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Bangladesh elected LDC council chair

UNB, New York

Bangladesh has been elected chairman of the coordination council of Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed formally took over the charge of the 50-member LDC forum from outgoing chairman Moussa Okan, foreign minister of Benin, on Friday.

The coordination council of LDCs was constituted in 2001. Benin was first elected for the post of chairman.

In 2006, the LDC ministerial meeting decided that next chairman would be elected from Asia.

But Bangladesh and Nepal both aspired for the post creating stalemate in electing the next chairman. Finally, foreign ministers of 50 LDCs extended total support to Bangladesh's candidature.

Assuming the chairmanship, Iftekhar said the first challenge before them is implementation of the Brussels programme on the LDCs, adopted unanimously by the international community in 2001.

He hoped that LDC products would get free access to developed countries. He also said alongside the fulfilment of developed nations' commitments, targets for removing poverty and attaining economic progress should be fulfilled.

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GATCO CASE
Khaleda might be quizzed this week

UNB, Dhaka

Detained former prime minister Khaleda Zia is likely to be quizzed this week in connection with the container handling case filed against her by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

"The investigation officer has already filed a petition with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate seeking permission to question and take a statement from the detained former prime minister. The petition is likely to be granted tomorrow," a competent source told the news agency.

If permitted, the source said, the interrogation will take place sometime this week at sub-jail.

On September 2, ACC Deputy Director Golam Shahriar Chowdhury filed the case against

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TIB says its study not applicable to all NGOs

ADAB decries report

DU CORRESPONDENT

Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) yesterday gave an explanation regarding its recently published study on corruption in non-governmental development organisations (NGO) following an outcry from a section of the sector against the study.

In a news release the Bangladesh chapter of the international anti-corruption watchdog said the study depicted an overall picture of the existence of corruption in the sector which is in no way equally applicable to all NGOs.

The release quoted TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman as saying, "The

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Truth Commission should not be formed for certain quarters

BBC Sanglap told

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the major political parties yesterday strongly opposed the move to form the "Truth Commission" for certain quarters, saying that it would rather add to the rise of corruption.

Speaking at the BBC Sanglap, the political leaders also observed that if any law is to be enacted or any commission is to be formed, it should be made for all.

Their comments came following the recent plan of the government to set up a Truth Commission

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for businessmen accused of graft to have their confessions and settle the charges against them without putting them to trials.

Awami League leader advocate Abdul Hamid, expelled BNP joint secretary general Ashraf Hossain, Acting Jatiya Party Chairman barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud and professor Sadiqa Halim of sociology department of Dhaka University took part in the dialogue held at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre in the capital.

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FBCCI hails govt move for Truth Commission

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country's apex trade body, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), yesterday welcomed the government's decision to form the Truth Commission.

"We welcome the concept of Truth Commission, as it will be a realistic measure to treat the corrupt who were bound to do corruption," FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain told reporters after a press conference on 2nd Dhaka International Mobile Phone Fair 2007 at the chamber's conference room in the capital.

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Masterminds of Bogra arms haul still untraced

SHARIFUL ISLAM and HASIBUR RAHMAN BIUL

The masterminds behind the huge ammunition and explosives hauls in Kaliabu and Dupchachia upazilas of Bogra have remained untraced for over four years since the seizure.

The proceedings of the four cases filed in connection with the arms haul have remained stalled since February 29, 2005 following a High Court order after a revision petition filed by one of the accused.

Investigators submitted charge sheets of the cases after three

months of the recovery, basing on "half-hearted" probes. Under political influence the investigators submitted the charge sheets to court to victimise political opponents rather than arrest the masterminds, sources said.

Police high-ups meanwhile said they are planning to take necessary steps for further investigation into the seizure.

Deputy Inspector General of Rajshahi Range AKM Shaidul Hoque said through the additional inspector general of CID they will appeal to restart the proceedings of the cases.

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Many Eid-shoppers avoid going to markets and prefer to buy things from hawkers for a better bargain. The photo was taken from New Market area in the capital yesterday.

Ministries seek Tk 6,286cr as administered prices remain unadjusted

REJAU KARIM BYRON

As the government has yet to adjust the prices of fertiliser, electricity, gas, and petroleum products according to their production cost, the ministries concerned sought Tk 6,286 crore additional budgetary allocations from the finance division as subsidies.

Sources said the finance division already took the request into consideration and conveyed it to the government high-ups last month. A summary paper on the required extra subsidy was also submitted to the finance adviser.

The government prepared the current fiscal budget keeping in mind possible adjustment of prices of the products and utilities, but it could not implement the plan due to high inflationary pressure, said a finance ministry source.

According to the summary paper, sector based additional subsidies sought by the ministries are Tk 2,800 crore for petroleum

products, Tk 586 crore for electricity, Tk 2,700 crore for agricultural products including fertilizer, and Tk 200 crore for jute and food items. The paper also projected that another Tk 300 crore might be needed for jute and food items.

To meet the World Bank's conditions for loans, the government committed to adjust the price of electricity in every six months.

In a bid to bring structural development in the power sector the government had a plan to bring gradual price adjustment, and to meet that end the government had allocated Tk 600 crore, but due to its failure to adjust the price of electricity, the power sector now needs an additional Tk 586 crore as a subsidy.

Production cost of electricity was Tk 2,826 per kilowatt-hour (kWh) in 2006-'07 fiscal, while it was being sold at Tk 2,260 per kWh.

A total of 55 percent of the demand for gas in the country is met by international oil companies. Bangladesh spends Tk 210 per 1,000 cubic feet (Mcfc) of gas but it is being sold for Tk 92 per Mcfc, making Petro Bangla lose Tk 61.98 crore per month.

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Govt okays change to tax ordinance

UNB, Dhaka

The Council of Advisers yesterday approved a proposal to amend the Income Tax Ordinance 1984.

With the approval, the ceiling of income tax deduction at 10 percent from interest or profit of savings certificates has been raised to Tk 1,50,000 from earlier Tk 25,000.

According to the amended ordinance, persons having income below Tk 1,50,000 will be exempted from paying tax on the income from interest or profit of savings certificates, while those having income over Tk 1,50,000 from other sources will have to pay tax at the scheduled rate through submitting return.

Chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed, the weekly meeting of the Council of Advisers approved another proposal to

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Shattered Bangladeshi worker dies in Malaysia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

One of the 55 Bangladesh workers, scheduled to return home from Kuala Lumpur as their Malaysian employers failed to provide them with the promised jobs, died of cardiac arrest yesterday.

He was identified as Mahesh Sarker, 55, son of Nares Sarker of Parkhi village in Tangail's Kalihati upazila. He flew to Malaysia last April and had since been languishing in a Kuala Lumpur accommodation, rented by their Bangladeshi recruiting agency.

The labour counsellor at Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, Talat Mahmud, confirmed the death and said the

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Biman banks on leasing 3 aircraft to lift off

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd, plagued with an acute shortage of aircraft and consequent disarray in flight schedule, is now taking some urgent steps to improve the situation by acquiring three aircraft on lease and putting two under repair to service within this month.

"Of the three aircraft, one is likely to land in Dhaka within a few days and two are in the process of being leased," said Dr MA Momen, chief executive officer (CEO) and managing director (MD) of the national flag carrier.

"In order to be on time in operation, we have put in efforts to fly two DC-10s, now in hanger (for repair), in October," he said.

In an interview with The Daily Star, Momen sounded optimistic in saying that the urgent measures now underway would put Biman on a better footing from November.

And the problems with flight schedule will be over soon, he said. Admitting that Biman, newly turned into a public limited company (PLC), is facing manifold crises, Momen said it is now struggling to come out of this situation.

On the sufferings of the stranded workers, Momen said this is an unfortunate situation. He however hoped that the crisis will end soon.

"We have continued to request airlines operating to and from Dhaka to provide extra flights or at least flights agreed in Air Service Agreement (ASA). This is basically a one-way traffic and the return leg is empty, posing challenges to basic economic considerations of airlines."

Welcoming the government initiative for open sky policy, the Biman MD said, unless the ground is prepared to benefit out of the open skies, extra caution is always required at the policy implementation level. However, in the present context, declaration of time-bound limited open skies to cater to the need of the stranded passengers is a welcome move.

He further said offer of limited open sky as an exception not as a rule during tourist peak seasons is in practice. Airlines have their own business considerations -- when the price is acceptable and airlines

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Musharraf sweeps Pak presidential polls

But awaits court ruling before declaration; almost all parties boycott polls

APP, Islamabad

Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf swept to re-election yesterday in a controversial presidential vote that might yet be snatched away by the Supreme Court.

Musharraf, a key US ally who seized power in the world's only nuclear-armed Islamic nation in a 1999 coup, was voted in for another second five-year term with an easy win over his token rivals.

But the embattled general must now await a decision by the Supreme Court, which said Friday that the winner cannot be officially

declared until at least October 17 while it hears legal challenges.

This is a very welcome result," Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz told reporters in parliament. "It is a historic day in the democratic history of Pakistan."

Chief election commissioner Qazi Mohammad Farooq said a total of 257 votes were cast in the national assembly and senate, out of which Musharraf bagged 252 and three were rejected.

One rival, former judge Wajiduddin Ahmad, won two votes, he said. Another, Makhdoom Amin Fahim, vice-chairman of former premier Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan

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