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## Grabbers filling up yet another city wetland

PINAKI ROY

Just beside the Martyred Intellectuals' Monument at Rayerbazar in the capital, local brick and sand traders are filling up a canal known as 'Hikkar Khal'.

Filling up of this canal and wetland along the Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment may cause waterlogging in Mohammadpur, Basila, Rayerbazar and Dhanmondi areas in rainy season, locals say.

While visiting the area last Thursday, this correspondent found a local guy named Mohammad Alamgir supervising the land filling work at Hikkar Khal. When asked, Alamgir claimed that he is the owner of the land.

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Brick and sand traders are filling up a canal and wetland along the Dhaka Flood Protection Embankment, posing a threat of waterlogging in vast areas of the city.

PHOTO: STAR



## BoI chief made adviser to energy division

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed Board of Investment (BoI) chief Mahmudur Rahman an adviser to the energy and mineral resources division with the rank and status of a deputy minister.

The move came following state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain's resignation on Saturday.

Mahmudur will serve as an adviser to the ministry in addition to his duties as the BoI chief.

"I'm happy to take the new responsibility as the advisor for the Ministry of Energy. I hope to continue my duty with sincerity and honesty as I did at the Board of Investment," Mahmudur told The Daily Star.

"I'll have a short stint of about 16 months and I hope I'll be successful in attracting more investment," he added.

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## Project cars offered to speed up file clearance

### LGED provides most luxury vehicles

RAFIQ HASAN

The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is one of the major sources of luxury vehicles for the high officials of different ministries and the department offers them cars for quick clearance of files, sources alleged.

The LGED provides scores of vehicles, including highly expensive sports utility vehicles (SUV) bought for development projects, for the ministry high-ups.

The cars are used mostly by secretaries and joint secretaries of the ministries. A number of state ministers, deputy ministers and high officials at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) also use the vehicles,

the source said.

The LGED provides the cars for the high-ups in the ministries of LGRD, establishment, planning and finance, mainly to get their files cleared quickly, according to sources.

Asked, Shahidul Hassan, chief engineer of LGED, admitted the fact. "But we do not provide car for those organisations (or ministries) where we do not have any work," he told The Daily Star last night over telephone.

He believes there is no harm in providing the ministries with project cars as the vehicles are used for the government activities. Hassan observed the matter should not be seen negatively because it has become a necessity.

According to sources, the num-

ber of cars under the LGED will be around 500.

The chief engineer, however, could not say how many cars are there under the LGED.

He claimed that 10 to 15 new cars are bought every year for development projects.

The government has stopped buying such cars from its own resources following negative propaganda about the use of these vehicles, Shahidul said. "Now we buy cars only on request from the donor agencies," he added.

The LGED bears the cost of fuel and pays the drivers of the vehicles. The drivers say the officials use the cars beyond official works.

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## Security, trade to top agenda

### Delhi talks begin today

STAR REPORT

The first foreign secretary-level meeting between Bangladesh and India in two years begins today in New Delhi to focus on all issues of bilateral interest and cooperation.

Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin, who left Dhaka yesterday, will lead the Bangladesh

delegation at the two-day talks with his Indian counterpart Shyam Saran. The team includes senior officials drawn from the foreign, home and commerce ministries.

Foreign ministry officials said the talks with an 'open-ended agenda' assume special significance as both the countries have reaffirmed their

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## Double crime

11yr old mistakenly held, kept behind bars for 'bribe'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, KHULNA

An eleven-year-old boy, Milon Howlader, has been languishing at Khulna District Jail since May 3 last year despite his proven innocence.

Sonadanga police mistakenly arrested Milon, son of Yunus Howlader of Gobarchaka main road, as an accused in the Awami League (AL) leader Manzur Morshed Labu murder case on May 2.

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## OIC close to forming free trade area

### Plans to adopt tariff-cutting steps by this year

REUTERS, PUTRAJAYA

Muslim nations moved closer to forming a free trade area yesterday, with plans to adopt tariff-cutting steps by end-2005 to bridge a gap between oil-rich and poor members of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.

"This is an important first step toward the larger goal of greater economic integration among the OIC countries," the group's chairman, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, told an OIC trade forum.

One of the biggest challenges facing the grouping of Muslim nations is the vast economic disparities among its 57 members, Abdullah told the forum in Malaysia's administrative capital.

The OIC includes Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Iran, United Arab Emirates and Kuwait -- which together possess 700 billion barrels of proven oil reserves -- as well as poor countries

such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Bangladesh.

Abdullah said OIC countries were negotiating to establish a preferential trading system to boost trade with each other.

"The protocol is expected to be finalised in November," Malaysian Trade Minister Rafidah Aziz said. "The negotiations are now regarding tariff reduction modalities and implementation period. It will cover 7 pct of total tariff lines."

OIC nations account for just 8 percent of global trade, and trade within the bloc amounts to 13 percent of the grouping's total trade, she said.

"There's a three-staged lowering of tariffs," Rafidah added, describing the OIC measures. "Increasingly, we will be offering market access duty-free to each other in the longer term."

Morocco urged the OIC to use the trade pact as the basis for a free trade area.

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## JAPAN AID

## Governance issues come under watch

SHARIER KHAN, back from Japan

Japan, the country's biggest bilateral donor, has decided to closely monitor governance issues of Bangladesh to make sure its grants, loans and technical assistance effectively reach the poor, according to the foreign affairs ministry of Japan.

Such monitoring would include the tendering process under Japanese funds which are often plagued with corruption, bid manipulation, delays and awarding contracts to inappropriate bidders in vital sectors like power, transports and other infrastructure sectors.

"We request Bangladesh government to improve the environment for Japanese investors, the infrastructure, reform the country's regulations, improve its governance and security," an official dealing with Bangladesh at his Tokyo office told The Daily Star last week.

Unlike other donors, Japan never

focused on internal issues like governance before. But it feels that this poor governance has become a major concern for both the donors and the people of Bangladesh.

"We are not aggressive (like the western donors). This is not intervention. This is to make our funding more effective because its Japanese taxpayers' money," he said.

"We respect Bangladesh ownership. We will not impose anything. But if there is lack of governance, it becomes very difficult for us to make the Japanese official development assistance (ODA) effective. Without commitment from Bangladesh government, we will not do anything. We hate to be misunderstood," he added.

"We are more concerned about effective ODA inputs. Since the nineties, Japan has reduced its total ODA (for all developing nations) by 33 percent. So the aid flow to Bangladesh is also being affected.

We are facing pressures to improve the aid quality everywhere," another official explained why Japan tilted to governance issue.

Bangladesh's poor governance, corruption and internal political conflict had become a full fledged concern of all donors in the recent years while donors criticism on these matters have often triggered Bangladesh ministers to make offensive comments against some unspecified donor countries.

While the Japanese foreign ministry officials did not relate its new pro-governance aid policy with any particular experience in Bangladesh, some other officials however said the BNP government's cancellation of an agreement with Japan for a fertilizer factory in 2001 which was signed during the Awami League government stand as an example of the country's weak political direction. Besides a

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