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## Don't harass honest businessmen

### Top trade leaders urge government, say anti-graft steps should continue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Top business leaders yesterday lauded the ongoing crackdown on corruption and urged the government to continue it to bring the corrupt to book but not to harass genuine and honest businessmen.

They also urged the government to make public the names of only those who have specific allegations against them. Smugglers and hoarders who manipulate the market or create artificial crisis of goods are not businessmen, they pointed out.

"We fully support arrests made on specific charges but it will be very unfortunate if anyone is caught just on the basis of suspicion. The government must gain confidence of the honest businessmen," said International Chamber of Commerce-Bangladesh (ICC-B) President Mahbubur Rahman.

He was briefing the press following a meeting of the top business

bodies at ICC-B auditorium in the capital.

The meeting was attended by Acting President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce & Industry Mohammed Ali, Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce & Industry President Latifur Rahman, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce of Industry President Hossain Khaled, Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry President Masih ul Karim, Bangladesh Employers' Federation President Syed Manzur Elahi, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association President Fazul Haque and former president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Exporters Association Annisul Huq.

Mahbubur Rahman said the government decision on opening the warehouses that were sealed earlier will have a positive impact on the market.

Welcoming the waiving of

duties on rice and wheat import, the business leaders reiterated their suggestions for duty-free import of other essential commodities for stabilising the market price.

On the government move to formulate a policy on storage, the ICC president said, "The policy of storage of goods should not be equated with hoarding and normal business. And storage should not be disturbed and impeded in the name of (combating) hoarding in order to maintain the supply chain to retail outlets."

The policy should take into consideration the ground realities, and it should be framed in consultation with experts from the trade bodies concerned, he noted.

The meeting observed that the performance of Chittagong Port has improved significantly due to a number of positive measures taken recently.

## Tarique's humble days begin in jail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, who is used to a posh lifestyle, passed his first day in jail hospital very ordinarily.

He was sent to Dhaka Central Jail on Monday night from where he was shifted to the jail hospital for treatment.

"The civil surgeon of the jail hospital will visit Tarique today and then the next course of steps regarding his treatment will be taken," Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Shamsul Haider Siddique told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sources said a medical team, led by the civil surgeon of the jail hospital, will examine his health condition and as per their suggestion it will be decided whether Tarique will be in the hospital or in the cell with other general inmates.

Tarique had two pieces of bread with vegetables for his breakfast yesterday. He was served with a piece of Pangas fish at lunch with rice and pulses. Sources said the menu for the dinner was the same.

Meanwhile, Tarique's remand for interrogation in an extortion case has been challenged in the High Court.

Azizur Rahman Dulu, a lawyer

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## Meteoric rise of Orion on Hawa clout

SHARIER KHAN

The Orion group that had been failing to pay dividends to its shareholders for many years amassed an incredible amount of wealth by bagging various deals in the last five years using undue influence of the Hawa Bhaban allegedly of Tarique Rahman.

Beginning with air operation licence, Orion bagged various tenders for building car parking facility, flyover project, power project, large-scale hospitality operation scheme, construction of parking facility at Hotel Sheraton, extension project of Sonargaon Hotel and cargo scanning facility at the Zia International Airport, etc.

Moreover, Orion acquired tea garden, built high-end fish processing plant and became general sales agent (GSA) for two Middle-Eastern airlines.

Most of these deals were awarded by the alliance government during its five-year term through tender manipulation, rule violation and compromising the national interest.

According to a financial market analyst, it is very difficult to assess how much properties or assets Obaidul Karim, chairman of Orion Group, has amassed since most of his ventures are "private limited company", which are not required to make their financial statements public.

Now many of the Orion enterprises and projects face grave uncertainty as Orion chief Obaidul Karim and his family members are on the run to evade arrest for embezzling Tk 600 crore from Oriental Bank.

Projects facing major uncertainty are Meghnaghat phase two 490 MW power project, the eight-kilometre Gulistan-Jatrabari Flyover project and the Tk 240 crore Hotel Sonargaon extension project.

Though the power and the flyover projects were given to apparent "joint ventures" involving middle eastern Belhasa Group and a German company STEAG, Obaidul Karim himself held the key executive posts in these so-called joint ventures.

Prior to his departure from the

public in the third week of January, Karim held a meeting with this correspondent, trying to convince him how 'authentic' his bid for the Meghnaghat project was.

Karim offered this correspondent a trip to China to "inspect" power plant machinery that may be purchased for the Meghnaghat-2 power project.

During the conversation, Karim frankly admitted that typically he reserved 5 percent of a project cost as speed money (or bribe). But in the last five years, this percentage has gone up to 15 percent -- making all his projects financially non-viable.

Obaidul Karim's publicly known ventures of recent years include Gulistan-Jatrabari Flyover (to be constructed by Belhasa Accom and Associates Ltd -- an enterprise of Orion Group, Air East Asia Limited (given air operation licence two years ago), City Centre -- a 37-storey commercial and parking centre at Motijheel, Meghnaghat 490 MW power project (by BON Consortium -- a shell company of Orion), Green House Organic

Farm (an export-oriented mushroom farm, yet to be launched), Jafflong Tea Company (a 2000-acre garden acquired in 2004), Noakhali Gold Foods Ltd (a fish processing plant installed recently), GSA for Oman Air, GSA for Yemen Air, Aviation Management Services Ltd (installation and operation of cargo scanning facility at the ZIA), maintenance and operation of Bangladesh China Friendship Conference Centre (awarded to Orion in 2005 by manipulating tender), real estate businesses -- Accom Centre Banani and Accom Nirvana Uttara, construction of the two-storey underground car parking at Hotel Sheraton (by Ark Constructions) and the Tk 240 crore Hotel Sonargaon extension project.

Besides these schemes, Obaidul Karim and his family siphoned off huge amounts of public money from Oriental Bank and acquired huge and costly land properties in the last five years.

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## Samuels lifts Windies

### World Cup gets off to thrilling start

AFP, Kingston

Pakistan were set 242 to win by West Indies in the opening match of the 2007 World Cup at Sabina Park here on Tuesday.

After keeping the hosts on a tight rein for most of the innings, Pakistan bled late runs after they won the toss and chose to field with a hard, true pitch rolled out.

Pakistan were 40 for three after 11 overs. Mohammad Yousuf was batting on 11 while captain Inzamamul Haq (1) just joined him.

Several batsmen got starts, but Marlon Samuels was the only one that passed 50. He struck five fours and three sixes in the top score of 63 off 68 balls.

Captain Brian Lara, vice-

captain Ramnaresh Sarwan, and Dwayne Smith all played crucial knocks along the way to beef up the West Indies' total.

West Indies were set back early when Chris Gayle was caught behind for two off Umar Gul in the third over.

Sarwan came to the wicket, and was dropped first ball, when Younis Khan failed to hold onto his top-edged cut.

The nerves of the West Indies vice-captain settled, and he prospered hitting a couple of rasping off-side strokes off Navedul Hasan to lift his confidence.

Shivnarine Chanderpaul was quietly playing the anchor role before Iftikhar Anjum struck to have him caught behind for 19 in the 20th over.

Anjum struck another important blow, when Sarwan drove off the back-foot at a wildish delivery and was caught at second slip -- this time Younis holding on.

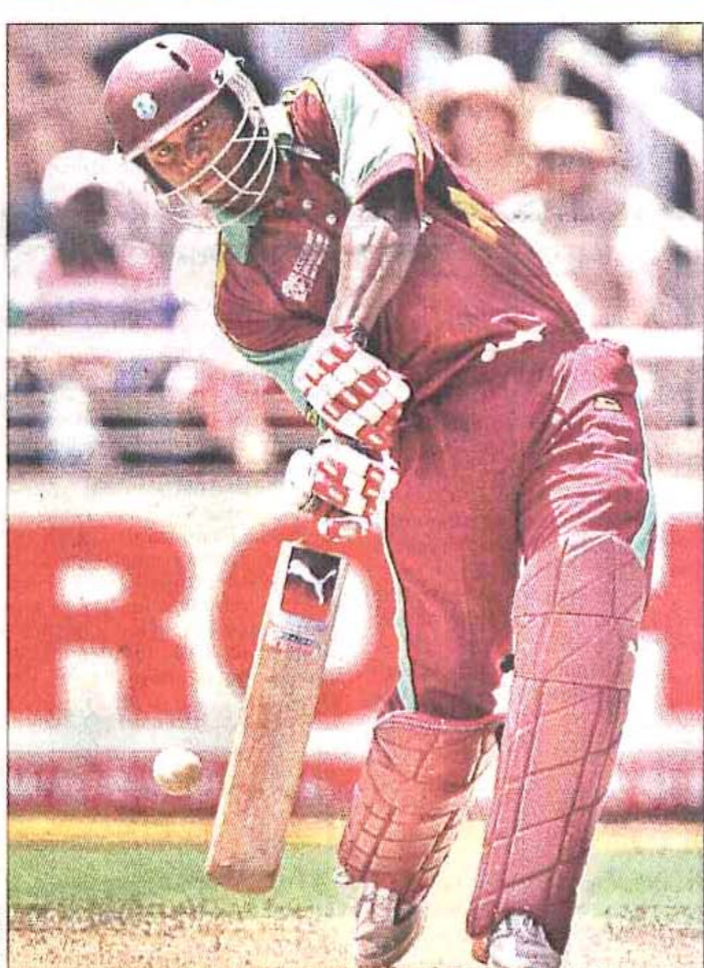
This meant Lara joined Samuels at the wicket with West Indies on 77 for three in the 25th over, and the two batsmen put on 91 for the fourth wicket to revive the innings.

Samuels played some enterprising strokes.

He totally dismissed the threat

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## ICC WORLD CUP 07



West Indies batsman Marlon Samuels hits Pakistan spinner Danish Kaneria (not in picture) to the fence on his way to an aggressive 63 in the opening match of the World Cup at the Sabina Park cricket ground in Kingston.

## Govt now to crack down on corrupt officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is set to crack down on corrupt government officials the way it has been acting against politicians and businessmen suspected of corruption, according to sources.

The planned actions would target officials from the public institutions or agencies riddled with graft allegations.

Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), the Roads and Highways, Facilities Department of the education ministry, Dhaka Water and

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## Govt to go tough on polluters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The caretaker government will soon take stern action against industries releasing pollutants into rivers since the water quality of rivers surrounding the capital deteriorated considerably during the last seven months, LGED and Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said yesterday.

"We will conduct drives very soon to curb the pollution in the industrial belt of the capital. New laws will be enacted or the existing laws will be amended if necessary," said the adviser while addressing as the chief guest at a workshop yesterday.

The World Bank and Bangladesh government jointly organised the

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## DUBAI ACCIDENT

### All passengers brought home

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All the 218 passengers, stranded at Dubai International Airport due to wheel failure of a Bangladesh Biman airliner on Monday, were brought back home yesterday.

"They (stranded passengers) were brought back to Dhaka safely by two separate aircraft at around 3:40pm," a Biman Bangladesh official said while talking to The Daily Star.

The Dhaka-bound Airbus suffered a wheel failure during takeoff,

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## Vast swath of Savar farmland washed with toxic waste

PINAKI ROY

Abdul Mazid Mia, a farmer in Savar, fears this year he will not be able to harvest even one kilogram of rice as most of the paddy seedlings he transplanted have died due to toxic waste from a nearby dyeing factory.

Usually, his one-acre land at Tazpur yields more than 50 maunds (approximately 1,850 kilograms) every year.

"I had planted saplings twice this year, but on both occasions they died due to the impact of toxic wastes," said Mazid standing beside his barren field now reduced to a ground full of poisonous litters.

Many villagers from Tazpur at Yarpur union in Savar allege that effluent from the Generation Next Fashion Ltd, a composite unit launched only six months ago, has already become a cause of worry for them.

Most of them are very poor farmers. Cultivation and seasonal fishing are their main

sources of income.

One of the high officials of the factory said they have been discharging the liquid waste only after treating those at their plant.

"We've set up the treatment plant at a cost of Tk 1.5 crore. Every day we spend Tk 20,000 for treating the effluent," said Major (retired) Shariful Islam, assistant vice-president of the composite garment plant.

He told The Daily Star that some local vested interests have been speaking against them as the factory authorities did not meet their interest.

Locals said the vast expanse of land there is arable only during this time of the year and they get only one crop from the fields.

"This land remains cultivable for only four to five months and for the rest of the year it lies under water, leaving us with no work but fishing," said Abdul Salam.

The villagers said the factory started dumping waste into the Dholair Beel, a wetland adjoining

the paddy fields, right from the day it was launched. On the second day, they found a huge number of dead fish floating belly-up in the water.

"They all died due to the poisonous discharge from the factory," said Mokhes, another farmer.

Some of the farmers however managed to protect their crops by building dikes around the fields but those of many others have been destroyed fully or partially.

"We would not get any rice had we let the waste into the fields," said Sohrab Hossain, adding that he guards his fields at night-time so that the rubbish does not get into those.

The authorities have built a tank about a kilometre off the factory and set up a pipeline to deposit the waste there. But it does not take long for the waste to spill from the tank and flow towards the paddy fields and the Dholair Beel.

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Toxic water from nearby dyeing factories destroys Irri crop in a vast area in Ashulia near the capital. Farmer Abdul Mazid narrates how he failed to protect his crop despite repeated efforts.

## Political parties to submit income-expenditure reports to EC soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliamentary political parties will soon have to start disclosing the sources of their annual incomes and submit expenditure reports to the Election Commission (EC).

The EC has prepared a set of electoral reform proposals that includes this provision to ensure transparency and democracy within parliamentary parties, sources said adding that the provision also stipulates that the parties' accounts will have to be audited every year.

Every parliamentary party will

have to be registered with the EC giving an undertaking that it will follow the party constitution. An unregistered political party will not be allowed to contest in parliamentary elections, sources said quoting from the draft proposal which will be sent to the government soon.

The registration of a political party will be cancelled if it fails to follow the rules, sources said.

Once the electoral reforms are implemented through promulgation of an ordinance by the president, parliamentary parties including Awami League, BNP, Jatiya

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## Rab catches 'corrupt' tax man red-handed

### SCC chief engineer tells of staggering wealth after arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Intelligence officials of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday picked up a joint commissioner of taxation and three others from the tax official's Bijoynagar office in the capital on charges of bribery.

Away in Sylhet, the joint forces arrested a Chief Engineer of Sylhet City Corporation (SCC) Saiful Islam from his office on corruption charges. Suspended by Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran on graft allegations, Islam admitted to have

amassed ill-gotten wealth amounting Tk 20 crore, sources said.

Islam also admitted that he has a bank balance of over Tk one crore with Standard Chartered Bank, 10 plots at Bashundhara, flats at Gulshan and Uttara, a petrol pump and a CNG filling station at Sirajganj, sources added.

At Bijoynagar, Rab members also confiscated Tk 25,000 from the desk drawer of the tax official and from the pocket of one of the other detainees.

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