

NEWS IN *brief*

Dipu Moni hopes Dhaka-IOM to continue to work closely

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni expressed hope that Bangladesh and International Organization for Migration (IOM) would continue to work closely in areas of mutual interest.

She said this when the new IOM Country Chief Sarah Dash called on her to present his credentials.

Sarah Dash mentioned that IOM would continue to provide policy support to Bangladesh for the welfare of migrant workers.

The foreign minister thanked IOM for its works in Bangladesh.

She underscored the need for an international framework to respond to emergency situations including reintegration of the workers in the countries of origin and return to the work in the destination country.

Fire breaks out at power sub-station

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Fire broke out at a power sub-station of DPDC in BSCIC industrial area of Fatulla of the district yesterday.

The fire originated from a circuit breaker and soon gutted the entire breaker around 12:00pm, said Ruhul Amin, junior assistant of the power station.

Two fire units doused the blaze. The damage in the fire was estimated at about Tk 1 crore.



Participants at a roundtable, "Are we spending enough to save our mothers", organised jointly by White Ribbon Alliance (WRA) and The Daily Star at the newspaper's office in the city yesterday. (Story on Page 20)

PHOTO: STAR

PM serious about Yunus as WB president

Says Gowher Rizvi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prime minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi yesterday said Prime Minister Shiekh Hasina was serious about her proposal to nominate Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus as the president of the World Bank.

"When the PM gives a proposal, she is serious. He (Prof Yunus) has competence; he has experience; he has standing; he has stature.

"He is a completely competent choice for the presidency of World Bank. There cannot be a more competent choice," said Gowher in an interview with the television channel ATN Bangla.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina conveyed the proposal to the European Union during a meeting with an EU delegation on February 22.

A few days later US Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan W Mozena endorsed the prime minister's proposal and expressed confidence that should Prof Yunus agree to his nomination for the position, it will be given the fullest consideration.

While the United Nations Development Programme chief used to be an American, the last few years have been different, added Gowher.

"It is not written anywhere or said in any constitution or any rules that it has to be an American. So the US will support him," he said.

The World Bank said it plans to appoint a new president by the time of the annual spring meetings in April as the current chief Robert Zoellick declared to step down at the end of June.

2 bills passed to tax speakers, MPs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Parliament yesterday passed two bills scrapping "discriminatory" provisions from two laws that exempted the speaker, deputy speaker and MPs for around 38 years from paying taxes on their remunerations.

Another two bills are likely to be placed in the House today seeking to repeal the similar provision from two other laws that exempt the prime minister, ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers from paying taxes on their salaries, sources in the Parliament Secretariat say.

Amid absence of the BNP-led opposition, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday proposed for passage of the bills to bring changes in the Members of Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) Order, 1973 and Speaker and Deputy Speaker (Remuneration and Privileges) Act, 1974.

The changes in the two laws concerned took effect from July 1, 2011.

The original law, Members of

Parliament (Remuneration and Allowances) Order, 1973 did not exempt MPs from taxes on their remuneration. But the then government in 1974 amended the law by introducing the "discriminatory" provision.

The speaker, deputy speaker, prime minister, ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers were also exempted from paying taxes on their salaries and remunerations with the introduction of a similar legal provision.

Criticism has been raging against the provision, with the demand that such provisions be repealed. But lawmakers did not pay heed to it and instead have been enjoying the "discriminatory" benefits.

Finally, the ruling Awami League in its manifesto amended in July 2009 stated that there would be no law "discriminatory" between MPs and citizens of Bangladesh.

Eventually, the AL-led government moved to scrap the provision, termed "discriminatory" by Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Shafique Ahmed, who placed the two

bills in the House on February 6.

"Usually any Bangladeshi's income above a certain limit is taxable. So there is discrimination between the common people and the MPs regarding taxation," the law minister said in his brief statements tagged with copies of the bills.

The AL-led government however remains silent about the "discriminatory" provision that allows MPs to import duty-free cars.

The original law of 1973 did not contain any such provision. It was introduced on May 24, 1987 during HM Ershad's rule to give MPs undue benefits.

Meanwhile, Environment and Forest Minister Hasan Mahmud placed two bills in parliament seeking to amend the Forest Act, 1927 and to enact new law for preserving trees.

The proposed legislation on tree preservation says the government can declare trees standing in forest or public places to be preserved. It has also a special provision that says opinion of headman will be taken before declaring any trees standing

in the areas of ethnic minority people for preservation.

According to the provisions of the bill, no trees grown naturally in the forest land can be cut or removed without the government's permission.

An individual might be punished with a maximum jail term of three months or a fine of Tk 50,000 or both for violation of the proposed legislation.

The other bill seeking to amend the Forest Act, 1927 proposes to increase punishment for offences related to forestry. A provision of the bill also proposes to impose a ban on leasing of forest land to any private company or agency in any form or any purpose including construction of roads, infrastructure, brick fields and establishment of industries.

A provision of the bill says special measures will be taken to protect the traditional and customary rights of the ethnic minority group as recognised in the existing laws.

Both the bills were sent to the parliamentary standing committee on the environment and forest ministry for scrutiny.

Obituary

CU CORRESPONDENT



Major (ret) Prof Abul Quasem Chowdhury of the Department of

Sociology in Chittagong University (CU) died of cardiac arrest at Birdem Hospital in the capital yesterday at the age of 65, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, three daughters, and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

Rahima Begum

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rahima Begum, mother of former home minister Rafiqul Islam, Bir Uttam, died at the city's Combined Military Hospital yesterday afternoon. He was 86.

She had been suffering from old age complications, says a press release.

She left behind three sons, six daughters, grandsons and a host of relatives, admirers and well-wishers to mourn her death.

Rahima will be buried at Banani graveyard after namaz-e-janeza at Gulshan Azad mosque after Johr prayers today.

Begum Faizunnessa

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Begum Faizunnessa, wife of late Shamsul Huq, former employee of Bangladesh Academy of Rural Development, passed away yesterday.

She left behind a daughter, a son and a host of relatives to mourn her death, says a press release.

She was buried at the city's new Azimpur graveyard.

Her qulkhwani will be held today after Asr prayers at her daughter's residence.

Birth anniversary

METRO DESK



Today is the 100th birth anniversary of Dr Md Osman Gani, former vice chancellor of Dhaka University, says a press release.

The MO Ghani Trust Foundation will organise week-long events to mark the occasion.

The Bangladesh Academy of Sciences, Kishoreganj Shamity, Shamsun Nahar Osman Ghani School, and his family will remember him through prayers and discussion programmes.

The programmes will be held in Dhaka as well as at his village home in Kishoreganj.

21 AUG CASE

Hearing on charge framing March 5

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday fixed March 5 to decide whether it will frame charges against BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman and 51 others accused in the August 21 grenade attack cases.

Judge Shahed Nuruddin of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 set the date for scrutinising the discharge petitions submitted by 33 out of the 52 accused.

Among them, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and Jamaat-e-Islami leader Ali Ahsan Mojaheed are now in jail while Tarique and 18 other accused are absconding.

The court was scheduled to decide on the charge framing yesterday.

All the 32 detained accused including Babar and Mojaheed were produced before the court prior to its resuming the proceedings.

Former Dhaka City Corporation ward councillor Ariful Islam Arif, now on bail, was also present.

Both the prosecution and the defence set 25 different dates to carry out the hearing on charge framing against the accused.

On October 9, 2011, Syed Rezaur Rahman, chief counsel for the two grenade attack cases, proposed the court to frame charges against all 52 accused, alleging that they had meetings at several places, including the Hawa Bhaban, to plot the grisly blasts in 2004.

Twenty-four people were killed and around 200 others injured in the grisly grenade attack on an AL rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21, 2004. The then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.



PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Visitors swarm the Bangla Academy premises as the month-long Amar Ekushey Boi Mela concluded yesterday.

Boi Mela ends with record number of new books

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 29-day Amar Ekushey Boi Mela ended yesterday with a record turnover and appearance of new books this year.

The turnover was over Tk 26 crore in 28 days, said Shahida Khatun, director (establishment, planning and training division) of Bangla Academy, who read out the closing report yesterday. Last year's sales amounted to Tk 25 crore.

Meanwhile, the number of new book arrivals was 3,669, 656 more than that of the previous year. Topping the list were poetry books numbering 817 followed by novels, totalling to 563. Yesterday's fair saw the arrival of 109 new books.

A total 425 publishing houses and socio-cultural, non-government and media organisations took part in the fair.

Expressing satisfaction over the sales, the publishers urged the authority to strictly implement the fair's policies to restrict the access of pirated books and stop allotting stalls to "so-called" socio cultural organisations.

Osman Gani, owner of Agamee Prakashani, said the huge turnouts since the fair's inauguration helped reach this year's record sales.

However, some publishers claimed that the monetary value did not portray the true picture of the number of book sold as book prices were comparatively high this year.

In yesterday's closing ceremony, presided over by Bangla Academy Chairman Prof Anisuzzaman, its Director General Dr Shamsuzzaman Khan thanked everyone for making the fair a success.

The academy awarded Ittadi Grantha Prokash, Moula Brothers and Bidya Prokash with "Munier Chowdhury Smriti Puraskar" for bringing out the "highest numbers of quality books".

"Ananya Jibanananda", authored by Clinton B Silly, translated by Faruk Mainuddin and published by Prothoma Prokashon, was awarded "Chittaranjan Shaha Smriti Puraskar" for being the "book of the best quality".

"Bangla Academy Probashi Lekhak Puraskar" was presented to expatriate writer Kader Mahmud while Sumonto Aslam, senior sub-editor of Samakal, received the "Shaheed Sirajuddin Hossain Smriti Puraskar" for his creative report on the fair.

The fair yesterday, being the 29th February of a leap year and the closing day, witnessed a massive turnout, with everyone wanting to get their hands on the books of their choice.