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# The Daily Star

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**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Cabinet meet**

NATORE, Jan 20: Uttara Ganabhaban here will for the first time host the cabinet meeting of the present government today (Tuesday). Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will chair the regular weekly meeting due to begin at 11 am. reports UNB.

**CEC addresses today**

Chief Election Commissioner Justice Mohammad Abdur Rauf will address the nation today on the occasion of coming union parishad elections. His address will be simultaneously broadcast and telecast over Radio Bangladesh and Bangladesh Television. reports BSS.

**Ferry stranded**

SIRAJGANJ, Jan 20: A railway ferry with some 1,500 passengers aboard ran aground on a shoal in the foggy Jamuna river route at 9 this morning, official sources said. The Rajshahi-bound mail train, connected with the vessel, MV Suhrawardy from Jagannathganj ghat, departed Sirajganj Station without passengers who were later stranded here. The Rajshahi-bound passengers were waiting at the Sirajganj ghat as the salvaged ferry reached the ghat at 1 pm, three hours behind the schedule. reports UNB.

**Tk 2.50 lakh goods seized**

CHITTAGONG, Jan 20: A special squad of Panchalish police today seized electronic goods worth about Taka 2.50 lakh and nabbed three persons in this connection from different parts of the city. According to a police press release, the goods including three colour televisions, one video cassette recorder, one video cassette player, and one remote control, reports BSS.

**Another top NLD leader resigns**

BANGKOK, Jan 20: Another senior leader of the main Burmese opposition party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), has resigned, the official Radio Rangoon said today.

Secy Gen likely to be minister without portfolio

## BNP wakes up to set house in order

By Mahfuz Ullah and Nurul Kabir

The new Secretary General of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), likely to be elected at the national council in April, will be a minister without portfolio.

Party sources say the policy planners have reached an understanding to this end in a bid to ride over the organizational problems and to make the office of the Secretary General more effective in dealing with the party affairs.

The proposal would soon be conveyed to the party chairperson and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia who, according to sources, would bless the decision.

Sources further say it became imperative against the backdrop of growing reluctance among stalwarts of the party to do the crucial party job without any ministerial protocol. The policy planners have discovered the lapses in organizational work under the leadership of a minister with a portfolio.

Another proposal to have a person without a cabinet as the Secretary General also came up. The proposal was made, say sources, to keep the office of the party Secretary General free from any other responsibilities. Finally, the policy settlers settled for the middle course a minister without portfolio as the party boss.

When contacted, Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder, Minister for Local Government and Rural Development and Secretary General of the party evaded a

direct answer to the question saying "we are now trying to complete the council sessions of the district committees of the party by February."

Talukder said the last national council of the party had been held in March 1989 and as per the party's constitution the council is due in March this year. But before the holding of national council, elections to the district committees will have to be completed, he added.

When asked about the date of the national council the BNP Secretary General replied that it would be held sometime in the month of April, preferably immediately after Ramadan. Hannan Shah the Jute Minister also confirmed the Secretary Generals' version.

Meanwhile, four leaders of the party have joined the race to become the Secretary General. They are: the incumbent Abdus Salam Talukder, Col (Retd) Akbar Hossain, a former minister and an MP elected from Comilla, Barrister Rafiqul Islam Mia, Minister for Works and an MP elected from Comilla and Tariqul Islam, Minister for Social Welfare and Women's Affairs of them. Islam lost the general elections last year but he is known to be a close confidante of the party chief.

Everything depends on the party council and its leader Begum Khaleda Zia. Barrister Talukder said. The other were not available for comment but sources close to them contenders did not rule out the

possibility of their bidding for the powerful party post.

Whatever be the intensity of lobbying to become the Secretary General, a minister who is very close to Begum Zia preferring anonymity said the final decision will be made by the party chairperson who is yet to make up her mind. The BNP is yet to emerge as an organized political party capable of confronting rival in and outside Parliament and in future elections.

Most of the party leaders say if immediate steps are not taken the party would face tough times in coming months. To emphasize the allegation of inertia and growing discontent in the party they referred to two recent incidents, the defeat of the party in the House on a division vote and the bill moved by Abdur Rab Chowdhury, MP from Laxmipur.

While a section of the MPs expressed dismay at the move by Chowdhury, the Chief Whip of the party Delwar Hossain ruled out the possibility of any punitive action against the MP. The party leadership did not have any idea of the move nor the proposal was moved in any forum of the party. Delwar Hossain added. Salam Talukder, commenting on the incident, said Chowdhury could discuss the issue beforehand with the Leader of the House or the Deputy Leader or at least with the Chief Whip.

Defending his position A Rab Chowdhury said there was



Akheri Munajat at the Biswa Ijtima yesterday (left) and a partial view of the damages done to the Tongi Railway Station by a group of angry devotees (right). — Star photo

## WB to divert industrial credit through private banks

By Sohel Manzur

The World Bank is to divert the implementation of all its industrial credit programmes through private commercial banks because of the ill-performance of the DFIs (Development Financing Institutions) and the government controlled banks.

According to a source various irregularities in the disbursing of loans and poor recovery performance at the DFIs and government commercial banks have contributed to such a diversion.

The WB has agreed to provide the government with \$25 million as Private Sector Industrial Credit (PSIC) recently on condition that it distribute the amount to the entrepreneurs through some selected private commercial banks, the source said.

According to the source the

agreement in this regard is likely to be signed in a couple of weeks. The government is now examining the terms and conditions imposed by the World Bank for approval of the charter of the final agreement, the source mentioned.

The government is also finalising the selection of the private banks through which the loans would have to be disbursed.

The banks, selected primarily, include Arab Bangladesh Bank, United Commercial Bank (UCB), Grindlays Bank and International Finance and Investment Corporation (IFIC) Bank. The source said adding that some other banks are also under consideration of the government to be selected for the purpose.

According to the source the main objective of the credit programme is to provide term loan and working capital to the entrepreneurs of small scale industries.

The government will provide loans to the private commercial banks at 8 to 9 per cent interest and the banks, to the entrepreneurs at 12 to 13 per cent.

Meanwhile, all the six DFIs in Bangladesh are now in a bad condition due to poor loan recovery performance. The ADH and other donor agencies suggested massive reorganisation in those to get further financial support.

The DFIs are now busy in recovering overdue loans rather than further financing the development of the sectors, they assigned.

## Trawler capsized leaves 33 missing

From Our Correspondent NARAYANGANJ, Jan 20: At least 33 people were missing and five others injured when a trawler capsized near Gazaria in Munshiganj district this evening.

Officials said that the trawler, carrying some 40 devotees from the Biswa Ijtima at Tongi, capsized at about 6.45 pm at the confluence of the rivers Buriganga, Meghna and the Shitalakhyia after it collided with a motor launch from Chandpur. The trawler was bound for Brahmanbaria.

They said that seven passengers swam ashore. Among them five were admitted to Narayanganj Hospital with injuries. The rest were released after first aid. The five injured were identified as Ramjan Ali (50), Md Rashed Mia (45), Rois Mia (43), Ilias Mia (43), Farid Alam (17) and Ilias Mia (7).

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## Two million take part in Akheri Munajat Police fire blank shots as move attacks Tongi station

From Our Correspondent

TONGI, Jan 20: Police fired in the air, used teargas and batons to disperse a mob that attacked and partially burnt Tongi railway station today (Monday). At least 40 people, including 4 railway policemen, were injured, hospital sources and witnesses said.

The trouble started after several thousand people returning from the Biswa Ijtima (World Congregation of Tablig Jammaat) at Tongi found no train at the station.

A section of the crowd, angered by the absence of train, went on a rampage through the station damaging the office of the Station Master, a goods office, a relay room, a battery

room, nine ticket counters digital phones, communication lines and the electronic panel board that monitors the movement of trains.

At one stage the unruly crowd set the station's office papers ablaze with the flames gutting the doors and windows of the Station Master's room.

Tongi Fire Brigade rushed to the scene and controlled the fire.

As police arrived at the scene a section of the crowd threw bricks at them. Police responded with firing two bullets in the air, five rounds of teargas and baton charges.

The trouble lasted for about three hours (From 12.35 pm

to 4.30 pm) It disrupted train movement via Tongi for more than four hours, railway sources said.

Monday was the last day of the three-day Biswa Ijtima which concluded with the Akheri Munajat (final prayer) seeking Allah's blessings for the welfare and unity of the world Muslims.

As soon as the Munajat was over at around 12.30 pm several thousand devotees, some of them students, streamed into the railway station hoping there would be a special train to carry them to Mymensingh and beyond. But the train named Ijtima Special, was not

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## Foreigners keen to dig for oil

Star Report

Attracted by the present government's liberalised terms, foreign companies have revived their interest in oil exploration in Bangladesh.

Two companies have already signed agreements with the Bangladesh government to explore for oil in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) and another two are in the process of doing so.

A US company AMOCO, an Australian company BHP have agreed to work jointly in the CHT project and are expected to start exploration soon.

Sources at the Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry told The Daily Star Monday that negotiations with two more companies UNOCAL and TEXACO, both of the US were at the final stage. They said that the ministry is expecting more companies to come to Bangladesh. The major feature of the relaxed terms is that the foreign companies need not pay taxes for their machinery and equipment brought into the country for oil exploration.

UNOCAL and TEXACO are

negotiating for exploration in two blocks comprising over a 16,000 square kilometre area in greater Sylhet and Mymensingh districts.

According to Bangladesh experts, the oil prospects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts region Sylhet and Mymensingh are bright.

Bangladesh's search for oil started in 1974, but it took about 12 years to achieve success. The country's engineers struck petroleum at Haripur where oil extraction started in

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## Local, ROK firms sign joint sea-food venture

Star Economic Report

Bangladeshi enterprise Sea Resources Limited and South Korean firm Seolim International Corporation Sunday signed a four-million-dollar joint venture project to produce sea-food products for export to South Korea and other countries.

The project titled "Sea Seolim Surimi Ltd." first of its kind in the country, will produce surimi, made from minced paste of white fish added with various flavours,

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## Influx continues: 65,000 enter so far Early return of Rohingyas to top 3rd meet agenda

The issue of quick return of Rohingya refugees to their homes will figure prominently in the next flag meeting scheduled to be held at a higher level between Bangladesh and Myanmar on January 28, reports BSS.

Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman told BSS yesterday that the Ministry of Home and the Relief Ministry were jointly working out the number of the refugees who had crossed into Bangladesh over the last few months.

The refugees are being provided with food and temporary shelter till their return to Myanmar, the Foreign Minister said.

Myanmar Foreign Minister, is expected to visit Bangladesh shortly though no date has yet been fixed, he said.

The Foreign Minister urged all concerned quarters to refrain from spreading rumour on the border issue between the two countries. "The government is fully alive to the

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## BSF starts erecting fence along border in Jamalpur

JAMALPUR, Jan 20: Indian Border Security Forces (BSF) have started erecting a 80 km long barbed wire fencing at Meghalaya along Bangladesh border, reports UNB.

BDR sources said BSF is carrying out the work violating international law which prohibits fencing within 150 yards of the border demarcation line.

The fencing stretches from Patharcherar to Nakshi, two northern points of Jamalpur and Sherpur districts respectively.

The sources said that upon contact over wireless BSF denied their involvement with it and stated that it was an Indian construction company which were carrying out the work.

Meanwhile, BDR high officials have offered to hold a flag meeting in this regard but there was no response from BSF as yet.

Earlier in 1987, an attempt to install a similar fencing in the area was made but stopped immediately following protests from Bangladesh.

## Union Parishad elections from tomorrow

Union Parishad election begins tomorrow (Wednesday) across the country amidst tight security, officials said, reports UNB.

Some 17,444 candidates are contesting 3,899 posts of Chairman while 1,06,964 running for 34,801 Member posts in the local body. Election Commission sources said.

They said 4,95,00576 voters were expected to cast votes in the phased polling which will continue till February 6.

A total of 2,93,779 election officials will conduct the voting at 19,585 polling stations.

Nearly 100,000 security men will be posted for smooth

holding of elections. Army units and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) will be put on full alert.

In pre-election violence, over a dozen people have been killed at different places in the country.

The last election was held on February 10, 1988 when widespread poll violence left some 5,000 people dead and 10,000 injured.

A BSS report says: All sorts of public meeting and processions have been banned in each of the union parishad election for 48 hours prior to the day of election till midnight during union parishad election.

Beginning Wednesday the

election will be held in phases throughout the country in 16 days.

On the first day, Wednesday voting will be held in 599 unions.

**Chittagong**

The hectic union parishad election campaign came to an end in some of the unions Sunday midnight while in others it is going on throughout the district.

In Chittagong district election will be held in Mirsarai and Sitakunda upazilas on Wednesday.

The campaign reached its peak during the current week when rural Chittagong wore a festive look with the display of

candidates banners posters, election symbols atop roofs, trees and raised platforms in prime locations like bazars and bus stands, candidates and their supporters are moving to people's doorsteps from morning till late night.

**Pabna**

A dawn to dusk hartal was observed in Ishwardi upazila Monday protesting the killing of a union parishad chairman candidate of Dashuria union.

Upazila unit Awami League called the hartal Sunday. Abdur Rouf, organising secretary of Ishwardi upazila unit was gunned down by some unknown miscreants at his residence on January 12.

None was yet to be arrested in this connection.

All shops, banks and offices remained shuttered down and vehicles stayed off the road.

Later, upazila unit Awami League held a protest meeting at the local bus stand this afternoon. Speakers at the meeting demanded immediate arrest of 'known' killers.

**Khagrachhari**

About 14 people were injured in a clash between the supporters of two union parishad chairman candidates at Matiranga upazila sadar last mid night, police said.

The deadline of electioneering ended Sunday night.

## 50 chairmen, 326 members elected unopposed

By Nazmul Ashraf

All the office-bearers of four union parishads and another 46 chairmen and 290 members have been elected unopposed in the Union Parishad elections that begin tomorrow.

According to the Election Commission the union parishads where all the office-bearers have been elected uncontested are: Charakwa (Sadar Upazila, Munshiganj), Hatta (Uzirpur Upazila, Barisal), Omarpur (Balaganj Upazila, Sylhet) and Faruka

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