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The Daily Star

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BNP offers AL dialogue to resolve crisis

By Asiuzzaman

The ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has offered its arch-rival the Awami League a dialogue in a bid to diffuse the present political tension and make Parliament effective, a senior BNP leader told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity.

The BNP leader, who holds a key post in the party, himself made the offer to another senior AL leader holding a responsible position in his party.

"We are awaiting a response from the AL," he told this correspondent.

"Please do not quote me, but I told a senior AL leader on Wednesday last to help open the dialogue," the BNP leader said.

"He will discuss the matter in the party forum and inform

me," he said. However, AL leaders were unavoidable for comment because they were attending a meeting of the party central working committee till late last night.

The BNP leader said his party would try to hold meetings with other opposition parties ahead of the 14th session of Parliament scheduled to convene on May 4.

In reply to a question if this offer for a dialogue was because of opposition pressure, the BNP leader said, "No, we are only making a democratic gesture."

"We sincerely and honestly want an effective Parliament. Therefore, we have taken the initiative for talks," he said.

He also said there was pres-

sure on the Jatiya Party leadership from within against hobnobbing with the AL and the Jamaat had already dissociated itself from the AL and the JP since the last JS session.

"I don't know how many demands they will come up with, but we are ready to discuss all matters," he said.

"There will be no pre-condition for the discussions," he added.

However, asked if he were optimistic about a positive outcome of the proposed talks, he said although his party's efforts had failed to bring the boycotting Opposition back to the last JS session, yet the ruling party would continue to explore every possible avenue to resolve the political impasse.

JS to go into session May 4

Parliament has been summoned to sit on May 4 (Wednesday) at 4:30 pm after 56 days of recess since March 7 when the last session was prorogued amidst a staggering Opposition boycott of the House, reports UNB.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday issued the summons in fulfilment of the constitutional obligation.

The relevant provision of the constitution says the Jatiya Sangsad must be called in to session within 60 days from the prorogation of the last session.

Opposition groups in Parliament meet tomorrow

Leaders of the opposition groups in Parliament will meet tomorrow to decide whether they would join the upcoming Parliament session and evolve a common constitutional formula for an interim care-taker government.

Opposition sources told UNB that they would meet at the Sangsad Bhaban chamber of Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina to review the overall political development and thrash out a common strategy in view of the summoning of Parliament on May 4.

The entire Opposition staged a walkout on March 1 See Page 12 Col 7

AL to sustain pressure on govt

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League central working committee (ALCWC) yesterday resolved to sustain its pressure on the government for holding the next general elections under a non-partisan, caretaker government.

The ALCWC members arrived at this decision after twelve hours of deliberations starting at 9:30 am yesterday. The meeting, with a three-hour lunch break from 1 pm, continued until midnight. See Page 12 Col 7

IRRI, Boro procurement drive delayed

By Special Correspondent

The IRRI-boro rice procurement drive for the current season is being delayed and the government is yet to announce a policy outline in this regard.

The drive usually starts on April 15 every year. But according to relevant sources, the government's procurement is unlikely to begin even in the next couple of weeks.

When contacted, an authoritative source in the Ministry of Food said a policy has already been formulated which is likely to be placed before the Cabinet on Monday for approval. The policy incorporates the proposed price and procurement target as well as the date of commencement of the drive.

However, the authorities declined to disclose anything regarding the policy before its approval by the Cabinet. As re-

gards the delay, they said this was mainly due to late harvesting of the crop this year.

The IRRI-boro procurement during 1993 was a total failure because only 1000 tonnes of rice out of a target of two lakh tonnes were procured by the government. The price fixed last year was Tk 225 for a maund of paddy and Tk 256.40 for rice.

The cause behind the poor procurement performance last year was a lack of initiative by the authorities. "Since the godowns were full at the time, the Food Department officials were not much interested to purchase any more," sources said.

But this year, the government is expected to be more keen to procure a substantial quantity of IRRI-boro rice to ensure fair price for the farm- See Page 12 Col 8

WB for fast-tracking privatisation of SOEs

Star Report

Early privatisation of state-owned enterprises (SOE) in the utilities and infrastructure sectors, accelerated privatisation of manufacturing SOEs and greater private participation in SOEs that will remain under public ownership for some time are needed to deal with the poor SOE sector performance.

These actions were proposed in a latest World Bank report on privatisation and adjustment, released recently.

The report further said the Privatisation Board should be given a strong mandate to manage, co-ordinate and implement the privatisation programme.

In view of the public resistance to the programme to divest the SOEs, the report suggested that the government needs to issue a privatisation policy statement and launch a significant public relations campaign to build a broad-based support for the pro-

gramme. At present, out of some 350 SOEs, 235 are now under public ownership because of earlier disinvestment. The utilities and infrastructure sector has the dominant share of 80 per cent of assets the losses of these SOEs in 1992-93 had swollen to Taka 20 billion and their bad debts have threatened the financial viability of the state owned banks.

Discussing the earlier privatisation experience, the World Bank said the outcomes were often affected by the 'permissive environment' in which disinvestment took place and which the private sector often took advantage of. "The lesson that emerges is that whilst the benefits of privatisation are clear, they will become manifest only if privatisation programme is managed in a transparent, credible and well conceived manner and the enabling and regula- See Page 12 Col 8

Mujibnagar Day today

By Staff Correspondent

The 24th Mujibnagar Day will be observed today.

On this day in 1971, the provisional government of Bangladesh was formed at the now historic mango grove at Baidyernath Tala of Meherpur district. The place which came to be known as Mujibnagar became the focus of world-wide attention as the capital of Bangladesh during the Liberation War.

The government in-exile was sworn in at Meherpur on See Page 12 Col 6

Teachers to skip talks with minister

By Staff Correspondent

Teachers in the country's 11,000 non-government schools and 640 private colleges are due to begin an indefinite strike from tomorrow Monday.

Meanwhile, representatives of the agitating teachers have also decided to boycott a dialogue, convened by the Education Minister this morning.

Education Minister Jamiruddin Sircar, Bar-at-Law, has sought bilateral talks with the leaders of different teachers' associations at his Secretariat See Page 12 Col 4

Tripura governor may visit CHT tomorrow

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 16: India's Tripura state governor Ramesh Bhandari, accompanied by a delegation of Chakma refugee leaders, is expected to visit Chittagong Hill Tracts on April 18 to see the rehabilitation of tribal refugees who returned home in the first phase this year.

Bhandari is expected to arrive in Dhaka before visiting the CHT.

Informed sources say, if the Tripura governor and other See Page 12 Col 4



Prof Jahan Ara Begum, State Minister for Cultural Affairs speaking at a press conference organised by the UNDP at the National Press Club yesterday. On her right is Eimi Watanabe, the UNDB resident representative. — Star photo

UNDP suggests 20pc JS seats be reserved for women

A United Nations body has suggested that the reserved seats for women in Parliament and local councils should be raised to 20 per cent and be filled through direct voting, reports UNB.

The UNDP suggestion is part of a package of its recommendations for upgrading women's status contained in a report released at a press conference at the National Press Club yesterday. State Minister for Cultural Affairs Prof Jahan Ara Begum formally released the report.

There are now 10 per cent seats reserved in Parliament for women, which are filled with lady MPs elected indirectly by members of Parli-

ament. "Women are, therefore, more accountable to male politicians than to the general population," the report said, referring to the reserved seats for women in Parliament and local councils.

The UNDP Report 1994, titled 'Human Development in Bangladesh: Empowerment of Women', noted that the electoral system of the country, both at national and local levels, discriminates against women.

It suggested ending gender discrimination and empowering women through redistribution of power from men to women, thereby creating more balance in power-sharing,

electoral and legal reforms, education and employment.

The report also suggested that planning and decision-making committees at the local level should comprise at least 50 per cent women and social programmes should be introduced to encourage women's effective participation in such fora.

It also noted that several laws clearly discriminate against women while some laws aimed at protecting them are not properly implemented.

"The legal system needs major review from its potential for affirmative action to redress past imbalances against women." See Page 12 Col 1

Barisal Medical College closed sine die

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Apr 16: The Sher-e-Bangla Medical College here was closed sine die today following a fierce gunbattle between two rival students' groups, police and college sources said.

Armed supporters of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL M-I) and the ruling BNP's students wing the JCD locked in pre-dawn clashes leaving at least 20 people injured, four of them seriously.

More than 100 bomb blasts and dozens of gunshots were heard during the one and a half-hour clashes, witnesses See Page 12 Col 3

50 hurt in clash during hartal in Sirajganj

From Our Correspondent

SIRAJGANJ, Apr 16: A half-day hartal in the Kamarkhanda thana area today was marked by violence in which at least 50 people, including a magistrate and nine policemen, were injured.

Kamarkhanda Thana BNP called the 6-hour hartal today in protest against the killing of the unit president, Jamat Ali, 38, on April 12 by some unknown assailants. See Page 12 Col 3

NEWS BRIEFS

IGP off to France

Inspector General of Police A S M Shahjahan left for Paris early yesterday on a week-long visit to France. He is visiting France on an invitation of the French Ministry of Interior, reports UNB.

Oli to visit ROK

Communications Minister Oli Ahmed will pay a five-day official visit to South Korea beginning April 24. Official sources said, during the visit, the minister will discuss with leading Korean industrialists and businessmen the prospects of investment in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

EBL

EBL's 6th Branch at English Road, Dhaka

Eastern Bank expands to meet its clients' needs. Our 6th branch goes into operation from today, the 17th April 1994 at 5 English Road, Dhaka.

The 7th branch will be inaugurated soon at Laldighir Par, Sylhet.

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Head Office: Jiban Bima Bhaban, 10 Dilkusha Commercial Area, Dhaka.

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PHILIPS WorldCupUSA94

The Daily Star

WorldCupUSA94 Lucky Draw for Quiz 1 Today

At the Jatiya Press Club (At 6.30 PM)

Total Entries	17,740
Correct Entries	9,592
Incorrect	8,148

The draw will be from the correct entries and the Lucky Winners will get the following fabulous prizes

- Powervision CTV 21" (1st Prize) Tk. 26,950
- Philips B/W TV 17" (2nd Prize) Tk. 7,200
- Turbo Stereo Recorder (3rd Prize) Tk. 5,500
- 4 Dozens of Philips Bulbs (4th Prize) Tk. 1,200 X 5 Prizes

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Names and addresses of the LUCKY WINNERS and how and when to collect the prizes will be published tomorrow

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IN The Daily Star of Monday, 18th April, 1994

The Daily Star... we choose to lead