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JS SESSION BEGINS TODAY

Alliance, AL to lock horns over reforms

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The last session of parliament beginning today might see an intense face-off between the ruling alliance and opposition Awami League (AL) on electoral reforms while outside the possibility of a dialogue on the issue diminishes fast.

Lawmakers from both the ruling four-party alliance and AL are bracing themselves for one last chance to counter each other in the 8th Jatiya Sangsad (JS).

The BNP and its allies will boast of the government's success in about five years and set out an argument against the proposals for reforms.

On the other hand, the AL lawmakers, who will join the session tomorrow, plan to launch a tirade on the government for its failure to deliver and seek to make out a case for the reforms agenda, sources said.

Meanwhile, a long impasse in the political scene continues to raise the spectre of bloody confrontation on the streets ahead of the next parliamentary election.

The ruling alliance remains rigid in its stand not to recognise the opposition demands while the 14-party opposition combine vows to force the government to carry over electoral reforms before hand-over of power on October 27.

The AL led opposition parties campaigning since last year for reforms have decided to step up agitation. They said they will announce even tougher programmes at the grand rally in the capital on September 18.

Against this background of continuing political tension, the last session of parliament is set to experience some heated debates on issues that include reforms, price hike of essentials, shortage of power, Phulbari killing and militancy.

The AL lawmakers have already submitted a number of notices to the Parliament Secretariat, demanding parliamentary discussions on various issues, the sources added.

Sources in the AL said they will go to parliament to pressure the government into clarifying its latest stance on the reforms proposals placed by Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina on February 12.

Responding to the proposals, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in parliament on February 28 called for a committee to be comprised of representatives from both the ruling and opposition alliances to deal with the reforms.

But the committee has yet to be formed due to a stand-off between the BNP and AL over inclusion of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote. Over six months have gone since Khaleda's call.

Shab-e-Barat observed

UNB, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Barat, the night of fortune, was observed across the country on Friday night with due solemnity and religious fervour.

Muslim devotees offered special prayers throughout the night, seeking divine blessings for peace and happiness for themselves and for the Muslim Ummah.

They recited from the holy Quran, held milad mehfal, visited the graves of their near and dear ones and prayed to the almighty for the eternal peace of the departed souls.

They also distributed sweets and homemade foods among the poor, the neighbours, friends and relatives.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the occasion.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia visited the grave of president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Banglanagar in the city and offered special munaajat, seeking eternal peace of the departed soul and peace and prosperity of the country.



A child offers prayers on the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque premises in Dhaka on the night of Shab-e-Barat.

2 killed in 'crossfire'

STAR REPORT

Two leaders of Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Janajuddha faction were killed in 'crossfire' during shootouts between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), police and their cohorts in Bagerhat and Pabna.

Mustafizur Rahman Jewel, 32, an accused in Bagerhat Awami League leader Kalidas Borai murder case, was killed in an encounter between his accomplices and Rab around 3:30am Friday at Shibpur in Chitalmari upazila of Bagerhat, our Khulna correspondent reports.

Mustafizur was arrested at Bagerhat court on Thursday noon. Following his confession statement given to Rab, a team of Rab personnel along with Mustafizur went to Shibpur to recover hidden arms and arrest his accomplices.

Rab sources claimed, as the team reached the spot, Mustafizur's

NDI raises concern over polls, voter list

CEC bins the US group's apprehension

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Aziz yesterday brushed aside the National Democratic Institute (NDI) delegation's concern over controversy on the voter list and uncertainty about all the political parties' participation in the next parliamentary election.

"They [NDI] might have concern and tension. It's their personal affairs. We have nothing to say in this regard as there is nothing to be worried about," MA Aziz told reporters after a meeting with the visiting NDI delegation at his office.

At a meeting with the GEC and three other election commissioners, the Washington based NDI

delegation discussed the prevailing situation in connection with the parliamentary election scheduled for January.

Talking to reporters, Tom Daschle, a member of the delegation that started its visit from September 8 to assess the preparations and observe the electoral atmosphere leading up to the next polls, said they discussed voter list and the opposition's proposals for reforms.

"We are a little bit worried. However, we hope a free and fair election will be held," Daschle said.

Termining the discussion just a courtesy meeting, the CEC said they clarified the information that the NDI delegation 'lacked'.

Aziz on Monday said there is no

crisis about the next parliamentary election and he is confident that all the parties will participate in the polls under the present EC while the opposition alliance has declared that they will not contest the polls under Aziz.

The opposition alliance has also vowed not to allow any polls unless the demands for reforms in the caretaker government, Election Commissioner (EC) and electoral laws are met.

"It is their own view," Election Commissioner Justice Mahfuzur Rahman told reporters when asked whether the NDI delegation expressed concern over the prevailing situation.

The EC on Thursday disclosed

No decision yet to join 4-party

Ershad says on return from KSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HM Ershad yesterday said his party has not yet decided to join the ruling BNP-led four-party alliance.

"Time has not come yet to join any alliance," Ershad told newsmen at Zia International Airport on his return from Saudi Arabia after a 13-day stay there for medical check-up and treatment.

The JP Chairman denied having any pressure to join the ruling alliance and said he had no talks about joining the ruling four-party alliance with Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mujahid during his stay in Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the deposed president told newsmen after a meeting with the delegation of National

PADMA BRIDGE

Fund not mobilised, rush for foundation laying

RAFIQ HASAN

The government has decided to lay the foundation stone of 5.5-kilometre long Padma bridge at Maowa-Jajira point in the first week of the next month although the fund for the bridge construction is yet to be mobilised.

While the physical construction of the country's longest bridge over the mighty river Padma is scheduled to start in 2008, the government has planned the early foundation laying in view of the elections ahead of the next general elections, sources said.

The Ministry of Communications is preparing to lay the foundation stone on the basis of assurance of necessary fund by a consortium of three

international donor agencies -- World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan Bank of International Cooperation, said the sources.

Earlier the Japan government also assured Dhaka of fund arrangement.

Sources, however, said formal agreement is yet to be signed with any organisation about funding.

The preparation of foundation laying ceremony is going on, a high official of the communications ministry said, adding that the foundation stone will be laid for formal starting land acquisition for the bridge.

He admitted that the government is yet to mobilise the necessary fund for the project costing around \$1.4 billion equivalent to Tk

over 8,500 crore.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda on several occasions asked the ministry officials to complete the land acquisition programme and other related work for laying foundation stone before the end of the tenure of the four-party alliance government.

The communications ministry started the process of land acquisition at the Maowa-Jajira point and waiting for Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's schedule for the foundation laying ceremony, sources said.

The construction of the bridge that will take at least three years will be done under the supervision of Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge Authority.

The communications ministry

Kader Siddiqui, Rob form new alliance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A new political alliance comprising the Krishak Samik Janata League (KSJL), Unity for Political Reforms (UPR), Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Shafiq) and Bangladesh Labour Party was launched yesterday.

Led by KSJL President Kader Siddiqui and UPR Coordinator ASM Abdur Rob, the 'Juktafront' expects to include other parties and people and discussions are on to this end.

Announcing the floating of the alliance at the Jatiya Press Club, the Juktafront leaders said the front has been created to protect the greater interest of the nation like the Juktafront in 1954, which was established under the leadership of Sher-e-Bangla AK Fazlul Haque, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Hossain Shahid Suhrawardi to free the Bangalis



Opposition activists torched a bus at Arambagh in the capital yesterday ahead of the dawn-to-dusk hartal today. Two other buses were set afire at other places in the city.

GM Quader may form new party

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

Jatiya Party (JP) legislator Golam Mohammad Quader along with a number of like-minded political colleagues began the groundwork to form a new political party in Rangpur and its adjoining districts.

GM Quader, younger brother of JP Chairman HM Ershad, formed two committees -- one in Rangpur and another in Lalmonirhat -- during his recent five-day visit to the northern districts.

Even though the committees were named Election Committee, he said the committees would be the core unit of the future party.

While talking to The Daily Star yesterday at his Rangpur home, Quader said, "We will form committees like these in a number of upazilas with an aim to form a new political party."

He said, "Ershad might decide to join the BNP-Jamaat alliance. If

Hartal today to protest police atrocities

Opposition lays siege to PMO Sept 12 for electoral reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party opposition alliance enforces countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today to protest police atrocities on the opposition leaders and activists during their Election Commission (EC) Secretariat siege programme on September 6.

The opposition combine has also announced programme of laying siege to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on September 12 to

compel the government to accept reforms in the caretaker government system and the EC.

On September 6, the opposition camp attempted to besiege the EC Secretariat to press the same demand.

To thwart their attempt, riot police indiscriminately clubbed senior opposition leaders, lawmakers and the activists of the opposition combine, leaving around 100 people including AL

BSF kills 1

UNB, Chnauabganj

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) shot dead a Bangladeshi youth at Telkupi frontier in Shibganj upazila of the district early Friday.

The dead was identified as Zia, 22, son of Aynal Haq of Telkupi village.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources said the BSF men of Churi Anantapur border outpost fired on Zia while he was irrigating his cropland near border pillar no 180/4 at about 12:15am. Zia died instantly.

Immediately after the incident, the Indian border guards took the body to their camp.

They handed over the body to BDR Friday evening after a flag meeting between the border guards of the two countries on Telkupi border in the morning.

31 killed in explosions outside India mosque

No-one claimed responsibility; relatives bury dead

AFP, Malegaon

Relatives buried their dead yesterday after three bombs outside a mosque and graveyard killed 31 people and injured nearly 300 in the latest sectarian attack to shake India.

The blasts targeted Muslim worshippers leaving the mosque in the religiously-divided town of Malegaon in western India, the scene of previous clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

The dead included eight chil-

dren and six women caught by the three "crude" devices that were attached to bicycles, police said. Nearly half of the 297 injured were children, the state government said.

Forensic experts had collected some material from the scene but it was too early to say who was behind the attacks, said district police chief PK Jain.

Nobody has claimed responsibility for Friday's bloodshed, when an estimated 2,500 people had

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