

AL curtails hartal hours

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL) has curtailed its hartal period by four hours on Thursday in consideration of the ongoing O- and A- level examinations.

Instead of the earlier announced dawn-to-dusk hartal on January 16, the party decided to enforce it for eight hours from 6:00am to 2:00pm to protest the recent fuel price hike.

A meeting of the AL presidium chaired by AL President Sheikh Hasina at the AL's Dhanmondi office yesterday also exempted Narayanganj from the purview of the hartal so that voters can exercise their franchise in the municipality polls on the day.

The O level exams were scheduled at 4:30pm on the day. But in view of the initial hartal hour, the British Council already rescheduled the afternoon examinations at 10:30pm.

Now, concerned parents of the O

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Bid to defer BGMEA polls

STAR REPORT

A move is on to defer the upcoming election to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) since some influential ruling party lawmakers are against its schedule.

The Ministry of Commerce is under pressure from the government to issue an order deferring the election scheduled for January 26.

The Prime Minister's Office asked the commerce ministry to defer the election, as a state minister and some other influential BNP lawmakers were against the January 26 schedule.

The BGMEA leaders said the election was scheduled in line with the constitution of the association.

"If the election is deferred for few weeks, it may create a problem for voters as well as contestants as many of them will perform Hajj and stay abroad for a long time," said a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2



PHOTO: STAR

Lawyers of the Supreme Court Bar Association take out a procession in the city yesterday in protest at the recently promulgated Joint Drive Indemnity Ordinance 2003 (Story on page 1).

Tripura-West Bengal gas link Unocal proposes pipeline through Bangladesh

AFP, New Delhi

US energy giant Unocal has proposed to build a gas pipeline connecting two eastern Indian states through neighbouring Bangladesh, a report said yesterday.

The project's goal is to move unused gas from India's northeastern state of Tripura to the western state of West Bengal, the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency said.

"We are keen on laying a pipeline for transportation of gas from Tripura to Calcutta, Unocal's vice president Andrew Fawthrop was quoted as saying by PTI.

"There is a market for Tripura gas some 500 to 600 kilometers (300-370 miles) away."

Tripura's gas reserves of some

3.0 million cubic metres (105 million cubic feet) per day would be marketed to industrial hubs in eastern India.

The project, however, hinges on Dhaka giving the go-ahead for the pipeline to cross the Bangladeshi district of Comilla, which separates the two Indian states.

Unocal operates the gigantic Bibiyana Gas field in the northeastern Bangladeshi district of Habiganj and has proposed laying a 1,363-kilometer pipeline from the fields to northern India to transport some 15 million cubic meters of gas a day.

The Bibiyana field was discovered by Unocal in 1998 but has not been developed amid controversy over whether Bangladesh should export gas to India.

Studies commissioned by

Bangladeshi Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government have said Dhaka was not in a position to sell energy resources.

Fawthrop said Unocal was planning tie-ups with Indian companies for its Tripura pipeline.

"It makes sense to work on such a project with some partners, and we are identifying partners for that," he said. "(The state-run) Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) can be one such partner."

ONGC owns the Tripura gasfields, which are currently under-producing because they lack a market in the northeast. Unocal could also lay the pipeline on its own should it fail to strike an agreement with Indian partners, Fawthrop said.

December 8.

Deaths could at least be probed: Dr Kamal

A CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Eminent lawyer and leader of the Oikya Procheta, Dr Kamal Hossain said here yesterday that the deaths, which occurred in army custody, could at least be investigated to ascertain what really happened.

"But the promulgation of the indemnity ordinance has left no scope for such investigation, and that is a gross violation of human rights," he added.

Dr Kamal made the observations while talking to journalists at a newspaper office in Barisal yesterday evening.

Earlier, while addressing a public meeting at the town hall he said that the army was brought into the picture as police had failed to rein in the criminals. So the question is, said Dr Kamal, why police failed. He termed the politicians, responsible for using police for political purposes, as anti-state elements.

Dr Kamal also said that politics dominated by anti-social elements and black money has pushed the country to a critical position.

The meeting was also addressed by Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Pankaj Bhattacharya.

Shahriar, Muntasir hospitalised

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Writer-journalist Shahriar Kabir and teacher-columnist Muntasir Mamun were admitted to the Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) in the city yesterday for treatment, family sources said.

Shahriar Kabir was freed from the Chittagong jail on January 7, after he spent one month in prison. Muntasir Mamun was released from the Dinajpur Jail on January 9, after languishing in prison under a one-month detention order. Both of them were arrested under Section 54 without any specific charge on

Move to create more vacancies to diffuse rancour in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

To diffuse the rancour in the administration and to avoid any legal tangles, the government has asked the authorities concerned to create more vacancies at the deputy secretary level and increase the marks for promotion.

Delay in promotion has created stagnation in the administration and eligible officials are worried about their future.

Official sources said about 1,620 senior assistant secretaries who got into service between 1983 and 1991 have been waiting for promotion to the posts of deputy secretary. However, there are only 379 vacant posts.

The Superior Selection Board

(SSB) after a series of meetings and scrutiny finalised promotion of 379 senior assistant secretaries from 1983, 1984, 1985 and 1986 batches.

Besides, the SSB selected some others who joined in the service much later for promotion as they are currently serving in important offices, including the Prime Minister's Office, and have strong political connections with the ruling alliance.

The selection of promotion list created serious resentment among the aspirants. The SSB placed the list to the prime minister (PM) for her final approval on Wednesday.

Official sources said the SSB had set obtaining 83 marks by candidates as the criterion for

promotion and prepared the list. But junior officers protested this mark setting and demanded higher marks for promotion. But frustration has mounted among the officials of the 1983 special batch mounted most of whom would be excluded if promotion marks are fixed higher.

Sources said the PM has asked the SSB to set 85 marks for promotion and to increase the number of vacant posts so that more officials could be promoted.

Sources said the number of vacant posts would stand at 660 by the end of this year as nearly 300 deputy secretaries will go for retirement by December. Many suggest

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Reform police admn, set up independent Anti-corruption Commission

Development experts tell seminar

UNB, Dhaka

An exceptionally high level of pervasive and endemic corruption eats up national wealth and frustrates Bangladesh's ventures for sustained economic growth to help people out of poverty trap, development researchers said at a donor-sponsored seminar yesterday.

World Bank country director Frederick T Temple told the function that creation of an independent Anti-corruption Commission is a must for dealing with institutional corruption.

Unless the anti-corruption organisation is made independent, it will continue to be a "tool of partisan politics -- with each new government dropping ongoing cases against its own party members and launching new cases against members of the past government".

Speakers at the meet observed that the police is just a part of a wide network of corruption, and blaming the police alone will not solve the problem unless police administration is reformed and independent anti-corruption commission is formed.

Although GDP maintained a steady growth over the decades and foreign aid dependence reduced, income growth declined and overall incidence of poverty still remained very high, they said.

"GDP growth might take place... At the same time national wealth might be wasted due to corruption and misallocation of resources," Dhaka University teacher Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad told the workshop on "Corruption and Transparency."

News Network, a news feature agency, organised the workshop at CIRDP auditorium. World Bank Dhaka Office sponsored the meet.

Prof. Ahmed identified misuse of power as the root cause of corruption in Bangladesh and felt that corruption can never be arrested unless such abuses were stopped right from the highest level.

Prof. Ahmed viewed that the recent ordinance indemnifying all army acts during the anticrime operation, avoiding trial, would

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Dhanmondi dwellers decry commercial plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Dhanmondi in the city yesterday protested the government's proposal to convert residential areas into 'semi-commercial zones'.

They held a rally at Dhanmondi Road No. 8 and brought out a procession under the banner of Dhanmondi Paribesh Unnayon Jote' (DPUJ) protesting the proposal. The procession terminated at Road No. 27.

The rally was addressed by eminent economist Prof. Muzaffer Ahmad, former secretary to government Mufazzal Karim, local Ward Commissioner Abul Khair Bablu and Jote member Naima Amin.

They quoted a DPUJ survey to say that over 60 per cent of residents

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Reopen Viqarunnisa University: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A division bench of the High Court yesterday ordered immediate resumption of classes at the Viqarunnisa University.

Justice Hamidul Huq and Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury also asked the education secretary and four members on the governing body of the Viqarunnisa Noon School and College (VNSC) to explain why the order related to cancellation of the university's registration should not be declared illegal and without lawful authority.

The judges instructed the VNSC authorities to ensure congenial academic atmosphere for the 133 university students to attend classes at the Aparajita Bhaban.

The High Court order came on a writ filed by Dr. Abdus Sattar, registrar of the university, on behalf of guardians and students.

The government cancelled the university's registration in November last year after an education ministry notification pointed out a series of violation of the Private University Act towards its establishment.

Earlier, the ministry had earlier commissioned a committee to

probe into irregularities in establishment of the university, alleged by the VNSC authorities.

The university was set up on a temporary permission with certain conditions. It used VNSC funds and infrastructure to a great extent.

Newborn survives 4-storey fall

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miraculously, a three-hour-old baby survived after being thrown from the rooftop of a four-storied building.

Sources said Mita, 16, a domestic help, gave birth to a girl child at about 1:00pm yesterday. When the employers asked the maid to abandon the illegitimate child and she refused to do so, they forcibly took the baby throwing her from the rooftop at about 4:00pm.

The mother rushed to the ground floor and rescued her baby unhurt from clay.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Some respite from cold

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The severe cold wave sweeping across the country over the last five days became less intense yesterday with the mercury rising to 7.7 degrees Celsius from 5.1 of the day before.

The Met Office said the situation would start improving from today.

The lowest temperature of the country was recorded at 7.7 degrees Celsius in Chuadanga. And in the capital, the temperature fell to 10.8 degrees Celsius from 11. The highest temperature of 25.4 degrees Celsius for the day was recorded at Teknaf.

However, situation in the northern districts of the country remained almost same. Overcast sky and thick fog loomed large as the cold wind blew from the North, disrupting land and river traffic, our correspondents from the northern districts reported.

The Met Office said moderate to thick fog may still hang over the northern region and the river basins. Elsewhere in the country,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Don't let criminals make a comeback

PM asks police officials

UNB, Dhaka

Taking into account successes of the police before and during the army-led anticrime joint drive, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday asked the police high-ups to take all-out measures so that criminals cannot make a comeback on the cleaned ground.

"Keep up the image attained in restoring law and order in the country following the joint operation," she said addressing police high officials from the headquarters and field levels at the ICC in the Prime Minister's Office complex.

She told them that if necessary, the number of policemen in Rapid Action Team (RAT) would be raised from present 136 to 1000-1200 to contain terrors, extortionists and unauthorised arms-holders and recover all illegal weapons.

"At any cost you have to uphold as well as advance the success of joint operation, which created an image through restoring stability in

society and improving law-and-order situation," she told the senior police officials.

"You have to be careful so that this image can't be damaged in any way," she reminded her audience.

The prime minister asked them to change people's perception about police, in spite of many good tasks done by the law-enforcing agencies.

Mentioning their successful action before joint drive, particularly during various religious festivals, the prime minister expressed her optimism that police could earn people's confidence through their honest, sincere and hard labour.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, Home Secretary Omar Faruk, IG Modabbir Hossain Chowdhury, AIG Sajjad Hossain, AIG Chowdhury Kamrul Hasan, SP of Dhaka Khoda Boksh Chowdhury, CMP Commissioner Mohammad Shahidulla Khan, SP of Gazipur Yasmin Gafur and SP of Bogra Khan

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5