

OFFSHORE GAS EXPLORATION

PM seeks foreign help

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh needs foreign assistance for offshore gas exploration and installation of hydroelectric and solar-energy plants.

Hasina made the remark while talking with British High Commissioner Stephen Nicholas Evans on various matters of bilateral interest of the two countries.

"The government has plans for exploring offshore gas and installing hydroelectric and solar-energy plants to meet the growing demand for energy and power in the country," she told the British envoy during discussion at her office.

Hasina and Evans discussed issues like trade, investment and the challenges of the global climate change.

PM informed the envoy about her new government's

plans and programmes to ensure food security and eradicate poverty by building up a social safety net.

She said country's food production would be increased and more godowns and silos set up for increasing the food storage capacity.

Underlining education as one of the key elements of poverty alleviation, the prime minister said her government has a plan to make education free up to degree level.

"The government will take steps to stop dropout of primary students," she said adding that as a way of removing the dropout syndrome, the government has a plan to provide tiffin to the students of government primary schools at noon.

"The government is fully aware of the impact of global climate change," Hasina said adding that steps have already been taken for dredging the country's major rivers and

more water reservoirs will be created.

PM reiterated her government's commitment to ensure health services for people of all walks of life.

Community health clinics and child and mother care centres will be set up across the country to deliver quality health services to the people, she said.

When the issue of global terrorism came up for discussion, the prime minister said: "Terrorists have no religion or border."

"Terrorism has to be faced together," Hasina told the British envoy.

Finance Minister Abul Mal Abdul Muhit, Finance Adviser to the PM Moshir Rahman, PM's Office Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman, Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad, Special Assistant Abdus Sobhan Golap and former ambassador Ziauddin were present during the meeting.

Bangladesh to attend Al-Quds body meet in Morocco

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will participate in the 20th meeting of the Al-Quds Committee to be held at Rabat, the capital of Morocco, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Hasan Mahmud said yesterday.

He said a high level delegation of Bangladesh would participate in the meeting to be held on May 1-2.

The state minister said this when Moroccan Ambassador Mohammed Horru met him at the foreign ministry yesterday.

The ambassador handed over an invitation in this regard from Moroccan Foreign Minister Taib Fassi Fihri. Moroccan King Mohammed VI has called the meeting.

During the meeting bilateral ties between Bangladesh and Morocco was discussed in detail.

Following the meeting, the state minister told journalists that Morocco is an important member of OIC.

The Moroccan ambassador praised Bangladesh's constructive and positive role in the OIC. Besides, he praised the role of Bangladesh as a Muslim country in the international arena.

The state minister said the relation of Bangladesh with brotherly country Morocco is historical. As the 3rd largest Muslim country in the world, Bangladesh places high importance on its relation with Morocco.

Replying to a question of the newsmen, Dr Hasan Mahmud said a proposal for accepting Bangla as an official language of the UN was adopted in the Jatiya Sangsad unanimously on Monday.

A lawmaker of the grand alliance raised the proposal that will soon be placed in the UN. Besides, initiative would be taken for massive publicity among the UN member countries for garnering support for the proposal.

Kim Chang meets Dr Hasan

Meanwhile, a North Korean delegation led by the Director of Asian Affairs at the country's Foreign Ministry Kim Chang Il also met the state minister at the foreign ministry yesterday.

During the meeting, they discussed Bangladesh-North Korea relations in details, including Madhyapara hard rock project.

Kim informed the state minister that a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Bangladesh and North Korea was signed yesterday. He said it would increase the bilateral relations between the two countries. He hoped that during the tenure of the new democratic government the friendly relations between the two countries will be strengthened.

The state minister said as a member of the Human Rights Council Bangladesh is sincere to uphold human rights anywhere in the world.

However, sovereignty and integrity of a state is also important and Bangladesh is respectful to the sovereignty and integrity of every country.

Appeal for help

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

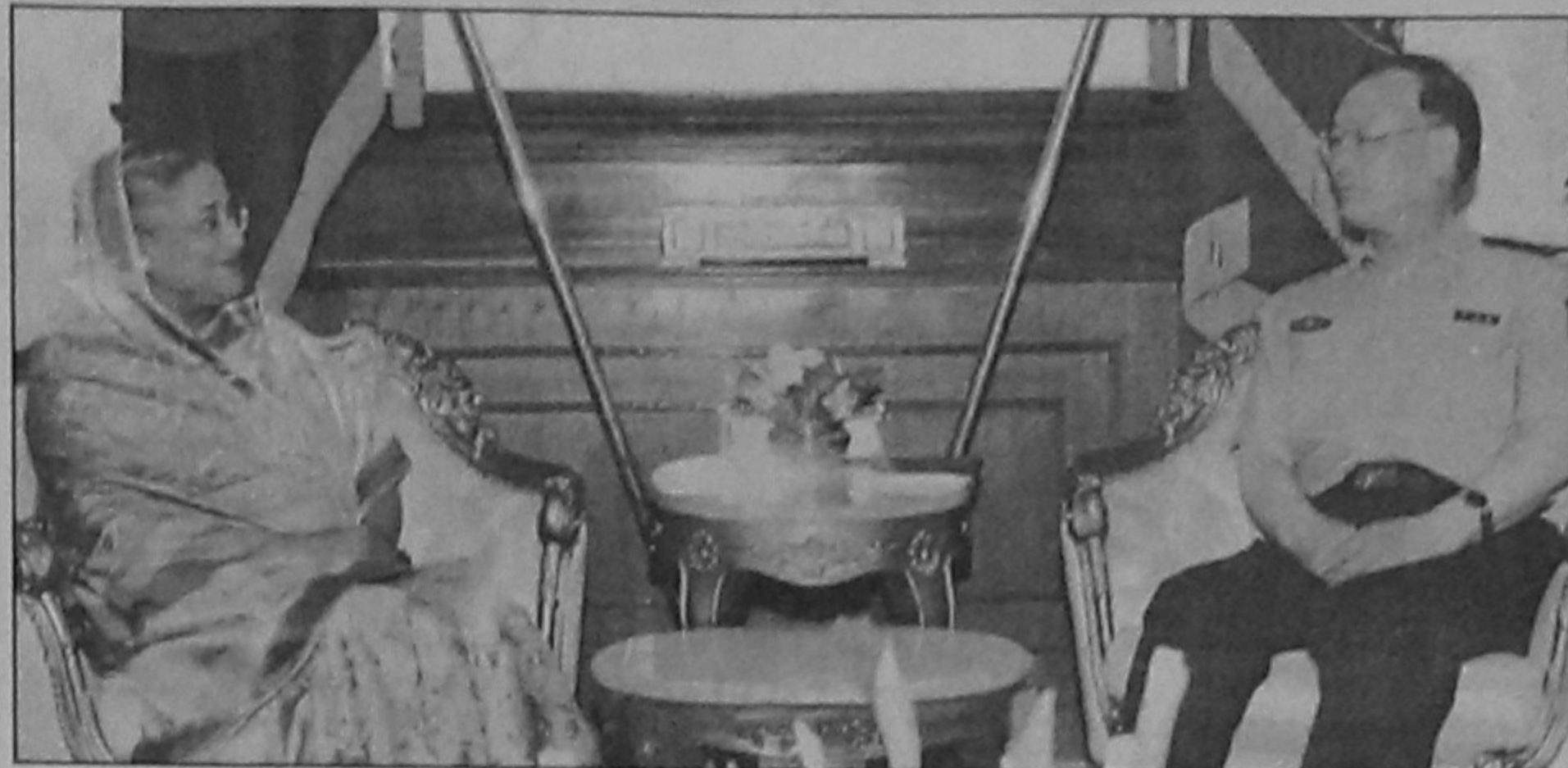
Hasina Begum, a superintendent of Food, has appealed for financial assistance for her treatment as she has been suffering from lung cancer for about six months, says a press release.

She was admitted to Tata Memorial Hospital in India several times where she underwent chemotherapy. According to doctors, improved treatment and chemotherapy could cure her illness, but such treatment involves a huge amount of money.

Her family is now broke as they have already spent Tk six lakh on her treatment. They could not afford to continue her treatment any longer.

So, Hasina, a resident of Azimpur, has appealed to generous people to extend a helping hand to save her life.

Contributions can be sent to Hasina Begum, Account No. 34069643, Janata Bank, Corporate Branch, Topkhana Road, Dhaka. Phone: 01191355530.



Chinese Deputy Chief of General Political Department of People's Liberation Army Lt Gen Jia Ting'an calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office in the city yesterday.

MPs' new role in Upazila to jeopardise local govt system

Different organisations express concern

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different socio-political organisations yesterday expressed deep resentment over the passage of the 'Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the Repealed Act and Amendment) Bill 2009', saying that it would jeopardise the entire local government system as well as weaken democracy.

Termining the enactment of the bill regretful and suicidal for the democracy, they said allowing the lawmakers' absolute supremacy over the local government system through the bill would create constitutional, legal, political and administrative complexities.

Issuing separate statements, they further said that the bill would make the entire local government system ineffective and also hamper the balanced development activities.

Saying that the main aim of the parishad was destroyed through passing the bill, they

demanded steps to repeal the bill as it is contradictory with the constitution.

The parliament on Monday unanimously passed the much-awaited bill that says lawmakers would be the advisers to upazila parishads in their constituencies, and upazila officials would take advice from them.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) leaders termed the bill a 'betrayal' of the pledge to empower the local government and said giving the lawmakers the scope for controlling the local body is unconstitutional and against the spirit of democracy.

Real democracy would not be established in the country unless the local government system is strengthened, they said.

The leaders demanded immediate cancellation of the bill and enactment of a new law ensuring empowerment of the parishad for making a self-ruling local government.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal said

the new bill would be considered as a black law in the country's history as it was against democracy, constitution, good governance and desire of the people.

Governance Advocacy Forum, a platform of 34 NGOs, termed the passing of the bill suicidal, saying that the bill paved the way for making the upazila parishad lame and ineffective.

The bill would create chaotic situation and 'dual administration' between lawmakers and the upazila parishad members while exercising authority, the forum mentioned.

Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh said the government weakened the local government structure and created an obstacle to establishing a democratic state through passing the bill.

Gono Forum, Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Gonotontri Party and Neeti Gobeshona Kendra also condemned the passage of the bill.

Govt considers raising judicial stamp price: Muhit

UNB, Dhaka

Finance Minister AMA Muhit yesterday said the government would consider raising the prices of judicial stamps in the next budget.

"The prices remained at the same level of 50 years back," he told reporters after a pre-budget meeting with secretaries of different ministries at the finance ministry.

Muhit said other expenditures related to legal process, including fees for the lawyers, increased substantially over the long period of 50 years.

Secretaries of the ministries, which are not under the Mid-term Budget Framework (MTBF), were present at the meeting. The finance minister earlier held a meeting with the ministries under MTBF on

Monday.

The finance minister said the day's meeting decided to bring 12 more ministries and divisions under the MTBF from the next fiscal year to give them ownership of budget and ensure their accountability.

He said it has also been discussed to strengthen manpower at Bangladesh Missions abroad to look after the problems of the expatriate Bangladeshi workers and ensure their welfare. "The level of increased manpower will be worked out later."

Muhit said the Finance Division has almost completed the primary preparation of the non-development budget for the next fiscal while the division was working out few remaining issues of the devel-

opment budget.

The next budget, he added, would try to maintain austerity as much as possible through avoiding unnecessary expenditures, as demands for expenditure would be much more due to the impact of global recession.

Replying to a question, the finance minister said the budget preparation would be hampered to some extent due to the removal of NBR chairman Muhammad Abdul Mazid from the important wing just before placing the budget.

He, however, said it would not be a problem to prepare the budget as he worked for last three months with the chairman, who has almost completed the first round of pre-budget discussions.

HATIRJHEEL-BEGUNBARI KHAL PROJECT

Work to be completed on schedule: Mannan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Housing and Public Works Abdul Mannan Khan yesterday said the Hatirjheel-Begunbari Khal project work would be completed on schedule.

The work of the project is scheduled to be completed by June 2010.

He was addressing a review meeting on the project titled "Integrated Development of Hatirjheel area, including Begunbari Khal" at the conference room of the ministry with the authorities concerned.

He said if everything remains okay it would be possible to complete the project work timely.

The officials of different agencies, including deputy commissioner's office, told the meeting that the process of land acquisition of 139 acre of private land would be completed by the next week.

An official of DC said they would start distributing checks to the owners of the land just after receiving the money from Rajuk, which is supposed to get by next week.

Mannan at the meeting asked the authorities concerned to make proper follow-up to dispose of cases filed by the land owners in the project area as early as possible.

A total of 41 cases have been filed against 11 acres of land of the project area, said an official at DC's office.

Expressing dissatisfaction at the delay in disposal of cases, he asked the officials concerned to take proper steps for their quick disposal.

The meeting decided to meet again on April 21 to review the progress of the project.

Professor Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), leader of the team that conducted the feasibility study of the project said they would try to complete the road embankment within the next three months.

The main objectives of the Tk 1480.98 crore Begunbari-Hatirjheel project are retention of rainwater to reduce waterlogging, flood protection and wastewater disposal, construction of walkways and roads around Hatirjheel as well as to improve communication

and reduce traffic congestion in the city.

Senior officials of public works ministry, Rajuk, DC's office and land ministry were present at the meeting.

Earlier, the state minister inaugurated an automation programme of the directorate of government accommodation to make the work of the directorate transparent.

TRIAL OF WAR CRIMINALS 'Govt trying to ensure loophole-free trial'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will start the process of trial of the war criminals after taking all-out preparations so that none of them can avoid the trial and no quarters can create obstacles to the trial, State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Qamrul Islam said yesterday.

The trial of the war criminals will be held under the International Crime Tribunal Act 1973, he told reporters at his secretariat office.

He said the government is examining all relevant matters, including evidence and information, regarding the trial of war criminals so that no loopholes can be found in the trial proceedings.

The government is also trying to bring the war criminals to book as soon as possible, he said, adding that all necessary steps will be taken to hold the trial in a speedy and transparent way.

The government has discussed the issue of expert legal assistance with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Qamrul Islam said, adding that it will soon decide on the processes of the trial.

Meanwhile, Home Minister Sahara Khatun met Law Minister Shafique Ahmed at his office yesterday and discussed the issue of the trial of war criminals, sources said.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam and Additional Attorney General M Enayetur Rahim were present at the meeting.



No change in temperature

UNB, Dhaka

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind is likely to occur at one or two places over all six divisions in next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Day temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met office said.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:17pm today and rises at 5:43am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 38.4 degree Celsius was recorded yesterday at Rajshahi and Jessore and lowest 21.0 degrees Celsius at Tangail, Dinajpur and Sayedpur.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	35.1	23.5	73	55
Chittagong	31.5	24.3	77	76
Rajshahi	38.4	23.8	81	30
Khulna	36.7	26.0	81	45
Barisal	34.9	21.6	83	64
Sylhet	33.5	23.8	70	62
Cox's Bazar	33.6	25.0	66	72

CHEATED WORKERS FROM MALAYSIA Rights bodies concerned over lack of govt steps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human rights bodies yesterday expressed grave concern over lack of government steps to

Formulate guidelines to promote volunteerism

Speakers tell workshop

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government should formulate guidelines to promote volunteerism, which is the best tool to achieve sustainable development, speakers at a national workshop on volunteerism said yesterday.

They also urged the youths, who possess immense energy, to play the leading role in voluntary activities.

Volunteerism creates a culture of responsibility; it provides an avenue for capacity building and it helps face development challenges, the speakers pointed out at the inaugural session of the workshop.

United Nations Volunteers (UNV) in collaboration with VSO, the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) organised the national workshop titled 'Recognising volunteerism as a tool to increase local participation to achieve MDGs'.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Md Ahad Ali Sarkar said volunteerism is an act of kindness in general; it should be done in a coordinated way for more meaningful effects.

The government is committed to promoting and recognising the voluntary work, he added.

Citing the example of relief work during flood and cyclone, UNDP Country Director Stefan Priesner said volunteerism exists all around the world for centuries. It helps reduce poverty, enhance rural development and ensure welfare services. However, it goes on in an uncoordinated manner, which is why a state level policy is necessary.

Editor of the Prothom Alo Matir Rahman said the government should provide support for voluntary work.

He also said the example of volunteerism has to come from the people on top. Otherwise, it will not be recognised by the mass people.

Ehsan Ul Fatah, secretary at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Fakrul Islam, Minar Pimple, Regional Head, UN Millennium Campaign, Bangkok, Ngozi Oti, Programme Officer of UNV, Shahanna Hayat, Country Director of VSO, and Kazi Ali Reza, officer-in-charge of UNIC, also spoke.

address the demands of the 30 cheated workers, who have been demonstrating at Zia International Airport after being forced to return home from Malaysia on Monday.

"We are deeply concerned over the inhumane return of Bangladeshi workers from abroad after being cheated by recruiting agencies," said a press release of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association (BNWLA) signed by its Executive Director Advocate Salma Ali.

These workers went to Malaysia in May 2007, but they were not issued work permits. Sometimes they were provided jobs, but whatever salary they got were taken away by the agents in the name of renewing work permits and other fees.

They complained to the Bangladesh mission in Kuala Lumpur and the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training in Dhaka repeatedly to address their issue, but the authorities failed to address their problems in two long years.

They returned home with the money they took from home and are now making strong demands for compensation from the recruiting agency -- Tangail Overseas that processed their documents.

"We shall leave the airport in

the form of corpses, but not without compensation," said Abdul Hannan, one of the returnee workers. "We are fed up of complaining to the government and getting no remedies."

"Our ministers Mosharraf Hossain and Dipu Moni met us in Malaysia and assured us of help to get compensation, but they have not come to see us although it has been three days," he said.

The inhuman situation of the 30 returnees is only an iceberg of a large number of workers suffering abroad, BNWLA said in the press release, demanding punitive actions against Tangail Overseas.

Meanwhile, IMA Research Foundation, a migrants' rights body, urged the prime minister to immediately look into the matter and address the problems of the returnee workers.

The 30 workers went to Malaysia in a group of 53. Three of them had returned home earlier, the 30 returned on Sunday, while the rest 20 cannot return home as their families had failed to send the money required to bring them back.

Each of the returnees had to spend around Tk 3.5 lakh to go to Malaysia, survive there and return home.

Sino-Bangla military, trade ties stressed

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh attaches due importance to its bilateral relations with China and believes in the "One-China Policy", pursued by Beijing.

She made the remarks during discussion when a nine-member Chinese Defence delegation led by Lt Gen Jia Ting'an called on her at the PMO.

The delegation recalled with gratitude Bangladesh's assistance for China when a 7.8-magnitude earthquake hit China's Sichuan province last year killing thousands and smashing as many as 80 per cent of the buildings in the city.

They hoped that the age-old friendly relations between Bangladesh and China would further strengthen in the days to come.

The prime minister and the delegation laid emphasis on cooperation in military, trade and investment sectors between the two countries.

Prime Minister Office (PMO) Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman, Press Secretary to the PM Abul Kalam Azad and PM's Military Secretary Brig Gen Md. Salahuddin Miaji were present.

Sculpture of Zia at Mujibnagar memorial project demolished

A CORRESPONDENT, Meherpur

A sculpture of late president Ziaur Rahman has been demolished at the Liberation War Memorial Museum on the Mujibnagar Complex in Meherpur.

A group of unknown people entered the museum by breaking open its lock and demolished the sculpture on Monday night at the instruction of higher authorities, sources said.

The sculpture was made as part of Mujibnagar Memorial Project, which is scheduled to be inaugurated on April 17 on the occasion of Mujibnagar Day.

When contacted, Deputy Commissioner Md Amjad Hossain said he was not aware of the demolition of the sculpture.

MM Builders has been constructing the sculpture under the project. Sculptor Gopal Chandra Pal has left the project area after the incident. He could not be contacted over phone despite repeated attempts. The manager of MM Builders was not also available for comments.

Apart from the museum, construction of sculptures of 40 freedom fighters was under the project. Of them, 29 sculptures have been made.

The project work also involved construction of the sculptures of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the sector commanders.

Meherpur BNP President Masud Arun, a former lawmaker, strongly condemned the demolition of the sculpture.

I'm not eager to become deputy leader of opposition Says Moudud

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed yesterday said he is capable of playing the role of the deputy leader of the opposition in parliament, but he is not eager to have the post.

"It is totally up to the leader of the opposition to decide who will be the deputy leader. She would appoint the person who is deemed fit for the post," Moudud told reporters at his Motijheel office in the city.

Moudud, who was defeated in the December 29 parliamentary elections in his own area in Noakhali, won the April 2 by-elections from Bogra-7 constituency.

Moudud, a former law minister, also urged the government to launch an investigation into the activities of former Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) chairman Hasan Mashhud Chowdhury.

He alleged that Mashhud has weakened the country using the ACC in the last two years.

"A white paper should be published on his total activities as the ACC chairman," the BNP leader added.

Replying to a question, Moudud said there was no difference of opinion between the government and the opposition on curbing militancy and terrorism.

DHAKA TODAY

Dialogue

Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) organises the 3rd dialogue of BEI Student Forum on 'Media's role in preventing terrorism in Bangladesh'. Venue: BEI conference room. Time: 9:45am.

View exchange meeting

Steps Towards Development organises a view exchange meeting on 'Gender-sensitive budget: Some recommendations for the 2009-10 FY'. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

Seminar

Institute of Hazrat Mohammad (SAW) organises a seminar titled 'Culture sensitive HIV/AIDS prevention communication for behaviour change'. Venue: Goethe Institute auditorium. Time: 6:30pm.

Seminar

Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) organises a seminar on 'Global financial crisis and impact of recession on Bangladesh'. Venue: IUB Library Building. Time: 4:00pm.

View exchange meeting

Urban and Regional Planning department, Bangladesh University

of Engineering and Technology (Buet) and WBB Trust will organise a view exchange meeting on sustainable pro-people urban planning. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 11:00am.

Seminar

Bangladesh Chhatra Union organises a seminar on 'Education policy and our thoughts'. Venue: Teacher-Student Centre (TSC), Dhaka University. Time: 11:30am.

Book launch

The publication ceremony of 'Ashay Manusher Kanna' by journalist Shafikul Islam will be held. Venue: National Press Club. Time: 10:30am.

Discussion

Bangladesh Chamber of Industries (BCI) will hold a discussion on recession and labour market. Venue: BCI boardroom. Time: 12:45pm.

Bhawaiya programmes

Bhawaiya Ongon, Dhaka organises Bhawaiya programmes and a seminar on Bhawaiya songs. Venue: Public Library auditorium. Time: 5:45pm.