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## Govt to saw legal link off illegal wood trade

Plans to stop special permits for buying logs from forest depots

PINAKI ROY

The government plans to stop issuing special permits for buying wood from its depots as the official documents often end up being abused by illegal traders and also mean a loss in revenue from timber sales.

Usually, the permits are given to influential individuals like ministers, lawmakers, and civil and military officials to buy logs at bargain prices for building house or making furniture.

They entitle ministers and state ministers to buy up to 500 cubic feet, and secretaries and military high-ups 300 cft wood.

Unfortunately, these papers have long been a cover for unauthorised timber trade. Bought from original holders and sometimes issued with official connivance, they are widely used in getting illegal logs past the forest checkpoints and delivered to sawmills and furniture shops, said forest ministry officials.

Talking about the permit system, State Minister for Environment and Forest Mustafizur Rahman Fizar recently told The Daily Star, "This is like giving unlawful loggers a licence to

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Logs and planks seized from three CHT districts are kept in a government depot at Firingibazar in Chittagong city.

## GROSS POLL IRREGULARITIES 16 more upazila results may be suspended

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Election results of 16 more upazila parishads are likely to be suspended on grounds of gross irregularities, raising the number of such upazilas to 30.

Upon receiving specific allegations of anomalies in the polls, the Election Commission (EC) has instructed its secretariat not to publish the results of those upazilas in official gazettes, EC Secretariat sources said.

Election Commissioner Muhammed Sohul Hussein yesterday confirmed the commission's moves over the telephone.

The EC on January 27 suspended election results of seven upazilas on grounds of gross irregularities. It also decided to go for judicial enquiry to check the authenticity of the allegations and determine the next course of action.

"We had preliminary discussions on the issue and may make a decision at tomorrow's [today] commission meeting," Sohul said adding, "It is almost certain that election results of some upazilas will be suspended."

He however did not specify the number of upazilas whose

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## Shake-up in jail admin

Jail code violation to be probed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three deputy inspector generals (DIG-Prisons) including Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique were transferred yesterday.

Meanwhile, the jail directorate yesterday formed a two-member internal committee to probe into the jail code violation by the authorities of the Dhaka Central Jail.

As many as 400 visitors were permitted to meet dreaded criminal Monwar Hossain Dipjol within two months of his imprisonment in violation of the jail code, sources said.

The home ministry, in an instant move, yesterday transferred three DIG-Prisons: Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique of Dhaka division was transferred to Khulna-Barisal division, Maj

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## Tac blames it on ACC

Claims of probe failure in its report to govt, skirts its controversial role in granting wholesale clemency

EMRAN HOSSAIN

The now-defunct Truth and Accountability Commission (Tac), widely criticised for its failure to achieve the expected goal, in its report to the government mainly puts the blame on investigators for poor performance.

"In some cases the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) did not send right and necessary documents with forwarded files of clemency seekers because of hurry. Otherwise, it would be easier for Tac to unearth the truth or scrutinise information given by the clemency seek-

ers," reads one of the observations in the report.

Justice Habibur Rahman Khan, who was the chairman of Tac, along with two former members of the commission, handed over the report to Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday.

The report contains perspectives, backgrounds, and main goals behind formation of Tac and describes its five-month experience. Besides, it makes some observations and recommendations.

Justice Habibur yesterday told The Daily Star, "In most cases the anti-

corruption watchdog only provided a sentence describing ill-gotten wealth of a graft-accused. There was no break-up of the ill-gotten wealth or anything regarding how the wealth was amassed. So the commission was compelled to believe disclosures of the graft-accused without much hesitation."

Though the observations mainly criticise the investigation and the skill and efficiency of the investigators, the report says nothing about Tac's role of issuing clemency certificates to several hundreds graft-accused, whose disclosures were

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## Rejoinder, our reply

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami in a rejoinder termed The Daily Star report headlined 'Jamaat to take on war crime trial' published on January 30 'baseless and false'. It also claimed the report as a 'syndicated propaganda.'

In the rejoinder, Jamaat said the then Pakistani government formed Rajakar, Al-Badr, Al-Shams and different other organisations. Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chattra Sangha and its leaders had no role and were not involved in those organisations. The rejoinder also states that

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## ACC won't shift gear in its anti-graft drive

Mashhud tells The Daily Star fight against corruption to go on with same vigour

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) chairman sees no fear in pursuing the fight against corruption under the new political government with the enthusiasm they had during the caretaker rule.

"I know people are watch-



ing very closely as to who would be our target in near future. I can assure you, we'll not make any change in our stance regarding who should be investigated or who should be prosecuted. Only corruption will be the criteria," ACC

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FULL TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW ON PAGE 5



## BNP MPs sit today to talk return to JS

Speaker assures them of giving more seats in front row

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP parliamentary party sits today to decide whether the party lawmakers will return to parliament on the speaker's fresh assurance of giving them one or two more seats in the front row.

Demanding three more

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## Treasury bench MPs continue to slam president

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The thanksgiving motion on the president's address to the ninth parliament is turning into a censure motion as treasury bench lawmakers yesterday continued to slate the president for his 'controversial' role.

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## Govt moves to get Koko money back

Muhith tells JS he's upbeat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith is optimistic about getting back the money siphoned off by Arafat Rahman Koko, Khaleda Zia's youngest son.

"We are trying to get the money back and some steps have already been taken in this regard," Muhith told the parliament replying to a supplementary question of Awami League lawmaker Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim during the question-answer session.

The minister said a case filed with the Colombia District Court in the USA is under trial. "Discussion is going on between us and the United States...there are agreements and there will be a deal. So, I hope we will be able to bring the money back," he said.

The US government confiscated over Tk 11 crore siphoned off by Koko.

Selim also demanded disclosure of the names of plunderers who are on the list which the US government gave Bangladesh. Muhith said the matter is under investigation. "So, I don't think that I have the right to disclose the names."

Replying to another query from AL lawmaker Rahmatullah, the finance minister said the government does not control the interest rates of commercial banks.

He, however, said, "The government is making an effort to reduce the gap between the interest rates of deposits and loans."

When Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon asked whether the finance minister would propose forming of a parliamentary committee to review the services provided by the banking sector, Muhith said there is opportunity to form such a

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## Ershad gets acquitted in '92 telecoms graft case

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday acquitted former president HM Ershad of a corruption case filed on September 5, 1992 in connection with setting up 'microwave telephone lines' in 89 upazilas.

Special Court Judge for

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## Lessees get back ZIA cab business

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) yesterday handed over the cab service offices to its three lessees—BM Transport, Green Bangla and Baba Auto Gas after ousting the 'grabbers' from the cab service counters at Zia International Airport.

On Sunday, Leaders and

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## TRADE IMBALANCE WITH INDIA Govt works on trade boost plan

M ABUL KALAM AZAD and HASAN JAHIID TUSHER

The new government is set to renew trade relations with India to bring down huge trade imbalance of \$2 billion between the two neighbouring countries.

Government sources said a comprehensive study is underway to draw up a joint trade and investment agreement to allow businessmen from the two countries to invest in businesses on both sides of the border.

The government is also working out a strategy on the issue of giving transit to India upholding country's interests.

"We shall have to discuss the issue with India thoroughly before making any decision in this regard," a senior cabinet minister told The Daily Star wishing anonymity.

A proposal will be put forward when Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee visits Bangladesh next week, said some cabinet ministers after yesterday's cabinet meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

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## BNP revamp bid lacks coordination

Grassroots gather in city today for discussions

RAKIB HASNET SUMAN

Central BNP leaders split into six teams start a series of discussions with the grass roots today in efforts to revamp the party still reeling from the drubbing in December 29 general election.

However, lack of coordination between them and the high command might diminish the prospects for success of the move aimed particularly at holding a central council in June.

Party insiders said at least four teams might not be able to start work today. As of filing this report at 9:00pm, they did not receive any guidelines from the high command.

Speaking in return for anonymity, some leaders said they have learned it from the media that they are part of the teams.

"None of decision-makers bothered to inform me about the plans," BNP Joint Secretary General Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, who has been given the charge of Chittagong division.

"I should have been consulted before being given any responsibility. Why an office secretary should let me know about

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

### The Daily Star 18th ANNIVERSARY

The largest circulated national English daily is bringing out a 200-page, four colour Special Supplement to mark its 18th anniversary. The central theme of this supplement is: **Towards a new beginning.** This will appear in three parts:

- Lessons from the Caretaker Government
- Expectations from the elected government
- Global trends

Eminent intellectuals, professional experts, distinguished members of academia and civil society, corporate sector leaders and journalists have already agreed to write for this grand supplement.

The three-part supplement will be distributed FREE with the normal paper on three consecutive days which will be printed in greater numbers than usual and thus reach more than the normal number of readers who are likely to preserve the issues as reference.

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