



The Tannery Industrial Estate in Savar on the outskirts of the capital. Though the deadline for relocation of Hazaribagh tanneries to the site expired on Thursday, the authorities could not make it ready. Piled-up pipes, idle machines lying on the ground and incomplete structures there say it all. The photos were taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN



Double wings in 5 ministries

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According to the PMO orders, two divisions -- Public Security Division and Internal Security Services Division -- will be created at the home ministry. And the education ministry will have three divisions -- one for primary to higher secondary education, one for technical and madrasa education and another for higher education. Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid confirmed to The Daily Star that they received an order from the PMO. Sources at the ministry said they have already sent to the PMO the ministry's observations on the order. Abdus Sobhan Sikder, former secretary at the PMO, told The Daily Star, "This move will not only speed up the pace of work of the civil administration but also help accommodate a big number of officials at different ministries." Once the divisions start functioning, it would be possible for the ministries to make decisions promptly, which would ultimately benefit people, he said. "Every big ministry should have divisions for accelerating the pace of

work," added Sobhan. The civil bureaucracy has already turned top heavy due to wholesale promotions in the administration over the years. There are 1,301 deputy secretaries against 830 posts, 908 joint secretaries against 350 posts and 416 additional secretaries against 120 posts in different ministries, said sources at the public administration ministry. Besides, there are around 250 officers on special duty (OSD). Though they don't have any responsibilities, they get salaries and other benefits regularly. Now, several hundred of the promoted officials are working as in-situ officials. An in-situ official is one who continues to hold the same office and perform the same duties even after being elevated to a higher position. Government sources said the latest move to create divisions under the five ministries is aimed at promoting some senior officials to the rank of secretary and expanding the cabinet. "This initiative has been taken so that some new lawmakers could be

inducted in the cabinet. It will strengthen the party and bring dynamism to the government," said a senior minister on condition of anonymity. The minister also referred to the appointment of Tarana Halim and Zunaid Ahmed Palak as state ministers at the two divisions under the posts, telecommunications and ICT ministry. However, former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder thinks decentralisation of power of the ministries, rather than the creation of divisions, would be more effective. "There would be no need to create divisions if a ministry gives the responsibility for implementing decisions to its departments concerned," he told The Daily Star. The PMO order to the home ministry specified the areas of operation of the two divisions under the ministry. Police, Border Guard Bangladesh, Ansar and Village Defence Party, Coast Guard and the International Crimes Tribunal would operate under the Public Security Division.

Department of Immigration and Passports, Jail Department, Fire Services and Civil Defence, Department of Narcotics Control, and National Telecommunications and Monitoring Centre would function under the Internal Security Services Division, said the order. The two divisions would be headed by two secretaries. Talking to this correspondent recently, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said, "The creation of the divisions would accelerate the pace of work of the ministry. The prime minister thinks this is a big ministry and it has a huge workload. So, she gave this order." On the issue, former IGP Nurul Huda said if a new division is formed, it would help speed up the ministry's pace of work. "The effectiveness of a new division could be evaluated only after it becomes functional," he said. However, a top official at the police headquarters said the way the divisions are being formed, it appears that there would be basically no change at the home ministry.

\$20m she expected, but not from Dhaka

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had emerged on the Sri Lanka link. In her first public comments on the case, Perera, a struggling businesswoman who heads Shalika, told Reuters she expected \$20 million to come from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to help fund a power plant and other projects in Sri Lanka. She said she had no direct dealing with JICA, but the deal was arranged by an acquaintance who she met in Sri Lanka but had connections in Japan. Shalika was set up in October 2014 and says in its registration documents that it constructs low-cost houses and provides other social services. Reuters was unable to independently confirm Perera's account or to reach the acquaintance she named, via the email and phone numbers she provided. JICA, a Japanese government agency that provides official development assistance, said it has no ties with Shalika Foundation, including through any intermediaries. "We have had no exchange with them, and that includes such areas as loans and grants," JICA spokesman Naoyuki Nemoto said. The Sri Lankan police's criminal investigation division declined to comment because the probe is ongoing. "GENUINE PEOPLE" "We are very genuine people. We are not doing any illegal things," said Perera, speaking in English and Sinhalese in an interview in Colombo, the Sri Lankan capital. The 36-year-old was accompanied by her husband, Ramanayaka Arachchige Don Pradeep Rohitha Dhamkin, also a director in her company. Perera said she now thinks the acquaintance was either a victim of the hackers or in league with them, and she was hoodwinked into becoming a part of their scheme. She showed Reuters a copy of an inward remittance advisory from the SWIFT bank messaging system to put the \$20 million in her company's

account. The remitting entity was shown as a Bangladesh government electricity agency that had taken a loan from JICA in 2010 to fund an electricity project. The head of the Bangladesh government agency, the Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board, said it was "ridiculous" to think that the money could have come from them. "Maybe they used this government organization's name to make it believable," said Brigadier General Moin Uddin, the agency head. Police have questioned Perera's acquaintance, according to an investigation report filed in the Colombo Magistrate's Court on Thursday. The man told authorities that a Japanese middleman had helped arrange the funding, according to the report. The report provided the names of Perera's acquaintance whom Reuters has been unable to locate and the Japanese middleman. Reached by phone, the middleman said he was traveling and unable to provide immediate comment. The court has ordered a travel ban on Perera, her husband, the acquaintance and four other people listed as directors of her company. Perera maintains she is innocent and describes the government's move as "an injustice". Businesswoman Perera is, by her own admission, struggling. She said she has four other enterprises, including a publishing firm, an auto parts company, a construction company and a catering firm. In 2014, losses from her publishing firm were so bad that she was forced to sell her computers. She said she now does her business from Internet cafes. In early February, Perera said her acquaintance, who had been helping her for more than a year to meet investors, told her to expect \$20 million from JICA. Under their agreement, the payment would be split, between her power plant project and a housing project controlled by her acquaintance, she said. According to a Sri Lankan police

investigation report seen by Reuters last week, Perera told her bank, a Colombo branch of Pan Asia Bank that the company expected to receive \$20 million from a Japanese fund. A Pan Asia Bank official declined to comment, citing the investigation. Perera said she had not seen the report, which was submitted to the magistrate's court last week. According to the report, bank officials said Perera left instructions with them to transfer \$7.72 million to her own personal account and \$11.12 million to an account controlled by her acquaintance once the transaction had cleared. Perera confirmed she had given the instructions to the bank, and said they reflected the money earmarked for the two projects and commissions. The rest was to be used for taxes, she said. The money was remitted by the Pan Asia Bank to Shalika Foundation's account on February 4, but the bank refused to release the funds as the amount was unusually large and sought further verification, according to last week's police report. On February 9, Perera was told by her bank that the Bangladesh central bank had asked for the transaction to be reversed, according to the report. CID, BB TEAMS TO VISIT PHILIPPINES The Bangladeshi authorities will visit the Philippines in the coming days as part of their government's probe into the \$81 million funds stolen from the Bangladesh central bank's account. Bangladesh Ambassador to the Philippines Major General John Gomes said members of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) are due to coordinate with Philippine authorities on the money-laundering case, reports Filipino news portal rapper.com. "Officials of the CID will coordinate with the BSP [Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas]. They will start their own investigation on how the money entered the country and who are the people involved," Gomes said. The Bangladesh envoy made the statement after he witnessed the turn-

over of \$4.63 million by casino junket agent Kam Sin "Kim" Wong to the Anti-Money Laundering Council (AMLC) office at the BSP headquarters in Manila on March 31. Gomes added that officials of Bangladesh Bank are also scheduled to arrive tomorrow. He said the CID members will head to the AMLC office on Monday and attend the fourth hearing of the Senate Blue Ribbon committee on April 5. "We are hopeful that the entire amount will be recovered. The return of \$4.63 million from Wong is a step in the right direction," he said, adding that the Bangladesh government would pursue the \$17 million left with Philrem Services Corporation owned by the Bautista family as alleged by Wong. Gas blast rocks Paris apartment AFP, Paris A massive gas explosion destroyed the top floors and roof of a residential building in central Paris yesterday, injuring 17 people, rescuers and police said. The blast near the Jardin de Luxembourg park caused jitters in the French capital, which remains on edge after the Paris attacks in November and the Brussels bombings last month. It was traced to a fire that caused a gas stove to blow up, sending a thick cloud of smoke into the sky, police said. "People were scared, they thought it was a bomb," an employee of the nearby Ferrandi culinary institute told AFP. The force of the blast blew out some of the windows at the prestigious school, a witness said. A fireman was seriously injured in the blast and another 16 people were also hurt, including 10 firefighters. "I was at home, the windows shook in my building two streets away... We thought it was an attack," said local resident Sylvie Guillaumin, 51, adding that gas supplies had been cut in the area.

Another deadline ends

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these polluting factories within the last deadline, the government yesterday deployed police to prevent raw hide supply to the Hazaribagh tanneries. Visiting the Savar estate yesterday, this correspondent found that none of the factories has been fully constructed. Some factory owners have not even completed the piling works for construction. Some others are still setting up hide processing drums and other equipment, which means they will need a month or two more to be ready for operation. Though the CETP has been connected to the industrial units there through pipelines, the plant itself is yet to be ready for waste treatment. Also, the factories have not yet got gas and water connections. "I applied for the connections two months ago. But I have not yet got it," said Md Akhtaruzzaman, owner of Ahsan Habib and Brothers. He was supervising the construction work of his two-storey factory building at ZE-4 plot on the site. "Though I have made significant progress in the construction, I will need about a couple of months more to relocate my tannery from Hazaribagh," said Akhtaruzzaman. Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), the government agency that is implementing the tannery estate project, has approved the lay-out plan of 152 industrial units out of the 155 in the Savar site. Of them, construction of 148 units has started, ministry sources said. CETP NOT READY The Hazaribagh tanning factories release thousands of litres of untreated and toxic liquid waste into the Buriganga river every day, posing a serious risk to human and animal health and diminishing the prospects of leather exports. Considering the health and environmental hazards, the government in 2003 took up a project to relocate the tanneries to Savar. The tannery estate there was first scheduled to be completed by December 2005. The deadline was then extended several times over the years. Thirteen years have gone by but the infrastructural development is yet to be completed. The government plans to initially set up two of the four units of the CETP. Ninety percent work of the two units has been completed but the installation process has been stalled for the last one and a half months and the pipeline network has not been completed either. "We could not make much progress in construction of the CETP as the Chinese contractor firm did not pro-

vide us proper machineries," Prof Delowar Hossain, designer and consultant of the CETP installation, told The Daily Star yesterday. "The Chinese company was supposed to provide us stainless steel-made water pumps for carrying waste water. But they were providing us normal pumps. We did not accept those." The BSCIC would sit with the Chinese firm tomorrow to resolve the issue, said the professor of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Once in full operation, the two CETP units would be able to treat 13,000 cubic meters of waste a day. **IGNORED DEADLINES** **Sep 25, 2008:** Government resolves that all tanneries shall shift from Hazaribagh by February 2010. **Jun 23, 2009:** High Court orders the tanneries to relocate from Hazaribagh by February 28, 2010, 'failing which [they] shall be shut down'. **Feb 28, 2010:** HC extends the deadline for relocation to August 28, 2010. **Oct 30, 2010:** HC again extends deadline, this time to April 30, 2011. **Apr 30, 2011:** The HC's deadline for relocation expires. **Jun 1, 2011:** The environment minister tells parliament the Hazaribagh tanneries will be relocated by the end of 2012. **Mar 2012:** The industries minister tells the press that relocation of tanneries is expected to be completed 'within 15 to 18 months'. **Jan 9, 2015:** The industries minister gives 72 hour deadline for tanners to relocate to Savar. **SOURCE: HRW.ORG**

POLICE DEPLOYED AT HAZARIBAGH Police were deployed around Hazaribagh from yesterday morning to prevent supply of raw hides to the tanneries there. "We have deployed police at four entry points to Hazaribagh and did not allow hides to be transported to the tanneries. We will continue this until further instructions from the higher authorities," said Mir Alimuzzaman, officer-in-charge of Hazaribagh Police Station. The police teams sent back two trucks carrying raw hides yesterday. Despite this, all the tanning factories were found in operation. Workers said they were using raw materials that had been previously stockpiled.



These lobsters, injected with jelly, were seized by coast guards in Chandpur on Thursday, and destroyed yesterday. Some traders use jelly to increase the weight of lobsters. PHOTO: ALAM PALASH

BNP losing interest

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hopefuls wanted to run for the polls. According to some leaders, the BNP might announce within two to three days that it would not contest the UP polls. "We've assessed that contesting the local body polls have so far failed to bring any benefit for our party. So why should we take part in the polls to legitimise it?" questioned Emran Saleh Prince, assistant publicity secretary of BNP. "Our candidates won in some unions, but the losers became disappointed with vote rigging. The ruling Awami League men have been harassing BNP leaders and activists over the polls which would have a negative impact on the party in future elections," added Prince, also a member of the BNP's election monitoring cell. Meanwhile, leaders of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Ambia-Prodhan), Communist Party of Bangladesh and Workers Party of Bangladesh also said they will discuss electoral violence and irregularities within their parties to decide their next course of action on the UP polls. AL Joint General Secretary Mahbul Alam Hanif on Thursday said the second phase of the polls cannot be termed faulty as irregularities took place in only 22 polling stations out of over 6,000. A total of 19 people were killed and over 200 injured in polls violence dur-

ing the elections to 1,354 unions in the first two phases on March 22 and 31. Talking to The Daily Star, some BNP leaders said most of the grassroots leaders told the central leaders that they were not interested in contesting the upcoming UP polls as there were "gross irregularities and violence" in the previous elections. Many district-level leaders have conveyed similar opinion to the BNP high ups. Prince said media outlets only report on the polling day's violence, but they are "not aware" of the obstacles created by AL men during electioneering. Talking to this correspondent, Sharif Nurul Ambia, president of a faction of JSD, said they will hold a meeting soon to make a decision on contesting the UP polls. Fazle Hossain Badsha, general secretary of Workers Party, a component of the AL-led 14-party grand alliance, said they sought an appointment tomorrow with Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad. "We want to know what actions the Election Commission will take to stop irregularities in the upcoming polls," he added. Elections to 621 unions are slated for April 23 in the third phase. A total of 743 unions will go to polls on May 7 in the fourth phase and around 1,400 more in two other phases till June.