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NEWS BRIEFS

BNP joint meet today
 The election conducting committee formed by the BNP in connection with the Dhaka City Corporation election has summoned a joint meeting of Parliament members elected from Dhaka city, presidents and general secretaries, organising secretaries of the BNP thanas and ward units of the city, participating commissioner candidates and presidents and secretaries of all front organisations in the city, thanas and wards at 11 am today at its central office. All concerned have been requested to attend the meeting in time reports BSS.

ALPP meets Feb 4
 The Awami League Parliamentary Party will meet on February 4 in the conference room of Leader of the Opposition at Sangsad Bhaban at 4 pm. Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim has requested the party MPs to attend the meeting, reports UNB.

10 houses gutted in Chittagong
 CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: At least ten thatched dwelling houses were gutted in a fire which broke out at Hazipara under port police station here last night. According to fire brigade sources, the fire originated from a kitchen of one of the houses. Five units of fire brigade extinguished the fire after an hour struggle. The loss was estimated at about Taka one lakh, reports BSS.

Nasir greets Mohiuddin
 CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: The outgoing Mayor of Chittagong, Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin, today congratulated his successor A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury as well as the city dwellers. In a statement he assured continued cooperation in making Chittagong into a beautiful city. "I had planned to turn the city into a 'Garden City'... Although I was not elected I will extend my support and cooperation towards materialising my plans," reports UNB.

Repolling in 25 centres before Ramadan : CEC

Repolling in the postponed centres of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) elections will be held some time before Ramadan, in about ten days' time.

This was disclosed by Chief Election Commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf while talking to newsmen in his office yesterday.

The Election Commission (EC) postponed polling in 25 centres of the DCC Sunday on grounds of deterioration of law and order.

Replying to a question, the CEC said the commission was yet to decide whether there would be repolling in the three centres where results had been kept withheld.

Asked about the fate of the results of four centres which could not be traced Sunday night, the Chief Election Commissioner said it was an

arithmetical error. In fact, there was no case of non-availability of any results from any centre.

When asked to explain the need for holding re-elections in the postponed centres when the difference in the margin of votes between two leading mayoral contestants is already greater than the votes involved in those centres, the CEC told newsmen it was the commissions legal obligation to hold the repolling.

The rules relating to local government elections, do not allow the commission to avoid repolling even if the results of the repolling have no chance of influencing the already announced unofficial results," the CEC said.

"Besides, the repolling in the postponed centres was necessary for the commissioner candidates," Justice

Rouf said.

The official results of the city corporation polls would be announced after the consolidation of the total results and, in that case, the invalid votes would be taken into account, the CEC said.

Turning to the complaints regarding spurious voting, Justice Rouf said the commission had received many such complaints but it was impossible to check the phenomena unless identity cards for the voters were issued.

Giving his reactions over the just-held city corporation polls, the CEC expressed his satisfaction saying that the commission had been able to create a sense of responsibility towards elections among the common people.

Justice Rouf observed that the elections, barring some

See Page 12 Col 1



Visitors at an Ekushey Book Fair stall at the Bangla Academy premises in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Ekushey Book Fair opens

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair, the largest cultural festival of the nation, began yesterday at the Bangla Academy premises.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia inaugurated the fair and the month-long programmes organised by the Academy in memory of the martyrs who laid down their lives in the struggle for the sake of their mother tongue and cultural independence.

The inaugural function was presided over by the State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahanara Begum.

A total of 676 organisations are participating in this year's book fair while the number of stalls is 841.

A poster calling for writing Bengali in appropriate spelling as directed by the Bangla Academy, has also been published.

From today onwards many organisations will begin seminars, poetry session and other cultural functions at the Academy.

Meanwhile, braving drizzles and the rain-soaked ground, a good number of people visited the stalls yesterday.

'Ekushey' is our source of consciousness; PM

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday said 'Ekushey' was the source of our national consciousness and the book fair on the occasion arouses our sense of respect to the national language and culture, reports BSS.

Describing Ekushey as 'Our Pride', she said the country's independence and democracy are the fruits of 'Amar Ekushey'.

Inaugurating a month-long Amar Ekushey book fair organised by the Bangla Academy here in the morning at the sprawling premises of the academy, the Prime Minister said such fairs symbolise mutual tolerance and practice of democratic values through coexistence of different views and ideologies expressed in these books.

Paying tributes to the martyrs of the Language Movement as well as to those of the Liberation War, the Prime Minister said the aim of the Language Movement, the

Liberation War and the democratic movement was to ensure the rights of Freedom of speech, consolidation of democracy and achievement of self-reliance.

She said, We have been implementing the objectives of these movements as the representatives elected by the people.

Begum Zia acknowledged the immense contribution of writers and poets in enriching and establishing the Bangla Language in the world. She called upon the present generation to familiarise themselves better with our culture and heritage.

Begum Zia said the the Bangla Academy book fair which is one of the biggest in this region, is a grand meeting centre of the country's intellectuals, poets and litterateurs.

Lakhs of people come to this fair and see, buy books and participate in the cultural functions and discussions, expressed.

See Page 12 Col 4

Nat'l Poetry Festival begins

The Eighth National Poetry Festival began at the TSC crossing on the Dhaka University campus yesterday morning.

Poet Sufia Kamal inaugurated the two-day festival.

In her inaugural speech, Sufia Kamal urged all to save the country from terrorism and communalism.

The festival, arranged by the National Poetry Council, was also addressed by Samudra Gupta, Mazharul Islam, Faiz Ahmed, Japanese poets Tamako Kabe and Futsui Hazumi and Indian poet Amarendra Sen Gupta. Poet Syed Shamsul Huq presided over the inaugural session of the festival, which began at 9 in the morning.

Sufia Kamal alleged that the government had failed to protect the rights of women, children and the general people.

The second session of the

See Page 12 Col 7

'Contentious bilateral issues hinder progress of SAARC'

The Ambassadors and High Commissioners of SAARC countries to Bangladesh at a discussion meeting in the capital yesterday said, the SAARC was moving in the right direction but contentious bilateral issues sometimes hindered the process.

Pakistan's High Commissioner Anwar Kamal said the security problems and slow process were hindering the progress of the seven-nation South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

"We must try to resolve our disputes," he told the meeting held at Hotel Sheraton, adding

that satisfactory progress has been made in line with the SAARC charter and within the limited resources of the member countries.

The Rotary Club of Dhaka organised the discussion on "SAARC: Expectations and Realities."

There was no representative from the Maldives as Male has no mission in Dhaka.

Rotary District Governor Magfur Uddin Ahmed presided over the discussion meeting which was conducted by the president of the club, Ozair Farooq.

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Mourners carrying the coffins of the six who were killed in a post-election violence in the city's Lalbagh area Monday, after the Namaz-e-Janaza at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque yesterday. — Star photo

New DCC ward commissioners

The Election Commission yesterday released a list of 80 Ward Commissioners who were unofficially declared elected in Sunday's Dhaka City Corporation polls, reports UNB.

Polls in 10 wards were withheld because of violation of election rules and troubles at the polling centres. Repolling in those wards will be held as soon as possible, the Election Commission sources said.

Following is the list of the Ward Commissioners who were unofficially declared elected: 1. Hafizul Islam Kusum, 2. Ismail Hossain, 3. M Ali Haider, 4. Zaman Mostafa, 5. Mostafa Kamal, 6. Ahsanullah, 7. Hafizur Rashid, 8. Aga Khan Manju, 9. Motwar Hossain Dipu, 10. Shajahan Dewan, 11. ABM Delwar Hossain, 12. Showkat Ali, 13. Abdus Sattar, 14. Abdul Kader, 15. Shafiquddin, 16. Yusuf Ullah, 17. Kazi Hazrat Ali, 18. Anwar Hossain, 19. Tariquillah Sikder, 20. Habibur Rahman, 21. Abdul Quayum, 22. Liaquat Ali, 23. Mansur Ali, 24. Jahiruddin Babul, 25. Rafiq Ali Bhuiyan, 26. Withheld, 27. Rahmat Ali, 28. Mosharrar Hossain, 29. Enamul Huq Sardar, 30. ASM Mostafa Badsha, 31.

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Half-day hartal observed Thousands attend funeral of Lalbagh victims

Thousands of people took to the streets of Lalbagh in the capital yesterday during a half-day hartal observed to protest Monday's carnage in which six people died.

All shops, educational institutions and market places of the busy residential-cum-business areas of Lalbagh were closed during the hartal hours and all modes of transport remained off the roads.

Since early morning, the people from all walks of life wearing black badges came out on the streets while black flags flew atop most of the houses in Lalbagh.

Sporadic processions were also brought out in the area.

The marchers chanted slogans like 'Nab Abdul Aziz' and 'Hang killer Aziz'.

Thousands of people gathered at the Nawabganj Park where the bodies of the six victims were kept for some time to enable the people to see. It was a heart-rending sight with the relatives and friends of the deceased wailing hysterically.

The six were killed and 50

others injured in an armed attack on a victory procession, allegedly by the supporters of one Abdul Aziz, a BNP-backed commissioner candidate in Ward 59 Monday. Aziz was defeated in the city corporation polls by his Awami League rival.

A heavy contingent of police was deployed in different areas of Lalbagh, and also at the residence of Aziz, who has been absconding.

Angry demonstrators picketed many places of Lalbagh during the hartal hours. Brickbats were hurled at two cars and an autorickshaw near the Plassey crossing at about 9:15 in the morning, halting the movement of vehicular traffic in the locality for the day.

Students of the Badrunessa Girls College brought out a procession, welding sticks and paraded the roads in Lalbagh and Bakshishbar.

The first namaz-e-janaza of the victims was held at 11 am at the Nawabganj Park. A large number of people attended.

See Page 12 Col 4

News Analysis Voters express disenchantment

A certain degree of voter disenchantment, coupled with complacency and indiscipline within the ruling BNP, and a spirited, people-oriented campaign approach by the opposition Awami League appear to have shaped the final outcome of the just-concluded city corporation polls in Dhaka and Chittagong.

And although the ruling party managed to retain the mayorships of both Khulna and Rajshahi, the Awami League also made significant inroads in those two cities. All four BNP candidates for mayorship had had stints at the post before resigning to contest the polls.

The polls results were quite a reversal of fortune for the ruling party vis-a-vis the parliamentary elections of 1991 when it had convincingly won all 14 Jatiya Sangsad seats on offer in the four metropolitan

cities. The BNP also won all four by-elections — three in Dhaka and one in Chittagong — held in these cities since the parliamentary polls.

However, this time around the ruling BNP lost two of the most prized posts at stake — the mayorships of Dhaka and Chittagong — to its arch rival the Awami League (AL).

Alienation of certain blocks of voters and disenchantment among others are being identified as the primary reasons for the spectacular defeat of the ruling party in the two major cities.

Key voting blocks, specially in the capital, were turned away by some recent government decisions. Perhaps, the most damaging among them were the eviction of the hawkers and slum-dwellers and the perceived government plan to phase-out rickshaws and force government employ-

ees with 25 years of service to go on compulsory retirement. Retrenchment in the public sector enterprises was another factor.

The AL used these government decisions fully to their advantage to win over those alienated voters during the campaigning. The AL even forced BNP candidate Mirza Abbas to issue a disclaimer at an election rally that he had never intended to phase-out the rickshaws from the capital.

The Prime Minister and BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia was also compelled to say in a public meeting that the government had no plan to retire the government employees on completion of 25 years of service.

Disillusionment among the voters, political analysts point out, grew from the deteriorating law and order situation, a

See Page 12 Col 7

Mir Shawkat denies charge

President of the city unit of the BNP Lt Gen (Retd) Mir Shawkat Ali in a statement yesterday expressed his shock at the heinous attempt by a section of press to involve him in the killing of six people in Lalbagh Monday, reports BSS.

Shawkat also expressed his shock and surprise at the statement made by the Opposition leader involving him (Shawkat) with the killing.

He said, I want to categorically state that the reports in a section of newspapers and the statement of Leader of the Opposition in regard to the incident are totally baseless, concocted, politically motivated and heinous. It is an attempt to undermine me (Shawkat) in the eye of the people.

New Ctg mayor demands 'due development funds'

CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: The Mayor elect of the Chittagong City Corporation A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury appealed to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to stop the 'step-motherly' treatment meted to Chittagong during her tenure regarding the city's development.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia you will be greeted and accepted by the people of Chittagong and I will also welcome you as the Mayor of Chittagong City Corporation if you take initiatives for materialising your commitments made before the election for development of this port city.

Mohiuddin said.

Mohiuddin was addressing a victory rally held this afternoon at the Lalight Maidan. Streams of jubilant people poured into the rally venue while hundreds of processions accompanied by bands and dancing youths with coloured water sprayed bodies thronged there, raising full-throated slogans in favour of Mohiuddin on his victory in the January 30 city corporation election.

The roof tops of all the adjacent buildings were also crowded with curious onlookers. The supporters also expressed their joy by exploding

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Tribunal declares Akhtaruzzaman's JS election null & void

CHITTAGONG, Feb 1: The First Additional District and Election Tribunal Judge Syed Enayet Ullah today declared null and void the election of Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu as a Jatiya Sangsad member from the Anowara-West Paltiya constituency of Chittagong, reports BSS.

The BNP nominee for the same constituency Advocate Kabir Chowdhury had filed a case against Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury on grounds that the latter had resorted to terrorism, compelled the voters to vote in his favour and even occupied the polling centres.

Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury did not appear before the tribunal but submitted his statement in writing, refuting the allegations against him.

Sixteen witnesses appeared in favour of the complainant.

Barrister Salimul Huq Khan Milky, Barrister Salfuddin Mahmud, advocates M A Mannan, Abul Kasem Chowdhury, Fauzul Amin Chowdhury and Amarkrishna Sen appeared on behalf of the complainant while advocates Nazim Ullah, Shawkat Hussain Chowdhury and Anwaruzzaman Chowdhury defended Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury.

Salam Talukder condemns Lalbagh killings

Secretary General of the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal Barrister Abdus Salam Talukder has strongly criticised and condemned the dastardly killings in Lalbagh area yesterday, reports BSS.

In a statement issued last night, Talukder called for immediate investigation into the incident, and arrest and punishment to the culprits whoever they might be.

The BNP Secretary General prayed for the peace of the souls who were killed and urged the government to arrange proper treatment of the persons injured in the incident.

Talukder also expressed condolence to the members of the bereaved family, relations, friends and colleagues.

Strongly protesting the attempts by certain group to implicate the BNP with the tragic incident, Talukder said the BNP was never involved with such incidents in the past and not at present.

Abbas greets Hanif, other mayors-elect

Mirza Abbas, the BNP's mayoral candidate in the just concluded Dhaka City Corporation elections, has felicitated his rival candidate Mohammad Hanif for polling the majority votes. He also conveyed his congratulations to the elected mayors of Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi, reports BSS.

In a statement yesterday, Abbas expressed his gratitude to those who voted for him as well as to those who extended support and cooperation in the polls.

Mirza Abbas, former mayor of Dhaka, conveyed his thanks to the city dwellers for exercising their right of franchise, with a determination to continue the democratic process and strengthening it further.

'Saving stamps' withdrawn

The government has withdrawn the 'saving stamps' of the National Savings Scheme with effect from January 27, an official handout said yesterday, reports UNB.

The sale of the stamps from the post office and offices of the national savings and the bureau of savings have been stopped from that day.

The customers who have the stamps can convert them within three months from January 27.

The stamps will be considered cancelled after the stipulated time the handout said.

Hasina off to USA

Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina left last night for the United States to attend the National Breakfast Prayer in Washington, reports UNB.

Hasina is expected to return home on February 8.