

## Reconsider VAT

FROM PAGE 1

The private university students do not need to pay additional VAT this year, he said to reporters after Bangladesh Business Awards ceremony organised by DHL and The Daily Star at a city hotel.

"What I think is... this time nobody is going to be charged [the VAT]. They [universities] will pay it from what [tuition fees] have already been collected."

Muhith said the university authorities have already agreed to it.

Asked whether the VAT is going to be imposed on students in future, Muhith said it would be considered in the coming days, the UNB reports.

Meanwhile, two groups of private university students yesterday announced separate programmes demanding withdrawal of the VAT.

One group announced that it would enforce a three-day strike from today at all private educational institutions across the country, while the other said they would stage indefinite sit-ins on university campuses from tomorrow.

Thousands of students staged daylong protests blocking major roads in Dhaka and elsewhere in the country on Thursday protesting the government move.

Issuing a circular on the same day, the National Board of Revenue (NBR) said the VAT was payable by the private university authorities, not by the students.

Criticising the circular, APUB chief Kabir yesterday said the NBR should have thought about it well before issuing the notice.

Since the universities are run by trustee boards, no tax or VAT is applicable for them, he claimed.

"Now the government will consider whether the trustee boards should pay the VAT. How could the trustee boards pay the VAT when they are not con-

sumers?" questioned Kabir, pointing to the fact that value-added tax is actually paid by the end users.

The government would need to revise the private university act if it wants the universities to pay the VAT, he noted, adding that no VAT was imposed on students.

### FRESH PROGRAMMES

Private university students were apparently divided over their next course of actions.

The first group under the banner of "Private University Students' Welfare Association" in a press conference in the city said they were retreating from the movement.

However, Stamford University students under the banner of "No VAT on Education" declared the three-day strike at all private educational institutions across the country.

"The government must withdraw the VAT on tuition fees immediately," said Jyotirmoy Chakraborty on behalf of the platform at a press briefing on Stamford University's Dhanmondi campus.

At another press conference in the city's Aftab Nagar, Salauddin Mithu of East West University said they would stage indefinite sit-ins on private university campuses across the country from tomorrow.

"The government is saying that the university authorities, not the students, will have to pay the VAT on tuition fees. We are rejecting the government's proposal."

The students will continue the movement until all kinds of VAT on education are lifted, he said.

Salauddin blamed the police for the Wednesday's attack on students in the capital and demanded punishment for the law enforcers responsible.

**EDUCATIONISTS OPPOSE VAT**  
Prof Syed Manzoorul Islam of Dhaka

University said imposing VAT on tuition fees is completely illogical and contradictory to the government's policies.

"It goes against the philosophy of the National Education Policy that considers education as a right of people, not a product. But here [by levying VAT] it is being regarded as a product."

The government, the renowned litterateur noted, is also saying that private universities are non-profitable organisations. "So how could it impose VAT on private universities if it considers them non-profitable?"

If the government thinks that private universities are making huge money, it should bring them under the tax net, he argued.

A lot of students from lower- and middle-income families attend private universities, said the academician. "They [the parents] are already spending a huge sum of money. For them, it would be the last straw that breaks the camel's back if they have to pay the VAT."

Prof Nazrul Islam, former chairman of the University Grants Commission, echoed the views of Manzoorul.

"It's not like that only children from affluent families enrol in private universities. There are many students from middle-income families too," he said.

"These students are already overburdened with tuition and other fees. If the VAT is imposed on them, it will only add to the burden."

Nazrul feared that even if the students were primarily exempted from paying the VAT, the universities might just hike other fees on some pretext to cover the VAT money they would pay to the government.

The government in 2010 had imposed a 4.5 percent VAT on the students' tuition fees, which triggered a similar uproar. As they took to the streets, the government withdrew its decision.

## Militants claim kidnapping of 18 Turks in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

An unknown militant group has claimed the kidnapping of 18 Turkish workers in Iraq and issued a list of demands it said Turkey must fulfil for them to be released.

Gunmen seized 18 employees of major Turkish construction firm Nurol Insaat on September 2 in the Sadr City area of northern Baghdad, where they were working on a football stadium project.

Men armed with submachine guns and wearing black uniforms and balaclavas stood behind 18 men said to be the kidnapped Turks in a video posted online.

The militants identified themselves as "Furaq al-Mawt," or "Death Squads," in text appearing behind them alongside the words "We are at your service, O Hussein."

One of their demands was that Turkey order rebel forces to stop besieging four Shia villages in northern Syria.

This all indicates the militants are Shia, but could also potentially be an attempt to mislead, and the group's makeup and provenance were not immediately clear.

The demands, addressed to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, included Ankara stopping "the flow of militants from Turkey to Iraq," and "the passage of stolen oil from Kurdistan through Turkish territory."

## Dhaka, KL

FROM PAGE 16

However, Malaysia recruited only some 10,000 workers in its plantation sector in two years under the G2G. Currently, there are some six lakh Bangladeshis in the Southeast Asian nation, but three lakh of them are undocumented migrants.

In June, Malaysia's Home Minister Ahmad Zahid Hamidi announced that his country would recruit 1.5 million Bangladeshi workers in the next three years through private sector (B2B).

Following the announcement, a Malaysian delegation led by its immigration department's Director General Datuk Mustafa Ibrahim visited Dhaka early August and held discussions with expatriates' welfare ministry officials and private recruiting agencies.

At that time, Bangladesh made several demands, including lowering migration cost and protection of the workers' rights in Malaysia. No decision, however, was reached on these conditions.

Meanwhile, two Malaysian IT companies' efforts to introduce online system in the labour recruitment process came under huge criticism in Bangladesh and Malaysia, as both the companies' owners had involved the relatives of Malaysia's present and previous ministers, and there were concerns of corruption.

An official of the expatriates' welfare ministry said Malaysia was considering recruiting Bangladeshi workers in other sectors like construction and services under the G2G arrangement and this might speed up the G2G process.

## Rising cost big challenge

FROM PAGE 1

He shared the views on the sidelines of the 15th edition of Bangladesh Business Awards, hosted by the DHL and The Daily Star at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka last night.

He said shortage of gas supply and poor road communications were affecting businesses the most.

Also, there are many external difficulties such as unwanted demands from vested interests. There is hardly any factory or establishment that does not suffer from local influence, he said.

"Extortion was there before. It is there now. It is increasing and we are trying our best to resist it," he said, seeking a strict enforcement of the law.

But he added, "We are the people who are prepared to face challenges. In Bangladesh, our entrepreneurs are definitely very determined and they will overcome the obstacles. We just request the government to expedite the completion of the ongoing projects."

Asked about government's promise of improving business climate, he said, "I think they [the government] have got to enforce the law more severely and provide us more security.... But we have not lost hope."

Anjan Chowdhury, managing director of Square Food and Beverage, a concern of Square Group, also said the cost of doing business was going up.

The government is doing a lot of things. Still, electricity and gas shortage remain a major problem. Without addressing these problems, faster growth is not possible, he said.

"Traffic jam is also increasing the cost of business. Time is also money. It increases the cost. So it is very difficult to compete," added Chowdhury, also a director of Square Group.

## Concern over

FROM PAGE 16

year's International Day of Democracy is space for the civil society. The UN and all Special Procedures mandate holders endorse this necessary and achievable goal.

"But democracy today has become an over-used word, invoked even by tyrants. A country does not become democratic simply by holding elections," said a media statement issued by the UN experts yesterday.

The UN experts put emphasis on people's ability to speak out, engage and influence the leaders they have elected between the elections. They questioned if there was a correlation between the needs and will of people and the policies that affect them. They also asked if people could peacefully assemble when other ways of expressing their grievances failed or peaceful dissent was tolerated and encouraged to flourish so that the marketplace of ideas was not monopolised by one group.

They said democracy should not be reduced to an empty word; it is self-determination in action, and a necessary instrument for securing a more peaceful, just and stable world. Civil society is a key partner to achieve this noble goal.

"We therefore call upon Member States to ensure greater space for civil society, so that they may take their rightful place as key players in democracy."

"We call on states to recognise that civil society space is the vehicle that allows this to happen. Indeed, it is essential for a true democracy," reads

"Even so, I would say Bangladesh people are very resilient. We can face challenges; otherwise we could not have liberated our country. People are very hard working."

Farmers have made the biggest contribution to make the country self-sufficient in food, he said.

On extortion, he said: "We have to learn to avoid this. We have to handle this... corruption is more or less present elsewhere."

## Pacific island leaders agree to disagree on climate change

AFP, Port Moresby

Pacific island leaders have agreed to disagree on how to tackle climate change, after Australia and New Zealand blocked a bid from low-lying island nations for a tougher global target.

Problems with negotiations behind closed doors at the Pacific Islands Forum in Port Moresby were evident with the official communique, due Thursday evening, not released until mid-morning yesterday.

The 16-nation group consists mainly of small island nations, most of which are susceptible to rising sea levels.

They wanted to send a clear message to climate talks in Paris in December that the average global warming should be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) over pre-Industrial Revolution levels.

the statement.

Unfortunately, space for civil society is shrinking rapidly, both in countries with no democratic tradition and in ostensibly democratic countries, Alfred de Zayas and Maina Kiai observed.

The UN experts said there is a growing disconnection between elected representatives and the public.

"We see this disconnection manifested in the recent surge of large protest movements throughout the world. People perceive a failure of governance and democracy, and protest is often their last resort in making themselves heard. Increasingly, governments are responding to this type of dissent with more repression, distorting the concept of democracy beyond recognition," the statement added.

They said civil society must reclaim its rightful place by demanding genuine participation in governance, including decisions on peace initiatives, environmental protection and trade and investment agreements.

"Fast-tracking legislation or treaties, enacted without consulting stakeholders and without responsible debate, are unacceptable in a democracy."

They also said democracy is much more than a label. 'Representative democracy' can only be called democratic if 'representatives' actually represent their constituencies by pro-actively consulting with them and facilitating their participation in decision-making, thus making the goal of greater space for civil society meaningful.

## Ukraine truce holding despite Russia 'threat': Poroshenko

AFP, Kiev

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko told an international conference yesterday that Russia remained a threat to the "entire democratic world" but that he held out hope a new truce with pro-Moscow insurgents would hold.

The Western-backed leader told an audience of about a hundred global investors and top diplomats that they must press Russian President Vladimir Putin harder to fulfil the disputed terms of a tentative peace deal to the 17-month war.

Ukraine is increasingly concerned that the European Union's attention was being diverted by its growing migrant crisis. Washington is also currently focused on implementing the new Iranian nuclear agreement and conducting strikes against Islamic State fighters in Syria and Iraq.

Poroshenko warned that Russia was harbouring "imperialist" ambitions under Putin and trying to seize back former tsarist and Soviet lands.

"By the aggression against sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, Russia has actually challenged the entire democratic world," the 49-year-old former chocolate baron told the Yalta Annual Meeting (YES) that had been held in Crimea until its annexation by Russia last year.

The meeting comes with government forces and pro-Moscow insurgents largely abiding by a new September 1 ceasefire that is meant to reinforce a broader -- but repeatedly broken -- deal signed in February in the Belarussian capital Minsk.

## Tarana Halim

FROM PAGE 16 by saying, "Why should I go slow and who are you to give me such a directive?"

Answering to a query, she said from the caller's tone, it seemed that the caller was an influential person.

"I am working as per the directives of the prime minister. Such threats will not stop my work. No-one can buy me," Tarana said during the conversation.

While talking to this correspondent, the state minister said she didn't care about the threat. It would rather help speed up her work.

She informed the law enforcement agencies about the threat, and the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) is working to trace the number.

The government has recently taken an initiative to re-register the mobile numbers with proper identification as criminals have been using unregistered SIMs or SIMs registered with fake documents to commit crimes or run VoIP business.

## Druggies

FROM PAGE 16 Family members told local reporters that the youths brutally burnt Shamim as he dared to forbid them to take drugs near his house.

On Thursday night, they took him to a local fishery, tied up his hands and legs and set him afire after pouring petrol over him, according to the family and the case statement.

Shamim was almost completely burnt before locals could rescue him after hearing his screams for help, police said. He was taken to Kishoreganj Sadar Hospital where doctors recommended sending him to the capital.

## Indian cattle

FROM PAGE 16 to the district's local markets through 15 border points including, Daikhawa, Narayanpur, Moydan, Diadanga, Shaljar, Pakhiura, Dhaldanga, Bagvandar Bhawalkuri, Singjar and Madarganj under Bhurungamari, Nageswari, Roumari and Sadar upazilas.

More cattle entered through Dharla Bridge point, they added.

With more Indian cattle coming in, the price of the local ones has dropped, said cattle farmers and farm owners.

Mozammel Hossain, a cattle farmer of Kurigram municipality, said, "I am rearing 30 cows for the last nine months for the Eid markets. I expected to sell them for Tk 9 lakh this year. But the price drop worries me now."

District Livestock Officer Amitabh Chakraborty said, "There are about six lakh cattle in the district. Of them, 55,500 cows, 16,000 goats and 3,278 sheep are saleable."

According to butcher shops, the price of beef has gone up to Tk 380 from Tk 280 per kg after India tightened its border a few months back.

## VAT on education

FROM PAGE 4

budget this year.

"How money will be collected for this huge budget? To fill the shortage, they are taking money out of people's pockets," he said.

At another discussion, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Emajuddin Ahmed claimed that no country in the world had imposed VAT on education.

He said Bangladesh's private universities would be good universities like other countries if the government did not create any obstacle.

Emajuddin, convener of pro-BNP citizens' group Adarsha Dhaka Andolan, also said the government did not make any contribution to private

universities; so it had no right to impose VAT.

Pointing to Finance Minister AMA Muhith's apology for his defamatory comments against public university teachers, he said the minister should also apologise for imposing VAT.

Rejecting the minister's remarks and National Board of Revenue's statement that the VAT would be collected from universities, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal said the remarks aimed at confusing the students.

The government has recently imposed 7.5 percent VAT on private universities, without clarifying who will be paying it.

## Many return

FROM PAGE 16

and 23. Therefore, I have bought ones for September 20," Nazimuddin, a businessman who wants to go to Naogaon, said at a counter of SR Paribahan in Gabtoli around 3:00pm.

He had been standing in a queue there since 5:30am.

However, another holidaymaker, Abul Kalam Azad, was quite lucky. He got two tickets to Thakurgaon for September 23 from the Hanif Enterprise counter in the same area.

"I held the hand of the man who was inside the counter and requested him for the tickets. I got the tickets only after that," he said, adding that he had to stand in a queue for over eight hours.

Azad alleged he had been charged Tk 300 extra.

"Usually two tickets for Thakurgaon cost Tk 1300. He [the ticket seller] kept Tk 800 for each of the tickets."

Posing as a passenger, The Daily Star asked for tickets to at least eight districts, including Rangpur, Kushtia, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Gaibandha,

Thakurgaon, and Naogaon, for September 22 and 23.

But the staff at the counters of Shyamoli Paribahan, SR Paribahan and Hanif Paribahan said they had no tickets as asked.

However, some people came and bought tickets quite easily as they had references from influential people or bus operators.

On the issue of higher fares, Ramesh Chandra Ghosh, managing director of Shyamoli Paribahan, said, "Throughout the year, we charge passengers 20 to 30 percent less than the rate fixed. Right now, the fare is what it should be."

Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) will start selling advance Eid tickets from September 16 while Bangladesh Railway authorities will begin selling advance train tickets from September 15.

The sale of advance train tickets will continue till September 19 at Kamalapur in the capital and Chittagong railway stations.

## Eastern Europe turns

FROM PAGE 16

Steinmeier said Germany expects some 40,000 migrants to arrive this weekend.

With the bloc continuing to squabble, EU president Donald Tusk said he would call a leaders' summit if a European justice and home affairs ministers' meeting in Brussels on Monday failed to yield a breakthrough.

"After contacts that I had with member states in the last few days, I feel more hopeful today that we are closer to finding a solution based on consensus and genuine solidarity," Tusk said.

But "without such a decision, I will have to call an emergency meeting of the European Council," he said.

EU lawmakers have called for an international conference on migration bringing together the United States, United Nations and Arab countries.

Facing criticism that his government has been too slow to help, US President Barack Obama pledged to admit at least 10,000 Syrian refugees over a year starting October 1.

Spokesman Josh Earnest said Obama had ordered staff to "scale up" the number after over 62,000 Americans signed a petition calling on Washington to take in more people.

The apparent failure of Steinmeier's mission came as record numbers of people, 70 percent of them fleeing Syria according to the UNHCR, entered both Macedonia and Hungary.

In addition to the 7,600 entering Macedonia overnight from Greece, Hungarian police said 3,601 crossed the border on Thursday.

From Hungary, the migrants attempt to reach western European countries, principally Germany and Sweden, via Austria, which on Thursday suspended rail services to

Hungary.

The response of Hungary, which has seen some 175,000 migrants enter this year, has been to lay a razor wire barrier and for almost 4,000 soldiers to begin erecting a fence four metres high with the help of prisoners from a nearby jail.

Draconian new laws entering into effect on Tuesday will allow Hungary to jail migrants and mooted legislation will see the army deployed and soldiers and police given wide-ranging new powers.

Further concerns about Hungary were raised by video footage showing migrants inside a holding camp being fed in the words of one volunteer "like animals in a pen", with women and children caught in a scum.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban reiterated yesterday that his country was merely applying European rules in seeking to register the new arrivals, pinning the blame on fellow EU member Greece for letting migrants leave and travel north.

"Just because Greece is not keeping to the common (Schengen) agreement does not authorise Hungary to give up on the Schengen rules as well," Orban said in Budapest.

Denmark said yesterday it would not take part in the European Union's plan to distribute 160,000 refugees around the continent.

"We will not take part in the distribution of the 160,000 refugees, Integration Minister Inger Stojberg told Danish news agency Ritzau. Like Britain and Ireland, Denmark has an opt-out on the EU's asylum policies.

Meanwhile on the Greek island of Lesbos the boats kept arriving, with hundreds making a gruelling 50-60 kilometre walk from their landing place to the main town to be registered.

## At the footprint

FROM PAGE 16

They stood at the empty footprint of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, toppled by two hijacked airliners on that clear, sunny morning in 2001.

"We come here every year. We live in New Jersey. The crowds keep getting less, but my wife and I, as long as we're breathing, we'll be here," said Tom Acquaviva, who with his wife Josephine, lost their son Paul when the towers fell.

"No remains were ever found, so basically this is his cemetery," he said, adding: "Couldn't ask for a better son."

Hijackers crashed two other commercial jets into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia and into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania.

The New York ceremony, where politicians past and present mixed with families but gave no speeches, was punctuated by moments of silence to mark the times when each of the four planes crashed and the towers fell.

In Washington, President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama, joined by staff, bowed their heads for a brief moment of silence on the south lawn of the White House to mark the anniversary.

Defence Secretary Ash Carter led a

remembrance ceremony for relatives of those killed at the Pentagon.

Relatives of the 40 passengers and crew members who died aboard United Airlines Flight 93 gathered at the newly dedicated Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville.

The passengers are believed to have fought back against the hijackers, who crashed the plane upside down at nearly 600 mph.

In New York, the buzz of increased commerce from new residential and business towers has returned a large degree of normalcy to the area, known after the attacks as Ground Zero.

The day also honours those who were killed in 1993, when a car bomb tore through one of the parking garage of one of the towers.

Next to the 16-acre site where the Twin Towers stood is the newly opened 1 World Trade Center, the tallest skyscraper in the Western hemisphere.

The first plane slammed into the North tower at 8:46 am, followed by a second plane hitting the South tower at 9:03 am. Within two hours, both towers had collapsed, engulfing lower Manhattan in acrid dust and smoke and debris that burned for days.