

13 lakh acres govt land gobbled up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around 13 lakh acres of land has been grabbed across the country, two ministers told parliament yesterday. Later, lawmakers demanded that the government take stern actions against the grabbers and recover the land. Of the grabbed land, said Land Minister Rezaul Karim Hira, 4.25 lakh acres are khas land--both farm and non-farm--3.74 lakh acres vested property, 1,231 acres abandoned property and 2.07 lakh acres are owned by government organisations.

Hasan Mahmud, state minister for environment and forest, said individuals and businesses together have encroached on around 2.85 lakh acres of forestland. Both the ministers told the House that the government has taken various measures to recover the land. They however did not say how much has so far been retrieved. In reply to AL lawmaker Mohammad Shah Alam's query, the land minister said they have directed the deputy commissioners to take steps to force the grabbers out of the land.

Answering a question from AL lawmaker Nasimul Alam Chowdhury, State Minister Hasan Mahmud said the government has taken up a programme of social forestation on the grabbed forestland. "We are also taking legal proceedings against the industries built illegally on forestland," he continued. Besides, the process to designate some areas as reserved forests has been sped up to stop further grabbing. Replying to ruling party lawmaker Rahmat Ali, the state minister said they are working on a project to develop

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PM's visit to Kuwait starts on Feb 7

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Financial assistance for construction of Padma Bridge, manpower export, and expansion of bilateral trade and investment will dominate the talks during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's 3-day visit to Kuwait, starting on Sunday. Official sources said increasing Kuwaiti assistance for construction of infrastructure and for other development projects, particularly fund for Padma Bridge will be at the top of the premier's agenda of discussion. According to the programme schedule, the

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BNP returns to JS next week

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led opposition is returning to parliament next week after skipping the House for 63 consecutive sittings since last June. The decision came yesterday at a meeting of the opposition lawmakers chaired by Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia at her conference room at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Thirty-six of the total 40 opposition lawmakers, including two from Jamaat and the lone MP from Bangladesh Jatiya Party, were present at yesterday's meeting. Talking to The Daily Star, a number of opposition MPs said they are likely to return to the House in its next sitting on Wednesday. "We placed many demands before the speaker, but none of them were met. Yet we decided to join the House to speak for the country and its people as many national problems arose in the last one year rule of the government," Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque said at a press briefing after the meeting.

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BDR, BSF trade fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

BDR and BSF traded over a hundred gunshots on Jaintapur, Sripur and Tamabil borders yesterday from 4:00pm to 6:00pm after the Indian border guards took a Bangladesh Rifles jawan to their territory from near Jaintapur border around 10:15am. The Border Security Force handed over the BDR soldier, Nayek Mujibur Rahman, around 8:15pm after an hour-long flag meeting at Tamabil international check post. Commanding Officer of the 21 Rifle Battalion of Sylhet Lt Col Khandaker Zahirul Alam received the BDR jawan. BSF

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Schoolboy run over

His brother injured by bus

A five-year-old schoolboy was killed and his seven-year old elder brother seriously injured in a road accident at Hotapara in the district yesterday. The accident occurred

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Injured mother wants to see Hamim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bedridden Sonia Sheikh woke up only to ask her husband to take her to the body of their only son Hamim Sheikh, who was crushed under the wheels of a speeding bus in front of Willes Little Flower School

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Road safety held hostage

Unfit buses, unskilled drivers allowed to rule city streets

TAWFIQUE ALI

Reckless and callous driving of rundown city-service buses is an everyday hazard for Dhaka dwellers and commuters and with law enforcement agencies not being strict enough, it puts people's lives and safety at risk. A large number of such bus and minibuses do not even have driving licenses or have fake ones. They drive at will, stop anywhere they want to and change lanes with no regard whatsoever for other vehicles. They often indulge in dangerous competitions with other drivers to get more passengers. They endanger the lives of motorists, pedestrians and the passengers they carry. Sometimes, reckless driving goes on in front of police officials on duty. Retired Pubali Bank assistant general manager Syed Shafiqul Ahmed died in front of GPO on January 24. He was travelling from Mohammadpur Town Hall by a bus and as he was about to

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Like hundred others, this Mirpur bound bus has no wing mirrors and indicators. Besides, scratches all over the body testify to its "fitness status" and previous experiences of road crash. The photo was taken yesterday from the city's Gulistan area. PHOTO: STAR

9 killed in bridal-party bus plunge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

At least nine people, six children and three women, of a bridal party were killed and three others injured in a road accident at Sadhurhat in Chittagong district yesterday afternoon. The deceased were identified as Tanvir, 4, Parul Akter, 8, Israfeel Sharif, 8, Kamrul, 8, Shahin Sultana, 11, Tahmina Akter, 14, Tahmina's mother Aleya Begum, 40, Laila Begum, 32, and Nur Jahan, 40. Two of the injured are Fahmida, 14, and Promi, 12, while identity of the other could not be known. Sources said the tragic accident occurred when the microbus of the bridal-party, carrying some 15 people, plunged into a roadside pond

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ABUBAKAR'S DEATH DU teachers, students for stern action

PM assigns 3 leaders to monitor BCL

Teachers and students of Dhaka University yesterday demanded exemplary punishment to the people responsible for the death of Abubakar Siddique, a student of the university's Islamic History and Culture department. Abubakar, who was a resident student of Sir AF Rahman hall, succumbed to his head injuries after fighting for life for over 30 hours at Dhaka

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HC orders for new warrant of precedence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday directed the government to issue a new Warrant of Precedence for the republic's officers, giving district judges and equivalent judicial officers precedence over the chiefs of armed forces, and government secretaries. The HC also declared the existing Warrant of Precedence illegal and void, as it does not conform to the country's constitution. "As we have found that judges are on a par with political executives and legislators and above administrative executives - district judges, members of the judicial service holding equivalent judicial posts of district judges, additional district judges,

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Big plan on war weapon purchase

JS told of 10-yr dev plan for armed forces

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday unveiled its plans and ongoing processes of purchasing weapons of war and armoured vehicles to enhance and consolidate combat proficiency of Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force. Planning Minister Air Vice Marshal (ret) AK Khandker, also in charge of the defence ministry in parliamentary affairs, yesterday notified the parliament about the government's plans and on going processes for the purchase. He said the government has planned to buy various weapons of war and combat vehicles in

the current fiscal year as part of its 10-year-long development plan for the armed forces. Efforts have been made to purchase seven tanks and one armoured recovery vehicle for army, and 80 armoured vehicles, five armoured recovery vehicles, five armoured ambulances and two helicopters for UN peacekeeping mission, added Khandker. "Besides, the government has approved in principle and allocated necessary funds to double the capacity of Bangladesh Ordnance Factory to produce ammunition for small arms," said the planning minister in reply to a

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Justice for poor Pledges CJ after appointment

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

New Chief Justice-designate Mohammad Fazlul Karim yesterday said he will try his best during his eight-month tenure to ensure access to justice for all, in order to establish the rule of law. "My first target is to ensure effective justice for all, especially for the poor, as we want to build a beautiful society and wonderful Bangladesh," he said adding that it is not possible to establish democracy in the country without the rule of law. He made the remarks while talking to The Daily Star in his Supreme Court office yesterday afternoon after being appointed the next chief justice of the country by President Zillur Rahman in the morning. Justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim, the senior-most judge of the Appellate Division of Supreme Court, was appointed the



Justice Karim

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More than 600 trees of this mangrove forest in coastal Badarkhali area in Cox's Bazar were felled to make a shrimp enclosure. PHOTO: STAR

COX'S BAZAR MANGROVE FOREST 600 trees felled for shrimp farm

A CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Over 600 keora and bain trees at a coastal mangrove forest in the district's Chakoria upazila have been felled to make way for a shrimp enclosure. Locals said some 50 labourers under supervision of Mohammad Ali Chowdhury, general secretary of a Badarkhali cooperative association, denuded the area in last five/six days. They are now building earthen dams for shrimp farming. Japanese green organisation Weska International planted the trees on khas and forest department land in 1992-93 and 2001. It developed the forest under its mangrove re-forestation programme. Ubinig, a non-government organisation, worked with Weska to develop the forest and was in charge of looking after it. With tree up to 14 feet high, the manmade forest was acting as a buffer against tidal surges. Around 40,000 people of Badarkhali union, on the estuary of the Matamuhuri river, are deeply concerned that the trees that used to protect them from storms and waves are gone. Environmentalists fear the absence of the mangrove forest would lead to severe environmental damage. Around seven months back, Mohammad Ali and his men first marked off the area, leaving out a portion of the forest. But around a week ago, they began a wholesale destruction of the vegetation, said witnesses. Hamidul Haque Manik, Weska International's Chakoria

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