

October 10 and rocky transition from autocracy to democracy

By Staff Correspondent

Mass movement by the mainstream opposition political alliance, parties and student organisations that culminated in the fall of the Ershad Government on December 6 began on this day (October 10) last year.

The nine-year opposition movement to press for the resignation of the Ershad government and holding of elections under a neutral caretaker government gained fresh life with observance of the October 10 sit-in demonstration around the Secretariat, the major programme by the Opposition after the Dhaka siege programme of November 10, 1987.

During observance of the sit-in demonstration, at least five people were killed and several hundred injured in a series of pitched battles between the police and the political activists in the capital city.

The clashes were concentrated mostly in the Motijheel Commercial Area, Gulistan, Nawabpur, and New Market areas where the demonstrators damaged and set on fire vehicles, and petrol pumps, brick-battled police, blasted crackers and attacked the ruling Jatiya Party city office at Motijheel. Police opened fire and lobbed teargas shells at the demonstrators.

Since morning, streams of processions from different parts of the city converged at the Bangabandhu Avenue, northern gate of the Baitul Mukarram, and the General Post Office areas chanting anti-government slogans.

Strong contingents of police were also posted at various strategic points including the Dhaka University, Shahbagh crossing, Secretariat, Dainik Bangla crossing, Shapla Square, Gulistan, New Market and Farmgate areas since the morning.

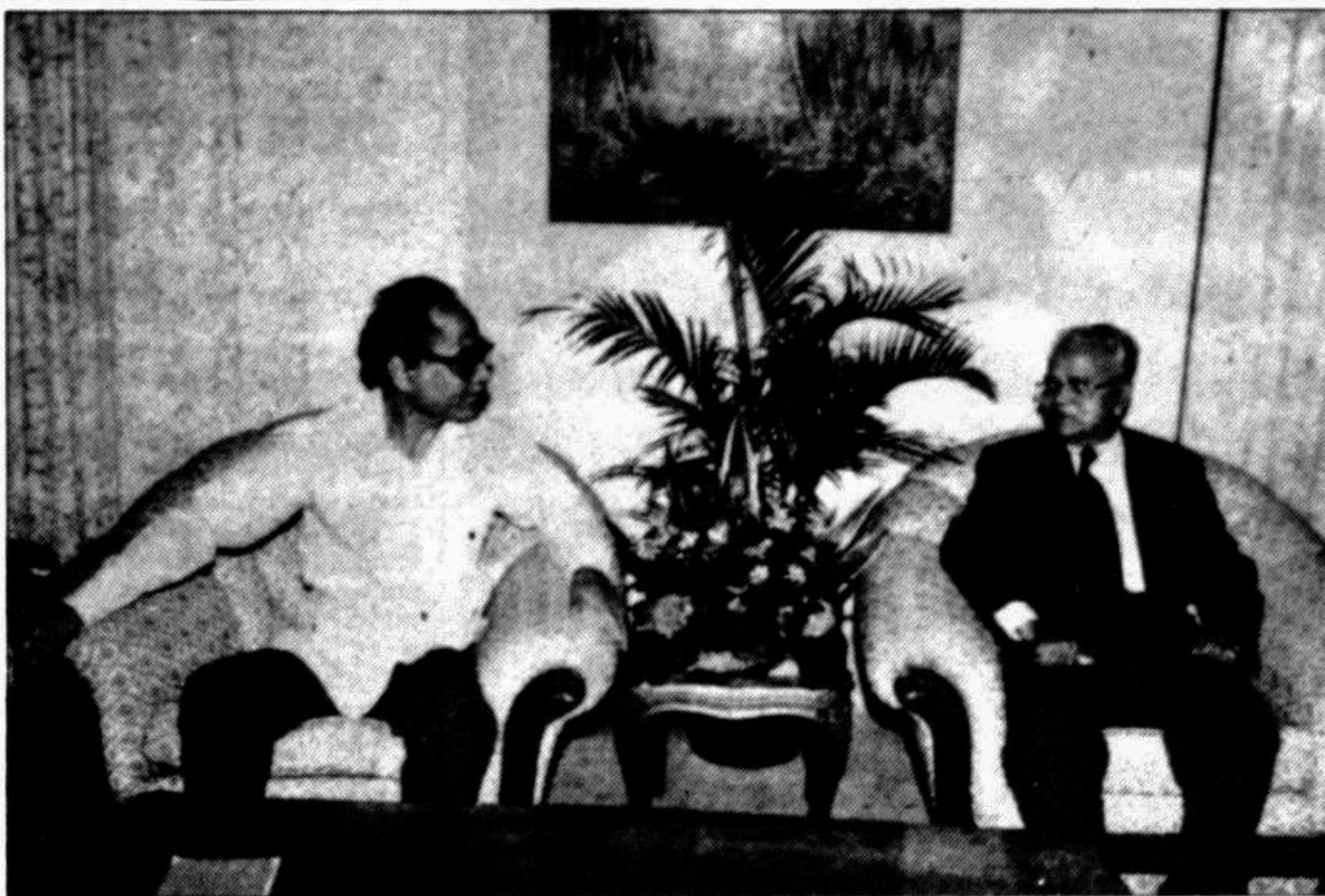
In the clashes over 40 policemen were also wounded by the demonstrators.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the Awami League, and other parties called a half-day hartal for the following day in protest against the deaths in police firing.

The All-Party Student Organisations led by the Dhaka University Central Students Union (DUCSU) which also supported the hartal call took oath keeping the body of Zahed, one of the five killed, at the Aparajeyo Bangla premises on the Dhaka University campus not to leave the streets until the government fell.



ANARDOUS JOURNEY ENDS: The vanguard of last year's mass upsurge the All-Party Students Unity boys and girls on Dhaka streets (top left), arrested Begum Khaleda Zia being taken to custody in a police lorry in 1987 (top right), Sheikh Hasina leading a procession in the capital (below left) and at the last stage of the transition to democracy yesterday newly-elected President Abdur Rahman Biswas called on the former Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed.



Thus the opposition alliances, parties and student bodies carried forward the movement aimed at bringing an end to the nine year auto-

cratic Ershad regime that captured power illegally in a coup in 1982.

During the 56-day continuous movement since October

10, a number of anti-government political activists were killed by police and pro-government terrorists. The Opposition also held various

identical programmes including hartal, blockades of roads and rails and ghraos of government offices of district and upazila level.

The government launched various repressive measures including imposition of emergency and curfew, shut down the educational institutions

and resort to actions by the members of the police, and the BDR in abortive bids to tame the protesters. But the protesters took to the streets

defying government instructions.

The Opposition movement took a significant turn on November 19, when the three mainstream Opposition alliances announced a Joint Declaration which contained the formula for transfer of power from the autocratic Ershad government to the interim government, holding of elections under it and transfer of power by the interim government to an elected government.

The government declared a state of emergency on November 27 when Dr Shamsul Alam Khan Milon was murdered by the government-backed terrorists on the Dhaka University.

All the national dailies and weeklies stopped publication protesting the imposition of emergency.

Government called in the army to resist the protesters. The Army defied the government order while the BDR was called in.

Anti-government demonstrators thronged the city streets violating the curfew. Clashes took place in different parts of the city between the BDR and political activists on the night of November 27.

Similar incidents also took place on November 28, 29, 30, and December 1 and 2.

On December 3, Ershad announced through the state-owned media that he would resign 15 days before elections. But the protests continued in the city and the BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia and the Awami League leader Dr. Kamal Hossain in separate interviews with the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Voice of America asked Ershad to resign without further delay.

On December 4 at 10 pm Ershad announced to resign immediately and called upon the Opposition leaders to nominate a neutral person to whom he would tender his resignation.

On December 5, the mainstream Opposition alliances and parties named Chief Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed as the Acting President to head an interim government under which the elections would be held.

On December 6, Ershad handed his resignation to Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and transferred power to him.

With the swearing-in of Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday (October 9) the process of the nation's transition to democracy ended.

Biswas sworn-in

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leaders and members of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party on the occasion.

The taking over of the new President also marked the end of the spectacular 307 days of power of Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed who is now free to resume his office as the Chief Justice of Bangladesh.

Justice Shahabuddin took over from President Ershad who was forced to resign on December 6 at the height of mass upsurge in the winter of 1991. He was the consensus candidate of the major political alliances and parties for heading a non-partisan caretaker government for holding free and fair elections to the Parliament and handing over power to people's representatives.

It was under his stewardship that the nation had a free and fair election to the Parliament on February 27, 1991. The Bangladesh Nationalist Party which commanded a majority in the House formed government on March 20. Subsequently, on August 6 midnight all the parties represented in Parliament unanimously passed the Constitution 12th Amendment Bill which was endorsed by the people through the September 15 referendum. The passage of the 12th Amendment Bill paved the way for transition to parliamentary democracy. And Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and 39 other ministers, State Ministers and Deputy Ministers took fresh oath of office on September 19 under the new system.

Election of President under the amended constitution was held on Tuesday, after the Supreme Court had rejected prayers for temporary stay of the election the day before. Abdus Samad Azad and six other MPs of Awami League, Ganatantri Party and NAP, and Barrister Moudud Ahmed of Jatiya Party had filed two writ petitions challenging the Election of President Act 1991, and the convening of meeting of the members of Parliament at the Jatiya Sangsad chamber by the Election Commission for the elections.

Biswas visits Shaheed Minar, Zia's mazar

President Abdur Rahman Biswas, Wednesday visited the central Shaheed Minar to pay homage to the martyrs of the Language Movement, reports BSS.

Soon after his swearing-in at Bangabhaban, the President drove straight to the Central Shaheed Minar and placed wreaths at the altar of the monument.

The President then went to the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman. He placed wreaths at the mazar and offered فاتحة there.

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Plan to expand Supreme Court

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of 40,000 cases. Over the last ten months this number has been reduced slightly by ensuring speedy disposal of cases. And after the taking over of power by the BNP three new judges have been appointed.

But the number of courts could not be increased in the Supreme Court due to scarcity of space. As when the Old High Court building will be available for use, the number of judges in the High Court and the Supreme Court divisions of the Supreme Court is likely to be raised to 40. At present the Court has a total of 25 judges, the Minister said.

If the number of judges is increased the government will also have to appoint more bench clerks, stenographers and other auxiliary staff to ensure proper running of their courts.

Meanwhile, some problems that surfaced following the abolition of six permanent High Court division benches outside Dhaka city are yet to be solved. Only some furniture of some such courts has been brought to Dhaka.

A large number of non-gazetted employees of the

erstwhile permanent High Court benches became surplus when after the Supreme Court verdict declaring the Constitution Eighth Amendment Act as ultra vires of the Constitution, these benches were brought back to Dhaka.

There was also a good number of deputy Attorneys General and Assistant Attorneys General whose services could not be adjusted over the last two years.

The septuagenarian politician who once was a member of the Supreme Court Bar, said that the number of members of the Bar has more than doubled over the last ten years. The number has increased from 500 to about 1200, a Bar Association source told The Daily Star.

Due to shortage of space junior members sometimes do not have space even to sit down. Senior members share rooms. The standard of the court can never improve without cooperation from the members of the Bar, he said.

The Law Minister said that at the end of his career his only mission was to strengthen the judiciary with a view to helping the establishment of rule of law in the country. The

Hartal

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After a condolence meeting at the Harendraal Public Library premises, addressed by district AL leader and former parliament member Mohiuddin Ahmed, the agitated BCL (S-A) workers, ransacked at least 70 rooms at the Haraganga College hostel belonging to Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal workers. Belongings in at least 25 rooms were set ablaze.

Shaheen (24), was the General Secretary of Haraganga College Chhatra Sangsad. The BCL (S-A) workers were also locked in a half an hour chase and counter chase with the rival JCD workers when they were ransacking the college Sangsad office. Several cocktails were also served before police dispersed them with baton charge. None was however hurt.

The dispersed BCL workers then ransacked and damaged three nearby shops. Earlier, addressing the condolence meeting General Secretary of Munshiganj district AL and former MP Mohiuddin Ahmed demanded punishment for the culprits within a week. Otherwise, he threatened, the town would be "paralysed."

Manik

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There was no election to the post of Assistant General Secretary even after 27-hours of deliberations and discussions in the election session which had begun at 8 pm Tuesday.

The central committee selected a 10 member presidium after consensus. They are: Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Nurul Islam Nahid, Shamsuddoha, Sankar Bose, Shahidullah Chowdhury, Nuhu Alam Lenin, Shekhar Datta, Morshed Ali, Ahsanullah Chowdhury and Kazi Rabiul Huq.

Some amendments to the party constitution were adopted during the session which included making the party president the executive head and making the provision for party presidium.

Earlier the delegates elected the 77 member central committee of the party. Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Shamsunnahar secured the highest number of 496 votes each. Mujahidul Islam Selim got 451 votes, Nahid 417, Shamsuddoha 447 and both Ajoy Roy and Nuhu Alam Lenin 380 each.

Oct 10 martyrs

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martyrdom at the beginning of the final stage of the movement for democracy."

The Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson said the sacrifices of the shaheeds of democratic movement did not go in vain. At present democracy is established in the country and people's government elected by them is now entrusted with the responsibility for running the country, she said.

The Prime Minister said, the best way to show our respect to the martyrs was to work for completely realising the dreams of the shaheeds for which they had sacrificed their lives.

She called upon all to make a firm pledge to consolidate the democratic base and continue to work untidely for achieving selfreliance in every field of the national life for the overall economic emancipation of the people.

The Prime Minister also called upon all to work untidely for realising the dreams of the martyrs of the movement for democracy and devote to the nation building activities.

Badrul

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to a volley of questions by journalists and congratulated the electorate in the presidential election, who participated in it and cast their votes without fear or favour.

Justice Chowdhury reiterated his independent character and said that he was never an Awami Leaguer and that he would not do Awami League politics in future too.

He said that at the nascent stage of democracy he wanted to work to establish it on a firm footing.

He however, cautioned the nation and the ruling party that the country would plunge into a deep economic crisis within the next two years if the government failed to reach a national consensus on different issues.

He said that his candidature was aimed at meeting that end but indicated that due to a midnight conspiracy he could not be elected.

He said that the President Election Act 1991 would not only be challenged in the Court but that history would prove the law was an ill motivated one as well.

He said that prior to the election he got positive responses from the Jatiya Party, the Jamaat, the CPB and the other opposition Members of Parliament.

Justice Chowdhury said that some of the BNP MPs also contacted him and assured him their support in the election. He referred to his meeting with BNP MP Farida Rahman at her residence where the Home Minister Abdul Main Chowdhury was also present.

Justice Chowdhury said that prior to the election two top-level leaders of the Jatiya Party, four Ministers of the BNP, CPB leader Shamsuddoha and Jamaat leader Sheikh Ansar Ali had assured him of favouring his candidature.

When asked whether he congratulated Abdur Rahman Biswas or would like to congratulate him he said that the Election of President Act 1991 would be challenged in the High Court.

Quoting a verse from the Holy Quran he said that it was a Quranic teaching that all should take decisions by consultation with each other.

Replying to a question Justice Chowdhury said that he used to be invited to state functions particularly to presidential functions as former Chief Justice, but yesterday he was not invited to the presidential oath-taking ceremony.

The Midnight File

Reports of my death greatly exaggerated: Gorbachev

MOSCOW, Oct 9 : Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, quoting American author Mark Twain, joked today that reports that he had been shot were "greatly exaggerated". A presidential press spokesman said the 60-year-old Kremlin leader learned "with interest" of the rumours which sent the dollar soaring briefly on Asian markets, reports Reuter.

EC ministers due Oct 20

AMSTERDAM, Oct 9 : Three European Community development ministers will visit Bangladesh from October 20 to 22 to discuss long-term aid projects for the country, a spokesman for the Dutch presidency said today. "The ministers want to discuss how the EC can contribute in other ways besides the emergency aid given out each year to deal with cyclones and floods," the spokesman said, reports Reuter.

Imelda rejects Manila's terms

NEW YORK, Oct 9 : Imelda Marcos today rejected conditions set by the Philippines government to allow her to bring her husband's body back for burial in his homeland, saying they violated Ferdinand Marcos's last wish, reports Reuter.

Y'slav Navy to lift blockade

ZAGREB, Oct 9 : The Yugoslav Navy was to begin lifting its blockade of Croatia's Adriatic ports at 3 pm (1400 GMT) today the same time as the republic's forces were to start lifting their blockade of federal barracks in the port towns, a spokesman for the European Community's (EC) observer mission announced here, reports AFP.

Khaleda to attend

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Mugabe. She is also likely to make contributions to other agenda items through intervention.

The Prime Minister's entourage will include Foreign Minister ASM Mustafizur Rahman, Parliament Members Begum Raushan Elahi, Ahsanul Huq Mollah, and Sardar Sakawat Hossain Bakul, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, and Additional Secretary-in-charge of Prime Minister's Secretariat Dr Kamaluddin Siddiqi. Bangladesh High Commissioners in London and Harare have also been included in the Prime Minister's entourage.

This year's conference is being held in the backdrop of momentous changes in global politics.

The main thrust of the conference will be a concerted attempt by the heads of government to chalk out a more active and dynamic role for the Commonwealth in the 1990s and beyond.

The meeting will also discuss South Africa where apartheid is being slowly dismantled. Global issues such as environment human rights and drugs will also figure prominently in the summit discussions.

JCD, BCL

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meeting of September 26, at all the residential hall to maintain peace.

The move began on Sunday and in the meantime they held meetings at S M Hall, Shahidullah Hall, Jasimuddin Hall, Ziaur Rahman Hall and Fazlul Huq Hall.

The leaders of the two main rival organisations advised their respective activists to show restraint, not to utter provocative words and shelter outsiders in the halls and allow return of the activists to their allotted seats in the halls.

The leaders suggested their hall units to solve all disputed matters between rival student groups with the help of the hall authorities.

Shahabuddin

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the military secretary to the President, Major General Manzoor Rashid Khan.

Both the PGR and the PSF presented their respective crests to the outgoing President.

Justice Shahabuddin visited the 'toshakhana' of the Bangabhaban where gifts to the head of state are preserved. He drove out of the Bangabhaban in a ceremonial motorcade.