

## Govt works

FROM PAGE 1  
Meanwhile, the cabinet sent back to the industries ministry a draft proposal on Development and Protection of Capital Investment under bilateral arrangement between Bangladesh and India terming it incomplete.

Hasina asked the industries ministry to submit a complete report on the proposed agreement at the next cabinet meeting after finding out the similarities and dissimilarities between the proposed agreement and those signed with other countries.

The prime minister has asked the authorities concerned to submit a comprehensive report on it at Wednesday's cabinet meeting in line with the trade and investment with other countries," Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star after the meeting.

Various issues including infrastructure development for smooth functioning of land ports and measures to reduce trade imbalance are likely to figure prominently in the talks between Pranab and Hasina.

Besides, duty and quota-free access of Bangladeshi goods to India and removal of tariff barriers will also come up in the bilateral talks with India.

Sources said two agreements on bilateral trade, and promotion and protection of investments are likely to be signed during Pranab's visit to Dhaka between February 8 and 9.

Bangladesh and India signed a trade agreement in 1978 keeping the option of road, rail and air transits for trade with a provision to renew it after every three years.

The two countries renewed the treaty in March 2006 allowing India to invest in Bangladesh.

Talking to The Daily Star Commerce Minister Faruk Khan said, "The three-year bilateral trade agreement, which was signed in 1978 will be renewed giving utmost priority to the country's interests and people's welfare."

He said they would make decisions on the matter after having discussions in the cabinet.

Commenting on the issue of transit with India, the commerce minister said trade is not seen as means of national development, but rather a weapon in politics.

"We have often failed to understand the people's requirement," he said at a regional seminar on Sunday.

India has long been pressing for transit through Bangladesh to reach its northeastern states.

On Wednesday, Chief Minister of Tripura Manik Sarkar told a Bangladeshi business delegation that transit and transhipment facilities can help both India and Bangladesh promote business and invest-

ment enormously, especially in seven northeastern Indian states, including Tripura.

## Treasury bench

FROM PAGE 1  
Discussing the president's speech, delivered on the inaugural day of the ninth parliament, the lawmakers blasted President Iajuddin Ahmed for "failing to discharge his constitutional duties".

They said the president kept mum during the five-year "misrule" of the BNP-led alliance government and Fakhrudin Ahmed-led caretaker government's "unconstitutional activities".

Now the question is whether the parliament will pass the thanksgiving motion or a censure motion. It will be an unprecedented incident if the parliament passes a motion censuring the president for his activities.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday a number of senior AL lawmakers said they could not recall any instance of treasury bench lawmakers criticising the president in such a way.

Awami League (AL) lawmaker Noni Gopal Mandal during the discussion in the House said he could not thank the president considering how far he has moved away from his ethics.

"I could have thanked the president if he had spoken about the dark episodes of the BNP-led government's regime," AL lawmaker Mustak Ahmed said.

AL lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder, who was detained by joint forces during the caretaker government rule, said the president failed to discharge his duties. "They had me detained without trial violating the constitution. But the president remained silent," Majumder said in an oblique reference to the president's constitutional jurisdiction to ensure accountability of the caretaker government.

Two ruling party lawmakers including Fazle Rabbi Mia, however, appreciated the president's address as he mentioned Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman as father of the nation. "For this, the president deserves thanks," Rabbis said.

Mostaf Faruk Mohammad thanked the president for administering the oath taking ceremony of ministers.

AL lawmaker AKM Awal Sayedur Rahman questioned the election of Iajuddin Ahmed as president. He said Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury was forced to step down from presidency and then Iajuddin Ahmed was elected president.

A number of ruling party lawmakers criticised former speaker Jamiruddin Sircar for "creating the trouble over seating arrangement in the House".

The House was adjourned around 9:30pm and is scheduled to resume at 4:45pm today.

## Free dorms

FROM PAGE 1  
programme at 11:30am at Central Shaheed Minar under the banner of JNU Hostel Recovery Movement and Protection of Students' Rights.

The JNU students also formed a human chain to realise their eight-point demand, including withdrawal of the case filed against them by police and shifting of the office of Bangladesh Bank from the university campus.

They also formed a 25-member committee with Bakul Munshi as its convenor and Masud Rana as member secretary to achieve their goals.

Witnesses said students now-defunct military-led taskforce in obtaining confession from Titas Gas employees, which were mostly "incorrect".

Although Tac was declared unconstitutional and illegal by the High Court, the report strongly suggests reviving a commission of same nature in a larger scale modifying the law, rule and functions.

Identifying some weakness and flaws in police and ACC investigation, the report observes that it has created difficulties for the commission to decide about the matter.

The report says, "It was found that investigation, even primary investigation, did not begin against graft-accused in most cases forwarded to Tac. As the commission was not entitled to investigate on its own, many clemency seekers tried to take the opportunity."

The report adds in most cases the taskforce's enquiry about Titas Gas meter readers was "not correct". It also terms it "mysterious" as to why Titas high-ups did not seek clemency.

The transfers were made as some senior jail officials brought allegations of irregularities against them.

Earlier, on January 27 the army headquarters called Inspector General (IG-Prisons) Brig Gen Zakir Hassan back instantly and another IG-Prisons Col Dr M Ashraful Islam Khan was appointed as the acting IG-Prisons.

Contacted, acting IG-Prisons Col Dr M Ashraful Islam Khan admitted that those three DIGs had been transferred.

He, however, said Maj Haider was transferred as he had been serving in Dhaka for over four years and the transfers of two other DIGs were also part of routine works.

Replying to a question, the acting IG-Prisons said, "A two-member internal committee has been formed to probe into the irregularities in allowing visitors of Dipzal in the prison in violation of the jail code."

Commander Zakaria Khan, a DIG of the jail directorate, heads the committee while deputy jailer AG Mahmud will assist him in the investigation, sources said.

Jail sources said the probe committee was asked to investigate how the photograph of smiling Maj Haider and Dipzal along with some visitors inside the jail had been published in Bengali daily Prothom Alo.

## BNP revamp

FROM PAGE 1  
my role?" he told The Daily Star last night.

Another joint secretary general, Abdurrahman Noman, who has been made head of the committee for Dhaka division, told The Daily Star that his team will meet the then BNP leaders from Sherpur district at 4:00pm today.

Mirza Abbas, who leads the team for Rajshahi division, said his team will have talks with thena leaders of Sirajganj district today. The meeting will start at 10:30am at BNP central office in Naya Paltan.

Discussions between the central teams and thena-level leaders from Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal divisions might begin tomorrow as the teams concerned will sit today to draw up their schedules.

"We will start meeting the grassroots level leaders tomorrow," Shamsuzzaman Dudu, a member of the committee for Sylhet division, told The Daily Star last night.

Before leaving Dhaka Wednesday afternoon, she will pay a courtesy call on Brac Founder and Chairperson Fazle Hasan Abed.

Rajiv Gandhi Foundation Secretary Gyanendra Bagdaiya and Trainer Sonia Phillip will accompany Priyanka during her visit.

According to a press release of Brac, Priyanka's brother and Congress Party General Secretary Rahul Gandhi visited Bangladesh in August last year and was impressed with Brac Education Programme. Rahul expressed his desire to introduce a similar programme in India. Priyanka's Bangladesh visit is aimed at finalising the matter.

According to previous announcement, the standing committee will convene tomorrow to discuss the issue with Chairperson Khaleda Zia in the chair.

## Tac blames

FROM PAGE 1

much less than ACC findings.

Controversy rose because Tac awarded clemency to 452 people out of 492 graft-accused allegedly without entertaining some provisions of the Voluntary Disclosure Ordinance, 2008 that empowered it to reject dubious disclosures.

The report also blames the police and ACC for filing cases based on false allegations and keeping stalled the investigation over the allegations.

Witnesses said students now-defunct military-led taskforce in obtaining confession from Titas Gas employees, which were mostly "incorrect".

Although Tac was declared unconstitutional and illegal by the High Court, the report strongly suggests reviving a commission of same nature in a larger scale modifying the law, rule and functions.

Identifying some weakness and flaws in police and ACC investigation, the report observes that it has created difficulties for the commission to decide about the matter.

The report says, "It was found that investigation, even primary investigation, did not begin against graft-accused in most cases forwarded to Tac. As the commission was not entitled to investigate on its own, many clemency seekers tried to take the opportunity."

The report adds in most cases the taskforce's enquiry about Titas Gas meter readers was "not correct". It also terms it "mysterious" as to why Titas high-ups did not seek clemency.

The report however admits that it could not achieve the main goal of getting confessions from politicians and businessmen as only two politicians and a very few small businessmen sought clemency.

It observes that the targeted group have not availed the opportunity due to the changed political situation.

It says the commission deposited Tk 34 crore after holding hearing of 452 graft-accused in 92 workdays since August 3 last year.

The report points at potentiality and efficiency of such a commission but concludes: "The commission is more appropriate for the distressed rather than the rich and affluent."

The commission however

## Ershad

FROM PAGE 1

Dhaka Division Golam Mortuza Majumder delivered the verdict saying investigations into the allegations against the Jatiya Party chairman were inadequate and erroneous.

The prosecution could not prove the charges brought against Ershad. So, he is acquitted of all charges... I found no evidence of misuse of power by him," the judge said.

The court also acquitted proprietor of Expo Company Ltd Abdul Majid Chowdhury, former T&T deputy managing director Anwarul Kader and former T&T general manager Shamsul Islam on the same ground.

The case filed with Tejgaon Police Station alleged, defying the authorities' decision, Ershad directed the authorities to take loans from France for setting up 'microwave telephone lines' in 89 upazilas despite the grant from Finland.

Due to Ershad's unilateral decision, the government had to pay an interest of Tk 28 crore to France, as the plan was not implemented, sources said.

Stating investigations into the case had many flaws, the judge said the investigation officer (IO) did not probe the allegations properly and did not seize any alamata (evidence).

The IO of the case submitted the charge sheet against Ershad and five others on July 31, 1995. Among the alleged former minister Kazi Firoz Rahis was later cleared of charges and former T&T chairman died during the trial of the case.

The finance minister told the House that as of January 15, 2009, the country's foreign currency reserve stands at \$5,434.69 million.

In response to another query, he said there are laws to consider expatriates who send home more than \$1 lakh a year as very important persons (VIPs) but the laws are not being enforced. He said the government will enforce the laws.

During the session, Posts and Telecommunications Minister Raziuddin Ahmed Raji said the government at the moment has no plans to provide licences to new mobile phone operators to ensure competition among the operators.

As AL lawmaker Fazle Rabbi Mia asked how competition would be ensured if new operators are not given licences, the minister said now there is no plan but in future new operators will be given licences.

Charged in dozens of criminal cases following his ouster in 1990, Ershad was earlier cleared of four graft cases in August and September 2006, soon after he consented to join the then ruling BNP-led four-party alliance.

Afterward, he was acquitted on three more cases filed on graft and gold-smuggling.

## Pranab visit

FROM PAGE 1

government leaders will prominently raise the issue.

However, officials of the ministries concerned said that Bangladesh government is yet to decide whether it will respond positively or not to India's transit both through land and waterway for the movement of goods from Kolkata to India's northeastern states.

Foreign ministry sources said India handed over a draft proposal in August 2007 proposing a 5-year deal on passenger and cargo traffic between the two countries.

According to the draft, Indian goods vehicles and container cargo will enter Bangladesh territory through Benapole land port and again enter Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram in India through the Bangladesh border points at Tamabil, Bibirbazar and Khagrachari.

Foreign ministry officials said they sent the draft proposal to the ministries concerned, including commerce, finance, communications and home seeking opinions as per instructions by the caretaker government but they are not to be used.

"We are responding and we will continue to retaliate. We know that most of the fire was not carried out by Hamas but by other small organisations, but Hamas is responsible. Hamas must act to stop this.

"We need calm in the south, and that is the test... If there is no calm we will have to act again," Barak warned on public radio.

The latest violence comes just over a week before Israelis go to the polls in a February 10 election expected to return the right-wing to power.

Meanwhile, Israeli soldiers shot dead a Palestinian gunman who opened fire at an army patrol in the south of the

## Israel bombs Gaza after new rocket fire

One Palestinian killed as Tel Aviv threatens more airstrikes

AFP, Gaza City

occupied West Bank, rescue services said.

The flare-up came as Egyptian officials were set to hold separate talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas and representatives of Hamas in a bid to broker a lasting truce.

## Climate change

FROM PAGE 16

AK Khandaiker to prepare strategies for combating climate change as early as possible.

The committee members include ministers for agriculture, and food and disaster management. The secretaries of those ministries will assist the committee.

Prime minister's economic adviser will head the other committee, the fund operation committee.

The committee members are civil aviation and tourism minister, state ministers for environment, foreign affairs, and housing and public works. The secretaries of those ministries will assist the committee.

"The cabinet okayed the climate change policy in principle," prime minister's press secretary Abul Kalam Azad told reporters at the press information department's conference room.

"At the meeting the prime minister asked all to put in their best efforts to utilize Tk 300 crore climate change fund so that people can get maximum benefits from the fund," Azad said.

Bangladesh is one of those countries that are highly vulnerable to the climate change. Floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges and droughts in Bangladesh are likely to become more frequent and severe in the coming years.

At the meeting Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury stressed the need for immediate steps for dredging rivers and removing water logging to reduce the effect of the climate change.

"We will prepare strategies on climate change soon. As per our electoral pledges, the prime minister endorsed the proposal for river dredging to mitigate the impact of climate change," Matia told The Daily Star after his office after the meeting.

She said the prime minister assured her of taking prompt initiatives in this regard.

The government, earlier, set up a secretariat on climate change under the environment and forest ministry to monitor the activities for combating climate change and deal with the climate change fund.

## BNP MPs sit

FROM PAGE 1

seats in front row, the BNP-led opposition lawmakers remained absent from the House proceedings since Wednesday.

Speaker Abdul Hamid contacted the opposition chief whip over telephone yesterday and assured that he would try to allocate one or two more seats to opposition lawmakers in front row in the next session of the House. And he urged them to return to parliament.

Following the speaker's assurance, the opposition lawmakers yesterday adjourned their meeting till 4:30pm today without making any decision on the issue.

"Our parliamentary party will sit again tomorrow (today) to make a decision, and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia will chair the meeting," Opposition Chief Whip Md. Faruq told journalists at the Sangsabha Bhaban complex.

On the speaker's contact with