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The Daily Star

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NEWS BRIEFS

7 AIDS victims found so far

The blood samples of over 20,000 males and females of the high risk groups have been screened for detection of AIDS. Health and Family Welfare Minister Chowdhury Kamal (Bne Yusuf) told the Jatiya Sangsad Wednesday answering a question from Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim (AL-Gopalgarh) he said so far seven persons had been detected with AIDS. Of the seven victims one person died on March 3 last, he said, reports BSS.

Hearing of Ershad's petition Jan 26

The hearing of former President HM Ershad's provisional stay petition will be held on January 26 before Appellate Division of the Supreme Court. A division bench summarily rejected the revision petition seeking the stay of further proceedings at the Special Court trying former President Ershad for amassing wealth beyond his known sources of income, reports BSS.

US General leaves Dhaka

The Commanding General US Army Pacific, Lt. General Johnnie H. Corns, left Dhaka Wednesday after a four-day goodwill visit. He was seen-off at the Zia International Airport by senior army officers and the US embassy officials, according to an ISPR press release, reports BSS.

Diarrhoea claims 46,246 in 20 yrs

Diarrhoeal diseases have claimed 46,246 lives in the country in the last 20 years since 1971, Deputy Health Minister Strajul Huq stated this in parliament Wednesday replying to Sheikh Ansar Ali of Jamaat-e-Islami. Some 5,782 people were killed last year alone, when there was a severe flooding in the country, he told the House, reports UNB.

Voting in 32 centres postponed

4 killed, 100 injured on first day of UP polling

By Staff Correspondent

Armed clashes at different voting centres left at least four persons, including a primary school teacher and a former UP member dead and another 100 persons injured on the first day of the 14-day elections to the country's

union parishads Wednesday. Polling was postponed at least 32 centres following the killing and other forms of violence like the snatching of ballot boxes and ballot papers by the unruly mob at some centres.

On the first day, elections to 599 union parishads of 77 thanas under 63 districts were held. According to reports reaching Dhaka, the turnout of voters varied from 50 per cent to 80 per cent. Enthusiastic voters lined up to exercise

their franchise disregarding dense fog and mild rains since 9 in the morning. Polling continued till 5 pm without any break. Barring the trouble-prone centres, voting was held peacefully.
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Braving the rains, people hired up to cast their votes yesterday at the Kanchpur Union polling centre in Sonargaon Upazila. — Star photo.

Ruling party accused of politicising administration UZ Repeal Bill introduced amid opposition protests

A bill to annul the upazila system was introduced in Parliament yesterday amidst Jatiya Party's walkout and the Awami League accusing the ruling party of politicising the administration, reports UNB.

Minister for LGRD Abdus Salam Talukdar who piloted the Local Government (Upazila Parishad and Upazila Administration Reorganisation) (Repeal) Bill, 1992 refuted the opposition allegations. He reminded the opposition that many members from both sides of the House had pointed to the wantonness, corruption and favouritism of upazila chairman and strongly pleaded for abolition of the system introduced by the autocratic regime.

Talukdar referred to the commission set up for recommending steps to reorganise the local government for meeting the needs of the day. Refuting opposition charges, the Minister emphatically said BNP had no intention of politicising the administration nor it would venture any step

towards that end in future. About entrusting upazila officials to look after its affairs, Salam said it was an interim arrangement. The entire system of the local government would be recast in accordance with the recommendations of the commission.

Referring to criticism that Parliament was ignored in abolishing system through an ordinance, the Minister said it was a normal practice in all democratic countries. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad wanted to know the alternative to the upazila parishad. He regretted that the House was not taken into confidence in setting up the commission for reorganising the local government.

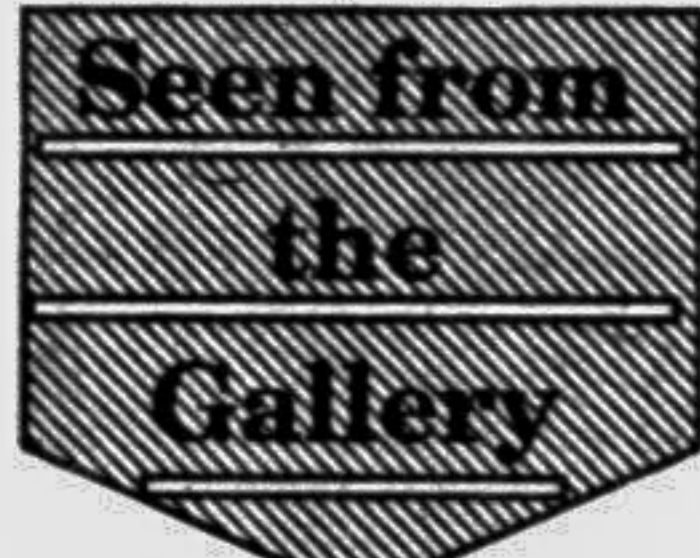
Azad suggested the bill be referred to a Standing Committee for scrutiny. We want to play the role of the representatives of the people, he added. As the Deputy Speaker Humayun Khan Panini invited the minister to introduce the

bill, more than half a dozen members stood at a time to protest. Among them were Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury (JP), Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Rahmat Ali and Sheikh Fazlul Karim of Awami League and Suranjit Sen Gupta (Ganatantri Party).

Defending the Upazila system introduced by the Jatiya Party in 1985, Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury said its annulment rendered the representatives of the people powerless.

With a mixture of sarcasm, the Jatiya Party stalwart said MPs have now the leadership but not the powers which were being enjoyed by the public servants.

The Deputy Speaker would not allow any discussion on the bill at this stage but Tofael Ahmed who was stubborn had the floor. He said the bill intended to serve purpose of the government in politicising the administration. Elected representatives have now been rendered powerless.
See Page 12 Col 7



By Mahfuz Ullah

The opposition, contrary to its practice and surprising many, did not oppose the introduction of two bills yesterday by the ageing Law Minister. Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad lost no time in saying 'yes' when Mirza Hafiz sought permission to move the bills.

The witty Speaker, Shaikh Razzak Ali also hastened to comment that it was the result of consultations between two friends.

As the whole House burst into laughter, Mohiuddin Ahmed, another old guard of Awami League and long time friend of the Law Minister stood up and said 'yes, we are friends and of course I won't reveal the secrets I know about my friend.'

Sharp came the reply from the slow-speaking Law Minister. 'I will also never disclose the secrets about him (Mr Mohiuddin) which are up my sleeves.'
See Page 12 Col 1

Date-expired x-ray films being used in Suhrawardy Hospital

The Jatiya Sangsad experienced a heated debate Wednesday when it was informed that date-expired X-ray films were being used in Suhrawardy Hospital, reports BSS.

Though the question was asked by Sardar Shakawat Hossain (Bakul), a Treasury Bench member, the issue was taken up by the opposition who went on putting up one after another supplementary, much to the embarrassment of the ruling party. However, the issue came to a convincing end when Deputy Leader of the House Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury told members that none would die because of X-ray taken on expired films.

Prof Chowdhury said a good X-ray help diagnosis of diseases. If the film was an expired one, the diagnosis would be delayed, he added.

Earlier in reply to a question, Deputy Health Minister Serajul Haq said though proper X-ray films were used in Shaheed Suhrawardy Heart Institute and Hospital, sometimes date-expired but useable films were used for X-ray. The minister stated that according to experts such use of X-ray film caused no harm to the patients.

The minister informed the House an investigation was underway about the date expiry of X-ray films. He assured the members that people responsible would be punished on the basis of report.

Replying to a supplementary, Deputy Health Minister Serajul Haq today said in the absence of Kamal ibne Yusuf, said the X-ray film in question were imported in 1988-89 at a cost of Taka 2.81 crore. He said of the over 19 lakh sheets of film, only 2 lakh had been left and likely to be exhausted soon.
See Page 12 Col 8



A scene from a Fashion Show held yesterday at Dhaka Sheraton where models displayed dresses styled on a unique blend of western and continental fashion. — Star photo

Presidential election act Hearing of writ begins

The hearing of the writ petition, filed by Abdus Samad Azad, MP, and six others, challenging the Presidential Election Act 1991 began Wednesday before a single-judge bench of the High Court division, reports BSS.

Justice Anwarul Huq Chowdhury comprised the judge of the bench. The counsel of the petitioner Amir-ul-Islam submitted his arguments that the concept of the election will be meaningless if the secrecy of the ballot is not maintained.

A division bench earlier on November 25, 1991 gave split judgement. Justice Fazle Hussain Mohammad Habibur Rahman had summarily rejected the petition while Justice Abdul Hasib had issued rule upon the government.

Afterwards the matter was referred to the Chief Justice who had set up a third single-judge bench to hear the petition afresh.

Amir-ul-Islam and Zakir Ahmed appeared on behalf of the petitioner. Attorney General Aminul Huq, Deputy Attorney General Hasan Arif and Assistant Attorney General Obaidur Rahman Mostafa appeared for the state.
See Page 12 Col 8

Canals for food autarky vital: PM

PAIKGACHA (Khulna), Jan 22: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today said the government wanted to implement the canal digging programmes throughout the country on voluntary basis and by ensuring people's participation, reports BSS.

Begum Zia was addressing a huge public meeting at Paikgacha upazila on the occasion of the re-excavation of Hitampur-Silemanpur canal here this afternoon. The 2.08-kilometer long canal is being re-excavated on voluntary basis.

The meeting was also addressed by speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Razzaque Ali, Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman, Social Welfare and Women Affairs Minister Tariqul Islam, State Minister for Textiles Major (Retd) Abdul Mannan, Whip Sheikh Ashraf Hossain and Begum Selima Rahman. MP were also present.

Begum Zia said the participation of the local people in this canal digging programme would remain as an example to be followed by others. She said late president

Ziaur Rahman had initiated the programme to attain autarky in food. 'We will carry on with the programme to become self-sufficient in food', she told the gathering.

She said the basic requirement was food and its production could only be increased by irrigation which would enable production of more than two crops.

She emphatically said the country could no longer support all the people by importing food. 'We have to work to solve our own problems by working on voluntarily', she added.

Begum Zia called upon the people to create self-employment opportunities by setting up small or cottage industries in the rural areas. She said the government would reach electricity to rural areas for this purpose.

Turning to womenfolk, the Prime Minister said, 'You can no longer sit idle at home. You have to take part in income generating activities such as raising poultry and livestock.' She assured that her government in this regard would provide loans on easy terms.
See Page 12 Col 4

UZ system may stay with new name and few changes

By Mahfuz Ullah and Nurul Kabir

The now-defunct Upazila system is likely to be retained with minor changes under a different title.

Although a bill that seeks to scrap it was introduced in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, the ruling party is contemplating the retention of the system amid growing support for it from partyman.

It is not the pressure from the opposition parties in parliament, rather a reflection of growing consensus within the party on the issue, BNP insiders say. Observations and comments of the BNP MPs, as gathered by The Daily Star, indicate that the basic structure, apart from

the judiciary, will be retained. The system is likely to be renamed as 'Thana Council'.

Under the revised system, party sources say, one of the union parishad chairman will head the organisation at thana level where the unions will be focal point of development.

Besides, the ruling party is contemplating to allocate some judicial functions to the union parishad. The party is also considering an option to appoint one of the MPs from each district as district coordinator. The administrative set-up at thana will be a federating unit of the unions, the sources say. The upazila system was in-

troduced in 1982 through an ordinance by the former government with the objective of 'ensuring people's participation in administration and their active participation in formulating development plans and overseeing their implementation.'

Since the introduction of the system, two elections—one in 1985 and the other in 1990—were held to elect the upazila chairman.

The system came amid strong criticisms from the then opposition parties including the BNP and especially the lawyers. Critics argued the system decentralised corruption when the objective was decen-

tralisation of administration. In the 1985 elections, local level leaders of almost all political parties participated in the elections, although officially the parties boycotted. In the 1990 elections, the Awami League took part officially saying it would not let the elections go unchallenged.

The reigning Jatiya Party got the highest number of seats in the election of 1990 while Awami League trailed behind.

The upazila system was repealed by the government through an ordinance on 23 November last year. All political parties opposed the deci-



Mukim Gazi
Mukim, accomplice get life term

By Staff Correspondent
Mukim Gazi and one of his accomplices Abdul Hanif were given life terms in an arms case Wednesday. Second Additional Dhaka District and Sessions Judge M
See Page 12 Col 8

Dhaka Central Jail overcrowded

By Farid Ahmed

The Dhaka Central Jail currently has about 5,000 inmates, more than double its sanctioned capacity, with the authorities blaming the overcrowding on the off-again on-again prison unrest.

Starting as a sub-jail during the British colonial rule, the Dhaka Central Jail, the largest of the country's 74 prisons, has the capacity to hold 2,116 prisoners, jail sources told The Daily Star.

But the number of inmates including convicts, under-trial prisoners and those held for safe custody has swelled to nearly 5,000.

The inmates in the Central Jail account for 11 per cent of nearly 45,000 prisoners held in the country's 74 jails.

At present about 200 women are being held prisoner in the Dhaka Central Jail as against the sanctioned capacity of 100, the sources said.

Twenty nine of a total of 106 prisoners, sentenced to death, are in the Dhaka Central Jail. The others are scattered in jails across the country.

The prisoners in the Dhaka Central Jail include 1,700 inmates, convicted of various charges. The rest are either awaiting trial or being held for their safety.

Jail officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, admitted that overcrowding is one of the main reasons for occasional prison unrest. But they pointed out the de-