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Govt to set up
17 labs to
test bird flu

BSS, CG

The government is contemplating setting up 17 laboratories across the country, including one in Chittagong, with the financial assistance of USAID for screening bird flu properly.

Fisheries and Livestock Secretary Syed Ataur Rahman disclosed this at a meeting of the stakeholders on bird flu situation and to review the precautionary measures taken so far to tackle the menace.

The meeting prohibited carrying of poultry birds and their eggs to and from Chittagong for the next 15 days.

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GAS PIPELINE, EXPLORATION Tardy gas decisions to worsen outages

SHARIER KHAN

Lack of timely and proper government decisions on gas pipeline and exploration activities will cause an acute gas supply crisis with a shortfall of at least 200 million cubic feet a day (mmcf/d) this year and the situation will continue to worsen, sources said.

Gas crisis is already acute in Chittagong region with about 50

mmcf/d supply shortfall. One hundred mmcf/d gas can generate around 500 megawatt power.

Though experts last year had proposed a simple solution to gas crisis costing about Tk 50 crore, no step was taken in this regard.

Instead, the government is considering a massive project involving

more than Tk 1,400 crore to build a new pipeline and install gas com-

pressor devices.

Besides, for the last one year the government is talking about allocating funds for Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration Company (Bapex) to begin drilling of exploratory gas wells in different prospective areas but there has been no allocation.

Even, maintenance work of Titas gas field, one of the biggest,

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INNOVATIVE PINCH... A gang slits sacks of rice on a truck, left, as it was leaving Chittagong Port yesterday. Some of the gang members are seen collecting rice that fell on the street.

HASINA CASE
SC hears today
govt plea for
stay on verdict

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court (SC) today hears a government petition seeking a stay on the operation of the High Court verdict on the extortion case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Earlier on Wednesday, the High Court, following a writ petition, declared illegal the trial of a Tk 3-crore extortion case filed by

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Suicide blast kills 20 at Pak election rally

AFP, Peshawar

A suicide bomber blew himself up at an opposition election rally in northwestern Pakistan yesterday, killing at least 20 people and wounding 25, government and party officials said.

The attacker struck as hundreds of people gathered for a meeting of the Awami National Party (ANP), a nationalist ethnic Pashtun party, in the town of Charsadda in troubled North West Frontier Province, they

LATEST INDIAN BAR 300 truckload of rice stranded at Hili port

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

At least 300 trucks loaded with rice en route to Bangladesh from India have been stranded at Hili land port as India has imposed a ban on export of rice to Bangladesh, said sources at the port.

In a fax message sent on February 7, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, informed the Hili port authorities of its decision

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said.

The bombing has further raised fears for the security of general elections on February 18, which have already been delayed by the assassination of opposition leader Benazir Bhutto at a rally in December.

"According to initial reports 20 people were killed and 25 were injured. One of the injured told me in hospital that it was a suicide attack but I cannot confirm it

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CA apprises
UK minister of
steps towards
credible polls

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday apprised visiting British foreign minister David Miliband of the measures taken to hold a free, fair and credible election within the stated timeframe and also the ongoing institutional reforms to that end.

Miliband, who arrived in Dhaka on a two-day visit, said that he had

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Banks see slower growth

Inflation, political uncertainty blamed for sluggish business

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Credit and deposit growth in commercial banks dropped 6.29 and 4.18 percentage points in 2007 compared with the year before due to high lending rate and inflationary pressure.

The banks witnessed a slower growth because of huge public demand for cash to cope with high inflation.

In a report to the government recently, Bangladesh Bank (BB) observed that high interest rate

and political uncertainty throughout the year resulted in sluggish business activities and credit growth.

Both credit and deposit growth as a whole improved slightly at the end of 2007 despite a very unusual situation in the middle of the year, said a central bank official.

According to BB statistics, credit in commercial banks increased by 11.70 percent by the end of last year, while it was 17.99 percent in January-December of 2006. Deposit increased by 15.49 percent

last year, compared to 19.69 percent the year before.

The central bank report said with inflationary pressure factored in, the interest rate against deposit was relatively low.

The BB official said the inflation rate last year was even higher considering the banks' offer against deposit.

The anti-corruption drive was another factor contributing to slower credit and deposit growth. In some cases, people preferred

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Hold polls on time or risk future

Says UK foreign secy after meeting CA, Moeen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Winding up his two-day trip, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband yesterday said the government must stick to its pledge to hold polls by this year or risk the country's development and potential.

Declaring a "new special partnership" between the two countries, he said the out-of-date relationship that centred on aid and Britain's colonial past has ended to make way for a "shared agenda" based on cooperation in trade and facing climate change and terrorism.

After meeting Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and army chief General Moeen U Ahmed yesterday, Miliband reiterated his call for the government to lift the state of emergency and hold a participatory election.

He said Britain wants to see "restoration of full democratic



David Miliband

processes" as soon as possible.

He told reporters, "The roadmap must be stuck to, the end date for which is December 31, 2008 and the elections must be free, fair and credible."

He stressed the need for holding a dialogue to help transition to a genuine democracy" by this year.

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SENIOR LAWYERS DEMAND Show controversial judges the door

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Controversial judges should be removed and a commission be formed to appoint skilled, meritorious and qualified judges to uphold the image of the judiciary, said senior lawyers and other

speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

Bangladesh Bar Council Vice-Chairman Khandakar Mahbub Hossain said, "The government can play a role by dismissing the controversial judges through the formation of Supreme Judicial

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scratches

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