

Rao to try again to delink religion from politics

NEW DELHI, Oct 19: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao said on Tuesday that his government will try once again to pass legislation separating religion from politics, reports AP.

The proposed bill is aimed at a right-wing Hindu nationalist party, which is the governing Congress Party's main adversary in the Nov 6-27 elections for the state legislatures. And the bill will be introduced when Parliament reconvenes after the voting.

Rao's earlier attempt to make it illegal for parties to use religious symbols and speeches during elections failed when his minority government could not muster enough support in Parliament to pass two bills in August.

"That, however, does not mean the issue is dead. No one can sweep under the carpet (an issue) that affects India's secular character," Rao told a news conference.

He was speaking before releasing a party manifesto for the elections in five states, including four northern ones that were ruled by the Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party until late last year.

Rao dismissed the governments, accusing them of promoting Hindu fanatics who demolished a Muslim Mosque in the town of Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh state on Dec 6. That sparked two months of nationwide Hindu-Muslim riots that killed nearly 2,000 people.

12 hurt in Feni

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pourashava election held on October 17, assaulted Khurshid at noon for not voting at their dictate.

They turned violent when associates of Khurshid tried to save him, and at one stage, they destroyed his video shop in the Academy area.

They also blasted several buses and damaged 35 trucks, buses, cars and other vehicles during the melee. Some 12 people were injured. Of them, seven were admitted to Sadar Hospital.

Results of the 12 centres out of 13 were announced in the pourashava election in which Awami League-backed candidate Khabat Ahmed was leading.

Meanwhile, leaders of the Feni Bus Owners Association, Truck Owners Association, Chamber of Commerce and Sramik Union met with the Deputy Commissioner in the afternoon and demanded immediate arrest of those involved in the violence within 24 hours.

Clinton okays withdrawal of army rangers from Somalia

WASHINGTON, Oct 19: President Clinton is pulling the Army's unit of Rangers out of Somalia now that Marines have arrived to patrol the country's coast, the White House announced Tuesday, reports AP.

The unit had the training to participate in the now-aborted hunt for Somali warlord Mohamed Farrah Aided, although the Pentagon initially denied it had such a role.

In a statement, Press Secretary Dee Myers said the President had approved a recommendation of Defence Secretary Les Aspin that the elite fighting unit be removed within the next few days.

The White House said the troops were being withdrawn because the 3,600 Marines that Clinton ordered to patrol the waters off the Somali coast have now arrived.

Benazir takes oath

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of her predecessor Nawaz Sharif and of President Ghulam Ishaq Khan in July to end their paralysing power struggle. He told Reuters he was delighted.

"I am glad democracy is on the rails," said the man who took on the job of supervising the elections to prevent rigging. "I thought it would be difficult but it all turned out very well."

The army has governed Pakistan for most of its 46 years since independence and remains the final arbiter of power.

Before the vote was announced, Bhutto toyed with her prayer beads, mumbled prayers and remained aloof from her party members.

Eight members, belonging to smaller groups and religious parties who were present in the House, did not take part in the vote.

Nawaz Sharif, her arch-rival conceded defeat and congratulated Bhutto, assuring her of his "unconditional cooperation" in ending poverty, hunger, corruption and unemployment and pulling the country out of economic stagnation.

Bhutto Tuesday vowed that her new government would usher in a new era of reforms.

Promising to treat her parliamentary opposition with "honour and respect" she said she was aware that the opposition of today can be the government of tomorrow.

Bhutto also said her government would try to maintain cordial relations between the centre and the provinces, as confrontations in the past had harmed the political atmosphere in the country.

Horse-trading, graft and purchasing loyalties of MPs in the past had harmed the democratic process and left a stigma on politicians, she said, voicing the hope that the present assembly would complete its five-year tenure and 'nobody would be allowed to undo the

people's mandate."

"My first priority would be to pull the country out of international isolation," she said, mentioning Islamabad's controversial nuclear programme, accusations of involvement in the drugs trade, and looming threats of being declared a state sponsoring terrorism.

"People have voted not to change the faces, they want a change of system," she said adding that "I pray to Allah (God) to help me in meeting these challenges."

Soon after taking her oath of office, today Bhutto appointed Farooq Ahmed Leghari as Foreign Minister, party sources said.

Leghari, a close confidant of Bhutto, served as deputy leader of the opposition during Sharif's government.

Bhutto also named Aftab Shaban Mirani, a senior leader of her Pakistan People's Party (PPP), as Defence Minister.

Like Leghari, Mirani also belongs to the landed aristocracy of Punjab and Sindh respectively.

A close relative of Bhutto, Mirani had earlier served as Chief Minister of her home province Sindh when her PPP government was in power in 1988-90.

Meanwhile a nominee of premier Bhutto's party (PPP) was elected Speaker of the Punjab Assembly today.

Hanif Ramay, a former Chief Minister of the politically key province, secured 130 votes to 107 polled by rival Zulfiqar Ali Khosa, candidate of Pakistan Muslim League (PML) of Nawaz Sharif.

The election ensured that Bhutto would get control over the province, seen crucial for the stability of her government.

The 248-member Punjab Assembly is to elect a Chief Minister of the province tomorrow.

Khaleda greets Benazir

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday greeted Benazir Bhutto on her being elected the Prime Minister of Pakistan, reports UNB.

"I extend to you warmest felicitations on your election to the high office of the Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," she said in a message of felicitation to Benazir.

The Bangladesh Prime Minister hoped that the people of Pakistan would prosper and get their hopes and aspirations fulfilled under the dynamic leadership of the newly elected Premier.

Khaleda said she looked forward to working closely with Benazir in further strengthening and consolidating the excellent relations existing between the two fraternal countries for the mutual benefit of the two peoples in the days ahead.

Hasina greets Benazir

Awami League president and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina congratulated Ms Benazir Bhutto on her assumption of the office of Prime Minister of Pakistan yesterday, reports UNB.

In a letter of felicitation to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, she said, "We followed with keen interest the outcome of the recent elections held under a neutral caretaker government. This was another milestone in the struggle of the people of Pakistan for strengthening and consolidating the democratic system of government in the country."

Hasina recalled her visit to Pakistan in September last year at the invitation of Ms Bhutto to a conference of the opposition leaders of the SAARC countries.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia being received by high officials of the Communications Ministry of Cyprus on her arrival at the Larnaca International Airport yesterday. — PID photo

Chinese team to study Rupsha Bridge project

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Bangladesh Prime Minister on different issues.

Airport ceremony over, the Prime Minister drove to Limassol, the second largest city of Cyprus, in a ceremonial motorcade.

She then reached the Le Meridien Hotel, located on the seaside. Begum Zia will be staying at the Meridien during her stay in Cyprus.

The Prime Minister's entourage includes Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman, members of Parliament Abdul Ghani and Begum Halima Khatun, editor of the Dainik Bangla Ahmed Humayun, editor of the Dainik Inqilab A M M Bahauddin, Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman, Secretary to the Prime Minister Kamaluddin Siddiqui and Press Secretary to the Prime Minister Mozammel Huq.

Earlier, Begum Zia left Dhaka this morning for Nicosia to attend the 50-nation conference, which is expected to continue till October 25.

The Prime Minister was seen off at the Zia International Airport by ministers, chiefs of the three services, diplomats and high civil and military officials.

Begum Zia also attended the

Khaleda arrives in Cyprus

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last Commonwealth summit, held in Harare in 1991.

The Cyprus summit is being held in the backdrop of profound and unprecedented changes in the global political scenario.

The five-day conference will be inaugurated by the President of Cyprus Glafkos Clerides at the International Conference Centre in Nicosia.

As a head of an elected democratic government Khaleda Zia will be in a special advantageous position to underline at the summit the important steps taken by her government to establish democracy on a firm footing and for the promotion of human rights at home and abroad.

The Cyprus summit will also provide Begum Zia an opportunity to renew and establish her personal contacts with Commonwealth leaders and further strengthen and consolidate Bangladesh's relations with those countries.

Bangladesh, the coordinator of the least developed countries (LDCs), will also have a good opportunity to underscore the serious difficulties being faced by the LDCs at the moment in the face of growing stagnation, disparities and volatile exchange and interest rates.

Begum Zia also attended the

9 WDB men suspended for corruption

SIRAJGANJ, Oct 19: Nine officials of the Water Development Board were suspended here today for their alleged misappropriation of about Tk 1.5 crore, reports UNB.

Official sources said they allegedly embezzled the money by issuing false work order and bills against 50 enlisted contractors of the Board's local office early last month.

The suspended officials are: former executive engineer of Sirajganj BWDB Bishnupada Halder, sub-divisional engineers Jamiruddin, Abdus Salam Chowdhury and Fazlul Karim, sub-assistant engineers Anwar Ali, Abdul Mannan Matbar, Moinul Haque, Abdul Bari and Jainal Abdin.

Champa murder case 6 more witnesses examined

BARISAL, Oct 19: Six more witnesses were cross-examined in the sensational Fausia Rahman Champa murder case on the fourth day of trial today, reports UNB.

With this, 18 witnesses out of 45 have been examined since the trial began on Saturday at the District and Sessions Judge's court.

The hearing of the case resumed after 1,044 days of suspension by a court order.

Those examined today are Liza Begum Liza, one of Champa's friends, Nurul Islam, lineman of the Power Development Board (Electrical Department), Aminul Islam Palash, Champa's brother, her relative Salahuddin and Nasruddin and Shridham Debnath, former Sub-inspector of Kotwali Thana.

Public Prosecutors Abdul Majid Munsi and Mukhlisur Rahman pleaded for the plaintiff while Advocate Sirajul Haq and Advocate Mahub Hossain stood in defence.

Two Russian Air officers killed in Algeria

ALGIERS, Oct 19: Muslim fundamentalist militants killed two Russian air force officers, officials said Tuesday, in the second fatal attack on foreigners in a 21-month insurgency, reports AP.

Three gunmen shot Lt Col Vladimir Valejny and Alexander Orlov on Saturday night as the two officers were leaving their residence in Laghouat, 400 kms (240 miles) south of Algiers, the Russian Embassy said.



Nancy Ali bidding final farewell to her illustrious husband S M Ali at The Daily Star office in the city yesterday. — Star photo

S M Ali laid to rest

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filed past the body of S M Ali, draped with flowers, and paid their last respects.

Abul Hasan Chowdhury, MP placed a bouquet on behalf of the Awami League president and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina.

The Jatiya Press Club, the Bangladesh Federal of Union of Journalists (BFUJ), the Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ) and leaders of other organisations also paid tributes to the late editor with bouquets.

Earlier in the afternoon, the body of S M Ali, who emerged as one of the country's most brilliant editors from the position of a cub reporter in a career spanning 44 years, was flown back to Dhaka from Bangkok.

Relatives, friends, colleagues and admirers as well as Civil Aviation and Biman officials were at the Zia International Airport to receive the coffin.

The body, which was accompanied by his wife Nancy Ali and brother Syed Muazzem Ali,

was received at the VIP lounge of the airport and brought to his Old DOHS residence.

After keeping the body at his home for sometime it was taken to the Baitul Mukarram Mosque for namaz-e-Janaza which took place after the Asr prayers.

From the Press Club, the body was brought to the Dhanmondi office of The Daily Star and placed inside the room he used as Editor before going to Bangkok on October 1 for treatment.

The directors of Mediaworld, the sponsoring company of the newspaper, journalists, officials and employees of The Daily Star offered munajat for the peace and salvation of the departed soul.

Amid subdued sobs of colleagues and relatives, the body of S M Ali was then taken to the Banani graveyard and buried there after the Maghrib prayers. Ali's *qul khwani* will be held Friday.

New fund for promoting higher studies

A taka one crore fund namely, the 'Prime Minister's Research and Higher Education Assistance Fund' has been formed to provide scholarships to the meritorious students and researchers of economics and science and technology disciplines for PhD programmes, reports BSS.

An implementation committee led by the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary will select topics, call nominations and select researchers for the fund every year.

The activities of the fund starts from the current fiscal.

CMCH killings

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they should not be expelled.

The college authorities also dissolved the students union of the Chittagong Medical College following Monday's violence.

The 72-hour doctors' strike called by the Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) from 6 pm Monday in protest against the violence, continued here at all hospitals of Chittagong while only emergency services were kept open. Doctors also suspended their private practices at the call of the BMA.

Sources said tension in and around the campus of the Chittagong Medical College Hospital had not yet eased.

Two detachments of police, most of them in riot-gear, continued their guard on the campus to prevent further violence.

Police said efforts were on to arrest the rest of the accused. Two cases have been filed with the Panchajanya thana, accusing 15 persons in connection with Monday's incident.

Meanwhile, the Chhatra Shibir gave a call for a half-day hartal tomorrow and the Chhatra League has called for a half-day hartal here on Thursday in protest against the killings at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Hasina condemns CMCH killings

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League (AL) chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday condemned the terrorist incident that left three persons, including a doctor, killed at the Chittagong Medical College Monday.

The AL leader felt that the killing was a deliberate attempt aimed at foiling her party's initiative to launch a social movement against widespread terrorism in the country.

Hasina, in a statement issued to the press last night, observed that such killings could not take place in broad day light unless the terrorists enjoyed immunity from the government.

She expressed her surprise over the indiscriminate armed attack on people inside the college cafeteria while police were supposedly patrolling the college campus.

Hasina also claimed that the incident had been planned to tarnish the image of the college unit of the Chhatra League, the student wing of her party.

Hartals

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tion of the country.

"So, unnecessary rules and regulations should go," the Finance Minister said. He also lashed out at bureaucratic tangles and redtapism. "It's frustrating all of us."

Criticising protectionism and managed trade by the rich nations, Rahman said any kind of protectionism demonstrates selfish attitude of the developed countries.

"These rich nations teach us liberalisation, but they shut their doors to the goods from the Third World," he said.

He was strongly in favour of liberalisation, saying liberalisation never harms the economy of any country. "If you open up everything, your quality will improve and you can compete with anybody."

About the donors' conditionalities, the Finance Minister said some of the conditions were creating bottlenecks in the process of country's industrialisation.

But, he hastened to add, all the conditions are not "impericable. Some of them are part of good management and good governance."

Addressing the function, Mahbubur Rahman observed that administrative anomalies and procedural obstruction ruled supreme. Experiment on a proposed 3-year liberalisation regime with the age-old system in place could not work, he said.

He sought legislation pertaining to non-performing industrial enterprises and constitution of an industrial and Financial Reconstruction Board.

He also stressed avoidance of procedural delays, continuity and implementation of supportive policies, obligatory trading in stocks for the Dhaka Stock Exchange membership to enhance liquidity, creating awareness about capital market and developing a debt market.

The Midnight File

US warns Serb leaders

WASHINGTON, Oct 19: The Clinton administration is warning Serb leaders in unusually strong terms that they risk air strikes by NATO war planes if the shelling of Sarajevo persists. Secretary of State Warren Christopher made the US position clear in a note to Serb president Slobodan Milosevic following the worst Serb shelling of Sarajevo in months, reports AP.

AIDS spreading rapidly in Ethiopia

ADDIS ABABA, Oct 19: AIDS is spreading rapidly in Ethiopia, and hospitals have reported an average of 335 new cases each month since July, a senior health official says. Dr Mengistau Mihret, head of National AIDS Prevention and Control office, estimated that 43,000 people have AIDS in Ethiopia, although hospitals have reported only 8,735 cases, reports AP.

Dhaka seeks work permits for Bangladeshis in Iran

Iran and Bangladesh yesterday stressed the need for strengthening bilateral cooperation in economic and technical fields, reports UNB.

Visiting Iranian Minister for Labour and Social Welfare Hossein Kamali and his Bangladesh counterpart Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan at a meeting at the state guest house Padma also called for closer cooperation among the Muslim nations to build up a more prosperous future for the Muslim Ummah.

The Bangladesh minister urged his Iranian counterpart to recruit more skilled and semi-skilled workers from Bangladesh.

He also called upon the Iranian government to grant work permits to the unauthorised Bangladeshis who formally applied for and also to consider the cases of those who could not apply in time and were engaged in sort of self-employment without indulging in criminal or anti-state activities.

The Iranian Minister was also urged to look into the problems of Bangladeshi doctors and other professionals who were affected due to introduction of a revised exchange rate of Iranian currency and could not save enough money to remit home for sustaining their families.

ICTVTR being an organ of the OIC, Iran was requested to treat it as their own organisation and send more trainees to the pioneer training institute in the field of technical education. The Iranian minister hoped

BADC asked
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funding for the railway and jute sectors might also be affected.

The BADC, as per the new schedule, would float tenders again for selling the equipment by 15 November. After the sale through tender, the leftover, along with accessories and spare parts, would be cleared through auctions.

The equipment, now stored in the godowns, include deep tubewells (DTW), shallow tubewells (STW), power pumps and all kinds of accessories and spares.

In the previous schedule, the sale programme through tenders was supposed to be completed by 30 September last. But the sources said the programme met with very poor response from the buyers who refrained from quoting reasonable prices in the hope of maximising profit.

The problem of the disposal of BADC's equipment was also discussed at a recent meeting of the cabinet where the revised schedule was approved.

IWT-3 project

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The 64.2 million dollar project comprising a 45 million dollar IDA credit, a five million dollar Finnish International Development Agency (FINIDA) credit and a 0.7 million dollar Japanese component has been in limbo since signing of the agreement.

The Shipping Ministry is especially critical of some terms and conditions imposed by the donor agencies which it deems unacceptable on grounds those may jeopardise the corporation's viability.

The Shipping Ministry has been objecting to four major conditions of the WB credit. The WB has imposed an investment ceiling on the corporation, which the BIWTC feels should be lifted. The BIWTC also objects to the high interest rate — 11.5 per cent — and says this would not be viable for the corporation. The corporation suggests it be lowered to 7.5 per cent.

BIWTC also wants that the fees for the consultancy service offered by FINIDA — unlikely to have a direct effect on the improvement of the corporation — be treated as a grant.

The BIWTC, which sees itself as a service-oriented agency, also feels there should not be any drastic reduction of its fleet strength. The WB had suggested that the fleet should be trimmed to 147 from the existing 300 river craft, but the BIWTC maintains the fleet should be scaled down to not below 283 vessels and the manpower should be rationalised in keeping with the downsizing.

JMB project

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critically on receiving Japan's green signal.

Japan has been requested to provide 200 million dollars for the project. The government was hoping that Japan's agreement to cofinance the project will be finalised before the deadline of October 15 to submit the draft resettlement action plan. There was no word from Japan in this regard until close of business on October 19. Senior officials, however, remain optimistic: "Japan is not constrained by our deadline," one official said.

Most believe that it is unlikely that Japan, the top donor for Bangladesh, will not associate itself with a priority project like the Jamuna Bridge which has passed the joint scrutiny of the World Bank and the ADB.