



The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

TODAY'S ISSUE 20 PAGES



REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVI. NO. 31

DHAKA TUESDAY FEBRUARY 14, 2006

COMMITTED
TO
People's Right to Know

www.thedailystar.net

FALGUN 2, 1412 BS

MOHARRAM 14, 1427 HIJRI

20 PAGES PLUS STAR LIFESTYLE PRICE: TK 10.00

POLITICAL LINKS
HC bars judge Chunnu from judicial work for 2 weeks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court in an unprecedented move yesterday issued an injunction barring a divisional judge from judicial activities for two weeks following a writ petition alleging his involvement in politics.

The injunction came against Dhaka Divisional Special Judge Rezaul Karim Khan Chunnu who allegedly took part in several programmes of the ruling BNP and expressed his interest in contesting the next parliamentary elections.

The High Court bench also issued a rule upon the government asking it to show cause in two weeks why it should not be asked to take action against the divisional judge for his alleged participation in political activities.

Supreme Court lawyer Khairul

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Top shots of Saarc central banks meet tomorrow

STAR REPORT

Top executives of the central banks of the Saarc countries meet in Dhaka tomorrow, when they will make recommendations on the utilisation of the 'Saarc Poverty Reduction Fund' that was formed in the 13th Saarc Summit held in Dhaka last year.

SaarcFinance, a platform of the central bank governors of the Saarc countries, is organising the meeting styled 'SaarcFinance Governors' Symposium on Microcredit'.

Professor Muhammad Yunus, managing director of Grameen Bank, the pioneer of microcredit programme, will present keynote paper in the symposium to be inaugurated by Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman.

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Fuel prices hiked by Tk 1 in North

Energy adviser terms surprise decision a compensation to traders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In a surprise move, the government yesterday hiked prices of diesel, petrol and octane by Tk 1 per litre in the fuel-hungry northern region to compensate traders due to increased carrying cost.

The decision was taken as traders are now carrying the petroleum products from Dhaka and Khulna instead of Baghabari in Sirajganj to the northern region in peak irrigation season.

The fresh hike will remain in force for 15 days and the govern-

ment will then review the situation.

"There is no scarcity of kerosene. But you bring diesel, petrol and octane to the northern region from wherever you can and charge Tk 1 more per litre," a desperate energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman asked fuel traders at an emergency meeting at his office.

Earlier, at a meeting in Moulvibazar late last month, Saifur had said, "We are not increasing oil prices at this moment."

Owners of filling stations and tank lorries and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) officials attended yesterday's

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Finance Minister Saifur Rahman told journalists yesterday that the latest government move did not mean raising fuel price from now. "Fuel price could be enhanced in six months or one year. It is not a static matter," he said.

Earlier, at a meeting in Moulvibazar late last month, Saifur had said, "We are not increasing oil prices at this moment."

Owners of filling stations and tank lorries and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) officials attended yesterday's

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Power-hungry people hem in Palli Bidyut office

UNB, Satkhira

About 1,000 people yesterday laid a siege to Patelghata Palli Bidyut office protesting severe load-shedding and low voltage affecting irrigation to the Irrigation Boro fields.

Ignoring police barricade, the demonstrators held a rally in front of the bidyut office where peasant leaders demanded uninterrupted power supply for irrigation to the drying up paddy plants.

Bidyut officials admitted they are supplying barely five to six megawatts against the demand of 30 megawatts.

The demonstrators said their pump machines were damaged due to low voltage. They also demanded withdrawal of General Manager G M Arif Ahmed of Patelghata Palli Bidyut for re-imposition of the minimum charge

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PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia speaks to her Pakistani counterpart Shaukat Aziz in a meeting at the Prime Minister's House in Islamabad yesterday.

Bilateral FTA to be finalised by Sept

Decide Dhaka, Islamabad; two PMs sign 4 MoUs

UNB, Islamabad

Pakistan and Bangladesh have agreed to finalise bilateral free trade area (FTA) agreement within the shortest possible time, by September at the latest, to increase trade relations between the two countries.

Amid such a situation, a delegation of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) called on Energy Advisor Mahmudur Rahman at his office yesterday.

The delegation requested the energy advisor to take immediate steps for uninterrupted supply of gas to RMG units.

"Productivity of our industry has been suffering badly due to inadequate gas supply and the crisis made our job difficult to complete export formalities in

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from reporters on the outcome of the talks.

Terming the bilateral meeting fruitful and effective, The Pak premier said they agreed to finalise the FTA soon, by the 30th of September, to increase trade relations between the two countries.

Replies to a question about duty-free access of Bangladeshi products to their market, Shaukat Aziz said Pakistan wants to take more goods from Bangladesh and the FTA will facilitate the process.

It was discussed at the bilateral talks that a Pakistani delegation led by its commerce minister will visit Bangladesh soon to make a successful FTA deal.

As Bangladeshi side raised the matter of duty-free access of its

goods, the host side welcomes it, saying that now a number of items, including tea and jute, are being imported from Bangladesh.

About Safta ratification, Pakistan informed that they would soon ratify the Safta in their next cabinet meeting, likely this month.

Shaukat Aziz termed this bilateral visit of Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda to Pakistan historic as it took place after long 12 years. This visit is "really a turning point to take the existing friendly relations to a new height" in all sides of cooperation for wellbeing of the two peoples, he said.

During the official talks, Shaukat was quoted as saying: "Relation between Pakistan and

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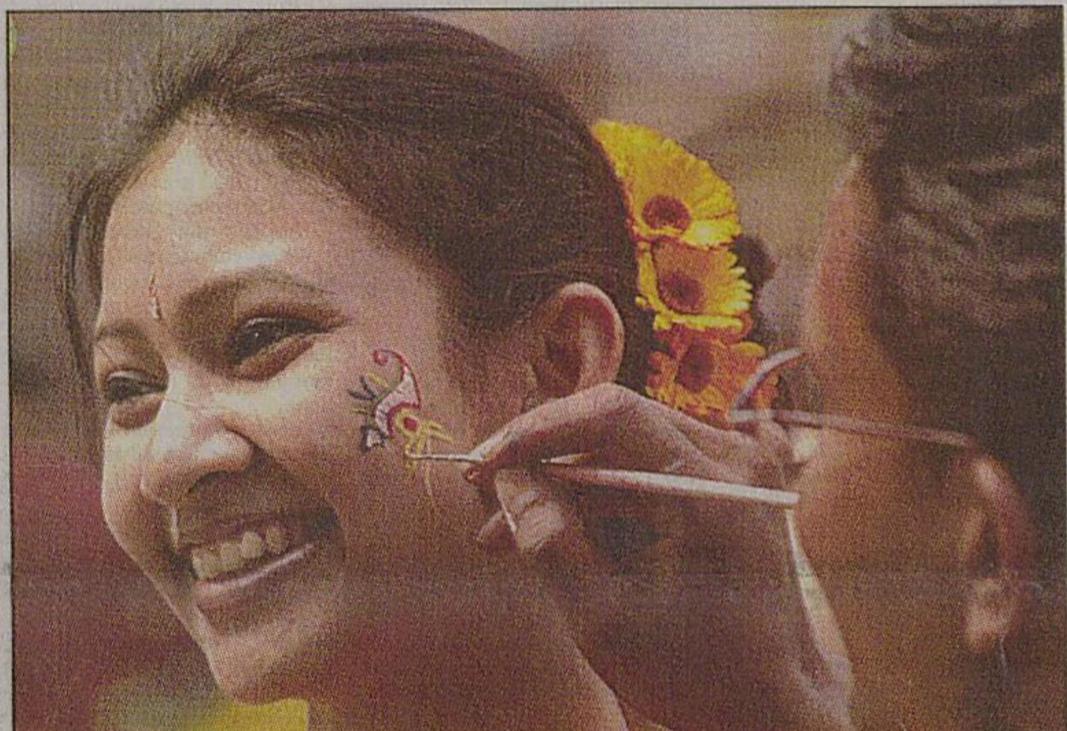


PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

Celebrating Pahela Falgun, the first day of spring, a smiling girl gets motif painted on her cheek on the Dhaka University Fine Arts Institute premises yesterday.

A different scene in parliament

Treasury, opposition bench members show 'rare tolerance'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ducted the House yesterday [Sunday]. We hope we'll get adequate time in future as well."

Both the ruling and opposition members requested the speaker to extend the current session to allow them more time in discussing the president's speech and other issues of national interest.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui, who was presiding over the sitting, told the House that the Business Advisory Committee (BAC) will meet on February 16 to make a decision in his regard.

Six Awami League (AL) lawmakers yesterday took the floor, raising points of order. They spoke without interruption by the chair or the ruling alliance lawmakers.

Referring to the speaker's performance, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid said, "We are happy with the way you con-

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Donors upbeat over AL's joining JS

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh's development partners, closely watching the pre-election political developments, feel encouraged to see the opposition party in parliament and hoped it would pave the way for free and credible general elections.

Spokesmen for the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) in their separate observations to UNB said parliament is an excellent forum for dialogue and debate over policy issues.

A spokesperson for the US Embassy said, "We are encouraged by the decision of the Awami League to attend the current parliamentary session and to exercise, not surrender, their democratic rights."

In a similar observation, a spokesperson for the British High Commission said, "We welcome the opposition party's return to the reform process and electoral systems in the best interests of the people. Their failure to do so will pitch the coun-

try into a potentially explosive situation," SM Shahjahan, former adviser to the caretaker government, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Alongside making suggestions on how to strengthen the Election Commission (EC) and electoral rules, the three former advisers-Major General (retired) Moinul Hossain Chowdhury, M Hafizuddin Khan and SM Shahjahan opposed the existing constitutional provision that allows the president to hold the defence portfolio during the rule of caretaker government.

The political climate will remain uncertain and the democratic process will be hampered if the crisis is not resolved before the next caretaker government takes office, they cautioned.

"We hope both the government and the opposition will reach a consensus on the proposed reforms in the caretaker government and electoral systems in the best interests of the people. Their failure to do so will pitch the coun-

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Hakaluki haor faces ecological disaster

Kushiyara river just 200m away, posing risk of joining

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The Hakaluki haor in Sylhet is facing ecological disaster as the Kushiyara river poses possibility of merging with the vast water body if it erodes just about 200m land at Kodupur and Basantapur in Golapganj upazila.

As the fallout of this possible joining, several thousand acres of Irrigation Boro land may also be lost during the dry season.

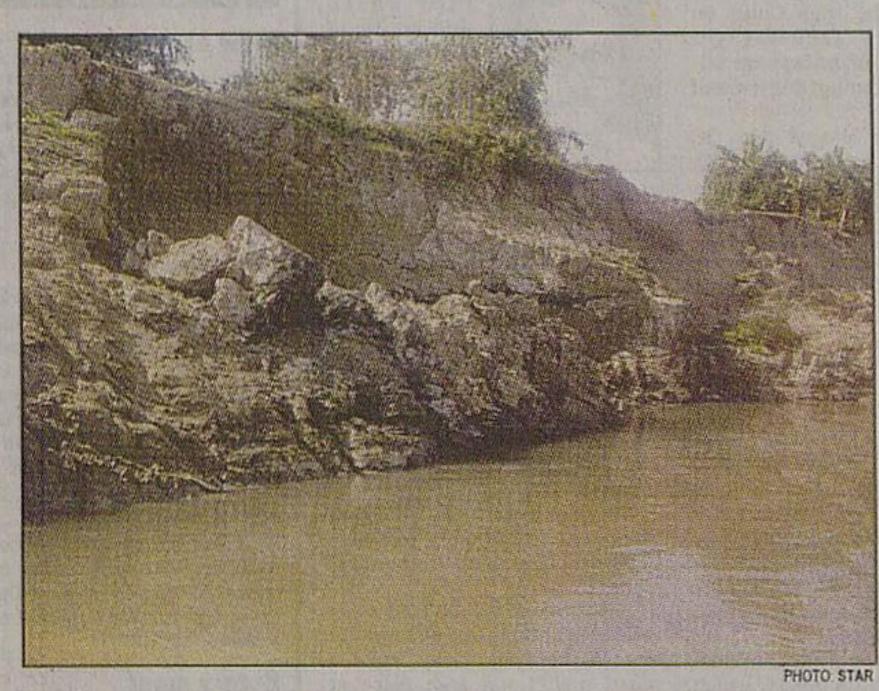
Sources said the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) here sent a Tk 9.26 crore project to the water resources ministry last year to check the erosion, which continues even during

the dry season.

BWDB Executive Engineer in Sylhet Fokhrul Islam said the project to save some 1,600m riverbank in Kodupur-Basantapur area was sent to the ministry last year, but "the project is yet to be approved."

Privatisation Commission Chairman Enam Ahmed Chowdhury also sent letters to the secretary to the water resources ministry, the BWDB director general and other high officials after visiting the area in 2003, requesting for immediate steps to check the large-scale erosion.

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The Hakaluki haor in Sylhet lies only 200 metres from this eroding bank of the Kushiyara. The river may merge with the haor, if erosion continues.



PINAKI ROY

ICT has proved a boon even for drug peddlers. A drug addict no longer needs to risk the hazards of going to drug dens to buy the stuff. One now simply calls a certain cellphone number, places the order, fixes a rendezvous and within a short while gets his daily dose delivered there. If one wants, he or she can get home delivery too. All is done in a neat, inconspicuous way, hard for law enforcers to detect.

Phensedyl is now available on

Drug running goes mobile

Agargaon for Tk 200 to Tk 300," he added.

Last Thursday evening a mobile-phone peddler was seen in Dhanmondi delivering three bottles of Phensedyl carried in his socks. He came from Kalyanpur to deliver the bottles, a Phensedyl addict said, adding the usual price is Tk 350 a bottle.

Officials of the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC), the police, Detective Branch and Rapid Action Battalion claimed drug running in the city has reduced much after they made away with the notorious drug spots. But this correspondent visited and found more than 10 drug dens running smoothly, in some cases even in presence of the police.

"Law enforcers have destroyed most of the notorious drug spots in the city. Now they [drug lords] have become extra-careful and most of

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