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Act tough to recover grabbed lands

PM asks DCs, terms illegal occupation a nat'l problem

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said the government has identified illegal land grabbing as a national problem and ordered the administration to take effective measures to recover public and private lands from grabbers, and go for stern action against them.

"We have already formed committees at national and district levels to recover illegally grabbed lands of the government, autonomous bodies, private institutions and people as well as to take proper steps against the illegal occupants,"

she said.

Inaugurating a three-day annual conference of deputy commissioners (DCs) at the Cabinet Division, the prime minister asked the DCs to take tougher action against the land grabbers.

"You must tackle with a heavy hand any obstructions to government activities and attacks on institutions or officials. You have to discharge all your responsibilities with neutrality ignoring all sorts of pressure and intimidation," Khaleda said.

The PM advised the DCs to gear up monitoring and inspection of

field level activities and take appropriate measures to keep all government institutions dynamic. "If necessary you can make direct contact with me for urgent resolution of problems on development issues," she said.

The PM lauded the DCs' role in implementing government decisions and development programmes.

Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed and Industries Minister Matiur Rahman Nizami, all the six

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STAFF RECRUITMENT ACC rejects advisory body's suggestions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday rejected the recommendations of the high-profile advisory committee formed for screening the Bureau of Anti-Corruption (Bac) staff.

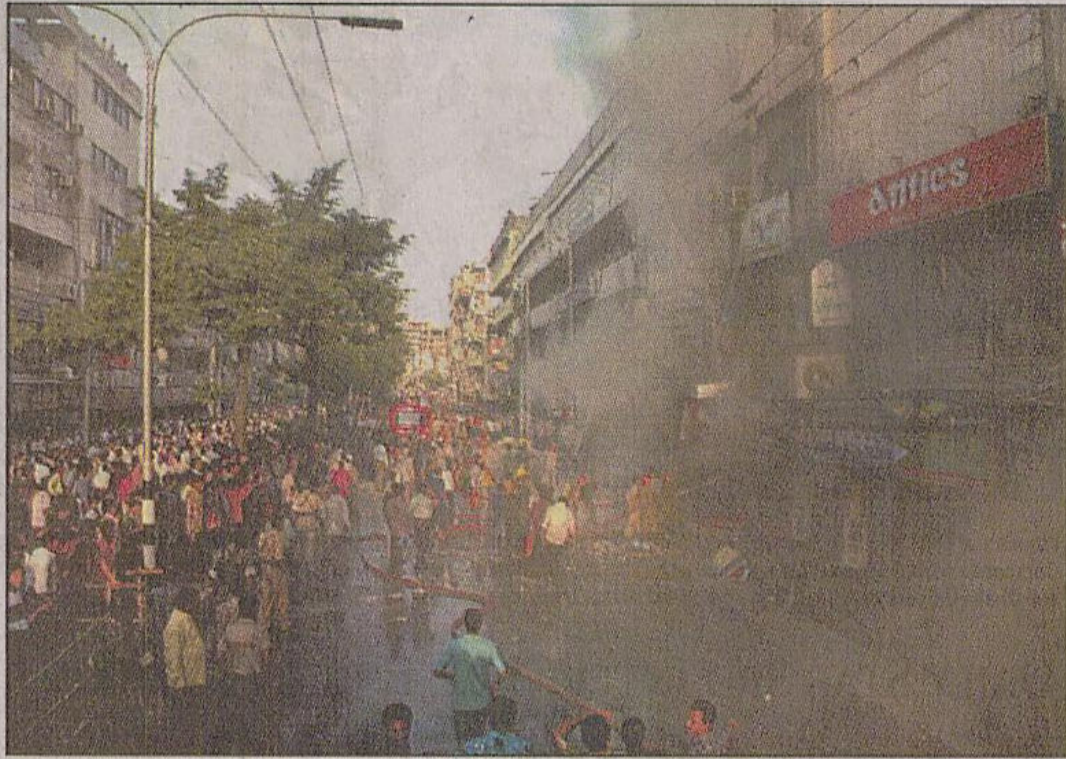
SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Ex-HC judge files petition against chief justice

UNB, Dhaka

A unconfirmed additional judge of the High Court (HC) yesterday filed a writ petition challenging the legality of Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain's holding office 'violating the Constitution'.

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Firefighters make frantic efforts to douse a blaze that broke out at a confectionery shop on the city's Elephant Road yesterday wounding 21.

'Blast' hurts 35, 15 shops burnt down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A blast at a confectionery shop on city's New Elephant Road left at least 35 people wounded and some 15 shops completely gutted yesterday.

Police and Fire Brigade officials suspect that problems with the air-conditioning system at Rina Confectionery might have set off the blast, which ripped through the ground floor of Sunrise Building at about 4:30pm.

"I heard a huge bang and saw a ball of fire leaping out of the confectionery. Soon windowpanes began to crack as the entire building shuddered," said Julhush Ali, owner of a shop said. "At first we took it to be an earthquake and got out of the building at once," he added.

Following the explosion, fire spread fast across five to six shops. Glass windows of almost all the 25 shops on the ground floor were damaged. Even the steel shutters of

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

558 acres forest land illegally occupied

Top industrialists deny allegations

STAR REPORT

State Minister for Health and Family Welfare Affairs Mizanur Rahman Sinha, ruling BNP lawmaker MA Hashem, FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo and others have illegally occupied 558 acres of forest land along Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, according to a forest department report.

A good many leading companies including Square, BRAC, Social Marketing Company, Bangas Company Ltd. and Jamuna Sugar Mills are also on the list of illegal occupiers.

The Department of Forest prepared the list of its land gobbled up at Bhaluka upazila in Mymensingh, sources said quoting the report submitted to a parliamentary stand-

ing committee.

The persons and the companies accused by the report of illegal forest land occupation have denied the allegations and claimed that they are the legal owners of the land.

The forest department last week sent the list of the illegal occupiers to the parliamentary standing committee on land ministry for necessary actions against them. A copy was also sent to the secretary of the Ministry of Forest and Environment, sources said.

The report says the forest department has filed cases against the occupiers, which are now pending with the court. The companies and persons grabbed the forest land by producing fake documents and have thrown up industries on the

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Air fare on int'l routes goes up

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Airline companies operating international flights from Bangladesh have raised the fare through adjustments of the Tk 2.5 hike in the exchange rate of US dollar.

Aviation sources said the airlines had maintained the previous exchange rate despite the rise of dollar price a year back and continued to sell tickets for international routes at a rate of Tk 59 per dollar until it was fixed at Tk 61.5 from April 1.

Vice President of Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Police drops charges against Galib, 3 others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi police yesterday dropped charges against militant linchpin Dr Asadullah Al Galib and three of his cohorts under the section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Fresh hike soon in power tariff

Donors also press for another rise in gas, petroleum prices

SHARIER KHAN and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government, under heavy pressure from the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), is mulling over another raise in the power tariff very soon in line with the recent hike in gas and petroleum prices.

The leading donor agencies also want the government to increase once again the gas and petroleum prices that witnessed increments as recently as in December and January last.

However, the government has not yet decided how much the hike in power tariff will be, but sources put it in the region of more than 2 percent.

The government will review the gas tariff in July, before considering a gas price hike, it told the donors.

An increase in the petroleum prices now would have political

repercussions, since these were increased but recently, it pointed out. And said it may not be able to step up petroleum prices before the next general elections, as the latest hike has pushed up prices of all commodities.

However, the government will consider revising the tax structure with a view to scale down the losses incurred by Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) that imports the country's oil. The BPC pays taxes at rates ranging up to 300 percent, providing over Tk 3,500 crore in revenue for the government while itself suffering an annual loss of around Tk 1,200 crore.

According to the draft aide memoire on the WB's Development Support Credit-3 submitted to the government last month, the annual adjustment of power tariffs was due in September last year. At that time, the government considered a 2

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Tokyo seeks Dhaka's help for UN seat

UNB, Dhaka

Japan yesterday sought Bangladesh's support to its candidature to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council, as aspirants from three continents are in a hot contest for a coveted berth in the elite body.

Japanese Ambassador in Dhaka Matsushiro Horiguchi called on Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and made the request during discussion on bilateral issues and UN reforms.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

KIBRIA KILLING Asma opens letter writing campaign for justice

UNB, Dhaka

Asma Kibria, wife of slain former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, yesterday announced a "letter writing campaign" to press for

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

JS body criticises speaker, minister for interference

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The parliamentary standing committee on private members' bills and resolutions yesterday denounced 'interference' by the speaker and the law minister in its affairs and blamed them for making the committee dysfunctional.

Members of the committee, both

from the ruling and the opposition parties, at a meeting decided to ask the speaker to initiate steps for making the committee functional and free from any interference by the executive.

The lawmakers observed that the speaker's letter to the law ministry on private members' bills has

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