

Students' demo stops Dhaka

Commuters suffer as private university students take to streets, causing traffic chaos

STAR REPORT

Thousands of private university students took to the streets and blocked traffic in the capital and elsewhere yesterday to press home their demand for lifting the 7.5 percent VAT imposed on their "tuition fees" in the current budget.

City dwellers suffered immensely as thousands of students barricaded key points in Rampura, Mohakhali, Baridhara, Dhanmondi and other areas for over six hours since around 10:00am, causing heavy traffic congestion that spilled over to nearby roads and allies.

Similar demonstrations were held in Chittagong and Sylhet.

The protest under the banner of "No VAT on Education" came a day after police opened fire on an anti-VAT demonstration of East West University students in Rampura. At least 35 people, including several students of the university, were injured in the shooting.

The government slapped 7.5 percent VAT on private

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



The VAT confusion

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite widespread protests, Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday categorically said the government would not withdraw the value added tax (VAT) imposed on the private universities.

"The universities will have to pay it without increasing the tuition fees and it cannot be collected from the students," he said at a press briefing in Sylhet.

Similarly, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) said it is

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



People are forced to walk on the Rampura-Badda road as East West University students, bottom right, blocked it near Aftabnagar in the capital for the second day yesterday. Bottom left, traffic mess on Mirpur Road in Dhanmondi.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



15th edition of BD Business Awards today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two companies and two individuals will be felicitated today at the 15th Bangladesh Business Awards in recognition of their financial success as well as contributions to the economy.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith is scheduled to hand out the awards to the winners at a hotel in Dhaka.

DHL Express, the world's leading logistics company, and The Daily Star, the leading English-language newspaper of Bangladesh, initiated the awards in 2000.

The awards were created to recognise and generate public recognition of the achievements and positive contributions of businesses and individuals, who have not only grown but have expanded the economy with them.

The awards also aim to create an environment of excellence and competitiveness that would drive the

Salinity tolerant rice shows promise

Bangladeshi scientists develop first transgenic rice infusing pea gene; up to 50pc higher yield potential



The team of scientists who have developed four salinity-tolerant rice varieties.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

REAZ AHMAD

Bangladeshi scientists have developed four transgenic rice varieties capable of production in high soil salinity, far better than the ones now available in the market that were derived from conventional breeding.

A particular pea gene -- *helicase* -- was infused into four high yielding rice varieties (HYVs) that helped rice plants have higher salt tolerance and higher yield potential, scientists told The Daily Star.

They were readying two most promising varieties for trials in greenhouses.

In lab and net house, the transgenic varieties had shown potential to yield up to 50 percent more than the available salt-tolerant HYVs in saline-stressed soil.

In Bangladesh, one million hectares out of a total nine million hectares of cultivable land are salinity affected, and the vulnerability is more profound during the dry season. That's why the scientists chose the dry season Boro rice varieties first for the gene transfection.

A team led by Dhaka University's Biochemistry and



Molecular Biology Professor Zeba Islam Seraj made it possible after a decade of research.

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday called Zeba to congratulate her and her team for the breakthrough and promised support.

A transgenic crop plant contains a gene or genes which have been artificially inserted.

The Zeba-led team applied multiple techniques of breeding that include genetic engineering, tissue culture and marker-assisted backcrossing.

Zeba first procured the pea gene from International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB) and then using Agrobacterium as carrier infused the salt-tolerance vigour into home-grown rice variety Binnatoa.

Later, her team crossed the helicase-infused Binnatoa with four HYVs, BRRI Dhan-28, BRRI Dhan-29, BRRI Dhan-36 and BRRI Dhan-47.

Agrobacterium is well known for its ability to transfer organism's genetic information between itself and plants,

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2

TEACHERS' AGITATION Muhith explains his comments, says sorry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday regretted his comment on the agitating teachers of public universities.

"The way my comment was published in the media is undesirable and I'm withdrawing it. I humbly request those who have been aggrieved or hurt by the comment to end all the misunderstanding here," Muhith said at a function in Sylhet.

"I wanted to say they started a movement when they were not aware of the actual recommendations and the overall



SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

This is an effective, true parliament

Says Hasina as 7th session ends

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night described the current parliament as "very effective and lively".

"This parliament is very effective. No abusive language is used in the House. Parliament is functioning on the basis of constructive activities and constructive criticism by the opposition, which is the nature of a real and effective House," the PM said in her winding up speech at the seventh session of the 10th parliament.

She also thanked the opposition party and its leader for making the session lively with their regular presence and participation. "This time, the role of the opposition was really lively."

Hasina said she could ignore interference of the big powers, including the World Bank, in the country's internal affairs on different occasions



SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Yunus Centre protests PM's remarks on Prof Yunus

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Yunus Centre yesterday protested news reports that the prime minister has alluded to the Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus of involvement in propaganda against the government.

"We are sad and frustrated at the untrue allegations made by the honorable Prime Minister. Making such allegations by the PM without providing any evidence is very sad," it said in a statement.

The centre, which promotes the philosophies and works of Prof Yunus, said according to the news published on Wednesday and Thursday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told the Parliament on Wednesday, "It's no superpower but an evil power inside the country that was behind the cancellation of the GSP facility."

She was also quoted as saying, "Another person, who felt aggrieved on losing the post of the managing director of a bank in a legal battle, engaged in negative publicity against the government."

The centre said according to newspaper reports,

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