the post-MFA regime, we had to be realistic and conservative. If we fare better, it is great for us."

Prompted by a question on whether the PRSP recommends any measures to curb corruption, committee member Hossain Zillur Rahman, an economist, said, "We

have some time-bound projects that will reduce corruption in multiple sectors. Corruption is an offshoot of lack of good governance and the PRSP aims at improving governance."

The country on an average achieved a 5 percent annual GDP growth in the last decade, but, at the same time, social inequity widened, pointed out reporters, and asked whether the PRSP would address this issue.

In response, Kazi Mesbahuddin Ahmed, member secretary of the committee and a member of the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia hands over textbooks to a primary school student yesterday at her office launching the nationwide textbook distribution.

## Khaleda opens textbook distribution

**UNB, Dhaka**

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia while inaugurating nationwide new textbooks distribution among students yesterday urged teachers to work with more enthusiasm to ensure quality education.

"It will help increase the number of successful learners in schools and heighten the reputation of educational institutions and teachers," she told the inauguration function held at International Conference Centre.

About 9 crore textbooks will be distributed under the government's initiative for students of new academic year began on January 1.

The prime minister regretted that children of insolvent families in many cases are not getting requisite

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## AHMADIYYA BOOKS HC asks govt why ban should not be illegal

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The High Court yesterday issued a rule on the government to show cause why its ban on Ahmadiyya publications should not be declared illegal, staying the ban for another three weeks.

The respondents -- home secretary, a senior assistant secretary of the home ministry, inspector general of police and deputy controller of Bangladesh Press -- will have to reply to the court in three weeks time.

They will have to show reasons why the government order prohibiting sales, distribution and preserva-

tion of Ahmadiyya books and publications should not be declared illegal for being violative to the constitution and the fundamental rights of the community.

A High Court Division bench comprising Justice MA Matin and Justice AFM Abdur Rahman passed the order after hearing the case yesterday.

A group of anti-Ahmadiyya operatives gathered in and outside the courtroom during the hearing. They said they would file separate petitions to vacate the stay order and discharge the rule.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Sweepers halt Dhaka-Ctg rail link for 3hrs

**UNB, Comilla**

Dhaka-Chittagong railway communication remained suspended for over three hours yesterday as sweepers bespattered Comilla Railway Station with human excreta protesting the arrest of a colleague.

Railway staff at the station were forced to stay away as the mob smeared the station master's office, booking office, ticket counter and platform with feces.

The sweepers however cleaned up the mess after the railway authorities and police promised them to set the arrestee, Laxman Chandra Das, free. The railway traffic resumed at about 1:00pm.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## ACC move on 'missing' cars irks secretaries

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

A section of the secretaries asked by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) to explain the reported irregular usage of 1,028 vehicles say it is wrong for the commission to make the sweeping implication that corrupt officials have gobbled up the cars.

They find the ACC letter "disappointing", because they say the vehicles in question have not been "gobbled up illegally by any official". One of them says, "All the vehicles are being used by officials at the ministries. Those did not get disappeared into thin air."

The ACC in a letter on Saturday asked 13 ministries to report and

explain the whereabouts of the vehicles purchased under different government development projects between 1995 and 2001.

A secretary requesting anonymity maintains, "This is a comparatively small-scale irregularity. Of course it needs to be addressed. But there are much bigger issues, bigger corruption in the government and the press is reporting them, too."

The commission's move followed a press report, according to which, after completion of the projects, the vehicles had not been deposited to the central transport pool as per the rule.

Interestingly, the report says these ministries have been regularly

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Gas crisis set to last year long

**SHARIER KHAN**

The present dip in supply of natural gas is set to dog the country throughout this year and turn into a full-blown national crisis later in the summer, fear experts.

The production of natural gas starts to decline in every winter as supply pipelines lose efficiency in low temperature, but the crisis may become unbearable this year against a backdrop of significant rise in demand and shortfall in supply.

An alarming depletion of reserve at offshore Sangu field recently further compounded the problems

of energy sector. Petrobangla is now supplying maximum 1,310 million cubic feet a day (mmcf) against a natural gas demand of 1,360mmcf.

Though the gas production is to go up with the operation of Unocal's Moulavibazar field in March, this fresh 70mmcf output can not be pumped in to the national grid this year for lack of pipeline from Ashuganj to Elenga.

Petrobangla, which contributes over Tk 2,500 crore to the national exchequer annually, planned to set up the 37km pipeline on urgent basis, but the Tk 150 crore project

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

## Benapole land port strike on Hundreds of trucks stranded


**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jessore**

Export and import at Benapole land port remained suspended for the second day yesterday while hundreds of trucks with goods including perishable ones are stranded at Benapole on Bangladesh side and Petrapole on Indian side.

The situation further deteriorated as customs officials could not work due to interference by five trade organisations.

When contacted over telephone, Clearing and Forwarding (C & F) Agents Association executive Mohsin Milon said the leaders of C&F Agents Association, Import and

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5



**ASA**

## 'Bangladesh : Pioneer of Microcredit'

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**Md. Shafiqul Haque Choudhury**  
Founder and President, ASA.

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- ASA methodology is simple, innovative, decentralized, cost-effective hence sustainable.
- ASA - The Ford Motor Model of Microfinance - ADB Newsletter, June 2002.
- ASA maintains the most impressive distinction of being highly profitable while serving very poor client with affordable interest rate - Microfinance Information eXchange, June 2003.

**ASA at a Glance**

Name of Loan Products	Member (Nos. in Million)	Loan Disbursement (Tk. in Million)	Loan Balance (Tk. in Million)
Small Loan	2.86	99,291	12,536
Small Business Loan	0.10	9,935	1,028
Hardcore Poor	0.03	144	35
Small Enterprise Lending (SEL)	0.01	928	370
Total	3.00	110,298	13,969
Savings & Security Fund Balance			4,223

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