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# The Daily Star

SECOND EDITION

Today's issue 24 pages

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## UN pledges food aid for Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The UN will give budgetary and food assistance to Bangladesh to help the people hit hard by sky rocketing food prices, visiting head of UNDP, Kemal Dervis, said yesterday.

Dervis however did not give a specific figure on the assistance, as he said it is currently being worked out with donors.

"As you know world food prices are going up quite a lot and those who have to buy food will be in difficult situations. We have to look at it internationally to get the help that is available," said Dervis after a meeting with Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam.

Dervis said he told Azizul, "The UN, working with other parts of the international system, will do its best to increase the assistance to Bangladesh on this point."

The government will expand

## PARTY POST-HOLDERS IN LOCAL GOVT POLLS Govt to empower EC to disqualify contestants

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry rejected the Election Commission's (EC) much talked about proposal for disqualifying political leaders holding party posts from contesting in elections to city corporations and municipalities.

The ministry however decided to empower the EC with the authority of formulating the electoral rules for city corporations and municipalities, meaning the commission will be able to disqualify the political leaders from contesting in the polls if it wants, by including the provision in the new electoral rules.

The ministry last week finalised the draft laws on formations and functions of city corporations and municipalities, and also on the qualifications and disqualifications for being elected as representatives to the two types of local governments in urban areas, without incorporating the EC's proposal.

Contacted by The Daily Star yesterday LGRD and Cooperatives Adviser Anwarul Iqbal said local government elections are absolutely non-partisan, so there is no need to include any provision in the laws disqualifying political leaders holding party posts from contesting in the polls.

"However, the Election

Commission may include such restrictions in the elections rules, if it wants," the LGRD adviser asserted.

He said the EC will be empowered with the authority to promulgate the election rules and the code of conduct for candidates contesting in elections to city corporations and municipalities, which now belongs to the LGRD ministry.

The EC made the proposal in a bid to free the local governments from the grip of partisan politics. The proposal said a political leader holding party post will have to resign from the party position to contest in elections to those local governments.

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## Bangabandhu's birthday today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 88th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the father of the nation, will be observed today.

Bangabandhu, who fought all his life for establishing the rights of people, was born in 1920 at Tungipara in Gopalganj.

Awami League (AL), its front

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## GMG plans to buy 6 Boeings for \$900m

Talks with IFC, Kuwaiti financier; MoU soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

GMG Airlines in a landmark move yesterday unveiled its plan to buy six new generation aircraft from US plane maker Boeing at \$900 million (Tk 6,200 crore) in a bid to expand routes and capture the growing market share.

"We're going to buy six new planes -- three Boeing 777-300ER with 463 seats and the rest Boeing 787-9s," Shahab Sattar, managing director (MD) of GMG, the country's largest private airlines, told The Daily Star last night.

"We have almost finalised the deal with Boeing and within next four to five weeks are going to sign a Memorandum of Understanding," he added while talking to Boeing



officials at his office.

Sattar went on to say: "With the new aircraft we'll expand our international routes to Singapore, Hong Kong, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Mascot, Doha, Bahrain, Rome and London."

The country's first private carrier took this landmark decision after Biman Bangladesh Airlines Ltd on March 10 announced its plan to buy eight new-generation aircraft from Boeing at a cost of \$1.265 billion (Tk 8,728 crore).

Aviation industry marks a boom with the launch of three private airlines in last eight months and another set to start commercial flights next month, thanks to a steadily growing demand for air transport.

The industry is growing by 7.5 to 8 percent every year, while the market size of passengers is worth around Tk 3,500 crore, private operators say.

Asked about financiers for buying the aircraft, the GMG MD said: "Negotiations are on with a Kuwaiti financing company, and International Finance Corporation, the World Bank's private sector arm."

"We are also holding talks with domestic banks for the financing."

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## Moeen seeks to dispel fear of silent famine

UNB, Rangpur

Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed yesterday dismissed the fear of 'silent famine' in the country, saying the government has overcome the fallout of consecutive floods and a devastating cyclone.

"There's no famine. It's true that there has been shortfall of food grains as the country suffered consecutive natural calamities -- flooding and devastating cyclone. But we've been able to overcome the problems," he said.

The army chief's assertion came on the heels of Regulatory Reforms Commission Chairman Dr Akbar Ali Khan's observation that the country is passing through a 'silent famine'.

Gen Moeen was speaking at the launching of a sewing-training centre for women at Begum Rokeya Complex at Pairabad in Rangpur's

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PHOTO STAR

Hundreds of poor people are seen waiting in long queues to buy rice at subsidised price at the BDR shop at Mohammadpur Beribadh in the capital yesterday.

## BARAPUKURIA COAL MINE Now a case of over production

SHARIEF KHAN

Steady record coal production at the Barapukuria mine has created a new problem for the authorities: the 250MW power plant at the site cannot consume enough of it and the mine's coal yard is rapidly filling up.

And that is not good news. The mine authorities now fear that if this continues, the coal yard will be full within next month and that

would pose the danger of 'spontaneous combustion' of the coal.

"It is unsafe to keep coal in a storage for a long time. It is even riskier to keep it outside a coal yard," said an official of Barapukuria Coal Mine Co Ltd (BCMCL), an affiliate of Petrobangla.

The coal yard is rapidly filling up because while the mine is producing record volume of coal steadily, one of the two units of the techni-

cally flawed 250MW power plant went out of operation five to six times since January for technical glitches.

On an average, the mine is producing 3,000 tonnes of coal daily--double the regular production level achieved in its troubled past. In two months, the mine has produced 1.88 lakh tonnes of coal while its annual target is 8 lakh tonnes.

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## Rejoinder, our reply

Petrobangla in a rejoinder to a news published in The Daily Star on March 13, headlined 'Petrobangla gets license for the first time to tap coal, Ministry pushes for deal with obscure Korean consortium', said the energy ministry never pushed Petrobangla for deals with the Korean consortium.

"Rather EMRD (Energy and Mineral Resources Division) directed Petrobangla to prepare an expression of interest (Eoi) for selecting a strategic partner through an open tender, which is under process," the rejoinder said.

It added that some international organisations along with the

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4H-541	Thu/Sat	1045	1125		4H-542	Thu/Sat	1140	1220	
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4H-537	Sun/Wed	1330	1430		4H-538	Sun/Wed	1445	1545	

CHITTAGONG TO COX'S BAZAR					COX'S BAZAR TO CHITTAGONG				
FLT NO.	DAY	DEP	ARR		FLT NO.	DAY	DEP	ARR	
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## SC rebukes govt law officers for being late

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday censured government law officers, including the attorney general, for staying away from the court at the start of a case that would decide the fate of a great lot of other cases under the emergency rules.

None from the Attorney General's Office was seen around when the SC resumed hearing on the government appeal against the High Court judgment that declared illegal its sanction for trying Sheikh Hasina in an extortion case under the EPR.

As the truancy of the government attorneys impeded court function, the 7-member full bench of the Appellate Division, headed by Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin, asked the government Advocate-on-Record (AoR) to make a proper reply.

"My lord, I have sent a car to fetch the attorney general and his

close aides," AoR Khalequzzaman told the court.

"What you have sent -- car or chariot -- that we don't want to know..."

Go, track him down and bring him in," Chief Justice Ruhul Amin retorted.

As Attorney General Fida M Kamal along with Additional Attorney General Salah Uddin Ahmed entered the courtroom, the chief justice fulminated: "It has become part of culture for the Office of Attorney General not to be present at court timely."

The chief justice had a word of warning for the attorney general: "Tell your men to come in court punctually. If it continues further, you will have to pay dearly. The government cannot dictate the timings of the court."

As a result of the hassles, the hearing on the government appeal was delayed by nearly half an hour.

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## Duty on edible oil to be withdrawn

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is going to withdraw customs duty on imported edible oil and considering a new programme to help the middle class cope with soaring prices of essentials.

"We have taken a number of steps and more actions are being planned to mitigate the impact of the price increase on people," Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam told journalists yesterday.

Meanwhile, a Bangladesh Bank (BB) official said the central bank is going to fix a special interest rate of 12 percent on loans for importing powdered milk. The special interest rate will be enforced to keep the milk powder prices stable in the country, the BB official added.

"We have decided to withdraw 10 percent customs duty on imported edible oil and the NBR

[National Board of Revenue] will issue orders in this regard within a couple of days," the finance adviser said while talking to reporters after a meeting with a team from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The IMF team is now visiting Dhaka to discuss NBR reforms issues with the government.

Asked if the government, in addition to its safety net programmes geared toward the impoverished section of the country, is planning any measures for the middle class who are also affected by the price inflation, Mirza Aziz said, "We are considering it." However, it is difficult to define the middle class and the government needs to precisely define the target group so the programme can bring positive results, he added.

Blaming the international

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