

LDF convention tomorrow

By Nazmul Ashraf

Representatives of 64 political parties, professional groups, trade unions and socio-cultural organisations are likely to join the Left parties' national convention in the city tomorrow to gear up agitation against the fundamentalists.

The convention, sponsored by the eight-party Left Democratic Front (LDF), will also try to unite the progressive forces against the communal and anti-liberation elements, organisers said.

The convention is likely to include in its declaration, demand for a ban on religion-based politics, they said.

Until yesterday, LDF leaders completed their meetings with representatives of most of the 64 organisations. They are scheduled to meet the journalists and university and college teachers today.

According to the organisers, all the 64 groups have confirmed their participation in the convention. However, the Awami League did not confirm its participation until last night. The LDF has so far not invited the ruling BNP, the

Senior SAARC officials meet informally

Senior officials from the SAARC countries last night held informal consultations mainly to discuss today's programme leading to the regional foreign ministers' meeting which begins here Saturday.

After the meeting, lasting for a little more than an hour, Director General, SAARC Desk, Bangladesh Foreign Affairs Ministry Ashfaqur Rahman, said the senior officials discussed procedural elements, structure of the meeting as well as programmes.

Today programming committee, comprising senior officials, from the region will meet, to be followed by meetings of the drafting committee and informal consultations among the foreign secretaries of South Asia.

Reports are expected to be adopted by the programming committee today.

The participants at the informal consultations among senior officials of the region included Director General, Bangladesh Foreign Office, Ashfaqur Rahman, Director, SAARC Desk, Bhutanese Foreign Affairs Ministry Mrs. Kunzang C. Namgyel, Joint Secretary, Indian Foreign Affairs Ministry, Bhaskar Mitra, Director, Maldives Ministry of Foreign Relations, Abdul Ghafoor Mohamad, Nepal's Under Secretary, SAARC Division at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Badri Prasad Khanal, Pakistan's Director, SAARC Desk at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iftekhar Hossain Kazmi and Sri Lanka's Director General, SAARC Division at the Foreign Affairs Ministry, A K David.

Chakma rehabilitation

From Page 1 Col 4
1,177 families was now going on sentences.

The Sonali Bank opened a temporary counter at the reception camp for exchange of the Indian currency brought by the refugees. Some 4,70,000 Indian rupees were received by the bank during the first phase of repatriation at a rate of Tk 1.25 for one Rupee. Sonali Bank later sold it to the Singapore and Hong Kong money market incurring some losses, bank officials said.

The peaceful sit-in at an Amman mosque was organised by eight Muslim fundamentalists and leftists groups that oppose the US-backed Middle East peace process. They regard Monday's meeting in Washington as a sellout of Arab rights to lands lost to Israel in the Mideast wars.

The Washington meeting is a black day in our history," one banner read.

At the White House on Monday, the two leaders met publicly for the first time and were to later sign a declaration ending the official state of war between their countries.

Many Jordanians favour a settlement, believing it will boost the stagnant economy by encouraging joint ventures with Israel. Protests against unpopular government policies are frequent in Jordan, so the low turnout at Monday's well-publicised demonstration seemed to reflect a widespread desire for peace.

Opposition by the groups that protested at the al-Husseini mosque downtown has been mostly vocal and peaceful. Hussein warned earlier this month that his patience was wearing thin with their anti-peace slogans.

An official of the Special Affairs Division, which is dealing with the tribal issue, told The Daily Star that the estimated cost might go up if the repatriation process took a long time. He failed to give any specific date by which the repatriation would be completed.

Meanwhile, refugee leader Upendra Lal Chakma, who lives in Tripura, told The Daily Star that if the commitments were met, it would not take much time to complete the repatriation.

He wants to come back with the last batch of refugees, he said as the second phase of repatriation began on July 21.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina speaking at the Central Working Committee meeting at the party office at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city yesterday. — Star photo

AL calls hartal

From Page 1 Col 7
self from the Jamaat-e-Islami as soon as possible, meeting sources said.

The leaders noted that confusion about the AL's commitment to the spirit of liberation war had been created among the people because of the party's 'tactical relation' with the Jamaat, the sources added.

Some of the leaders, however, felt that an all-out agitation against the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its 'old partner' would automatically remove any confusion about the AL's commitment to the spirit of liberation war.

The meeting, chaired by Sheikh Hasina, was adjourned till 2:00 this afternoon.

The meeting is likely to discuss the party strategy to intensify the agitation to press home its demand for holding general elections under a caretaker government.

The decisions relating to the party's next course of action would be made public by Sheikh Hasina at a rally scheduled to be held in the city tomorrow.

Israeli troops shell Hezbollah bases

RACHAYA (Lebanon), July 25: Israeli forces early today unleashed an eight-hour artillery barrage against strongholds of the Iranian-backed Hezbollah guerrilla movement in southern Lebanon, police said here, reports AFP.

Sixty heavy-calibre shells were fired at the Syrian controlled southern Bekaa valley from Israel's self-declared security zone in south Lebanon, the police said. There was no immediate report of casualties.

The shelling lasted for eight hours after midnight Sunday.

Protest in Amman against summit

AMMAN, July 25: Only 50 people showed up for a sit-in Monday against King Hussein's meeting with Yitzhak Rabin, bolstering the king's assertion that most of his subjects want peace with Israel, reports AP.

The peaceful sit-in at an Amman mosque was organised by eight Muslim fundamentalists and leftists groups that oppose the US-backed Middle East peace process. They regard Monday's meeting in Washington as a sellout of Arab rights to lands lost to Israel in the Mideast wars.

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Garments workers

From Page 1 Col 6
for the workers of garments industry in 1985 and then the second one in 1992 following workers movement.

None of the Wage Board Awards has been implemented, he said.

Referring to the deplorable condition of the garments workers, Amin said they would announce a programme for greater movement on September 2 at a national convention of garments workers in Dhaka.

During the month-long programme, the federation will submit memorandum to Garments Owners Association, Inspector of Industries and Labour Ministry, and organise rallies and a campaign week besides holding convention on September 2.

The press conference was attended by leaders of the federation Baharain Sultan Bahar Md Nasir and Parul Begum.

Jordan-Israel accord

From Page 1 Col 5

"And so it is that on this day we have been able to take an historic step, which we hope and pray will be the benefit of our peoples," Hussein said.

Only months ago, Rabin met with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat at the White House to sign an agreement granting self-government to Palestinians who have lived under Israeli rule in Gaza and on the west bank of the Jordan River.

It was 15 years ago that Egypt and Israel came to Washington to sign a peace treaty.

Before putting the finishing touches on the declaration at a White House meeting, Rabin and Hussein publicly greeted each other with a handshake and warm smiles.

Rabin said their handshake symbolises much more than two people who no longer take up arms against one another. He said he looked forward to the day when such greetings would become routine.

"Your Majesty, the entire state of Israel is shaking your hand," he told Hussein.

Welcoming them to the White House, Clinton said, "On this morning of promise these visionary statesmen from ancient lands have chosen to heal the rift that for too long has divided their lands."

The obvious warmth between Rabin and Hussein, who have met secretly in the past, was in sharp contrast to the restraint when Rabin met Arafat last September.

On that occasion Arafat held out his hand and Rabin hesitated before grasping it.

With US help, Israeli and Jordanian officials Sunday night negotiated the language of a declaration.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher predicted on television that the two countries

would have a formal peace treaty in a matter of months.

Hussein and Rabin were the guests of honour at a White House dinner tonight and will address a joint session of Congress on Tuesday.

For Clinton, another firm step toward peace in the Middle East was likely to be the high point in a week that will see the opening Tuesday of potentially embarrassing hearings in Congress on questions arising from the White-water land dealings in Arkansas.

In September Israel and the PLO signed an accord that promised self-government for the Palestinians, a promise that is being realized only now after months of difficult negotiations.

The path to peace between Israel and Jordan looks far less tortuous.

Despite periodic warfare between the two countries, Hussein has met secretly in the past with senior Israeli officials. But he rules a country in which more than half the population is of Palestinian ancestry and has had to proceed with extreme caution where the Israelis are concerned.

Arafat hails accord

GAZA, July 25: PLO chairman Yasser Arafat today congratulated the leaders of Israel and Jordan for their agreement ending the state of belligerency between their countries.

"I appreciate very much what has been done and I am sending my congratulations to President Clinton and King Hussein at what they have signed today," Arafat told reporters in the Palestinian self-rule area of Gaza.

The large dome of the shrine of the Muslim saint Lal Shabab Qalandar at Sehwan, 200 km (125 miles) northeast of Karachi, fell when dozens of people were busy in religious ceremonies, the volunteer said by telephone.

Seven bodies and more than 20 injured people were found under tonnes of debris, he said.

7 die as dome of shrine collapses in Karachi

KARACHI, July 25: At least seven Muslims died and more than 20 were injured today when the main dome of an old shrine in southern Pakistan fell on them, an ambulance volunteer said, reports Reuter.

The large dome of the shrine of the Muslim saint Lal Shabab Qalandar at Sehwan, 200 km (125 miles) northeast of Karachi, fell when dozens of people were busy in religious ceremonies, the volunteer said by telephone.

Seven bodies and more than 20 injured people were found under tonnes of debris, he said.

Russia to sell 7 rocket engines to India

NEW DELHI, July 25: Russia has agreed to sell seven cryogenic rocket engines to India but it will not transfer their technology, an Indian government minister said today, reports Reuter.

Minister of State for External Affairs Raghunandan Lal Bhattacharya said that the Indian Parliament had agreed to sell the engines to India initially with provision for another three later.

"This will be without transfer of technology," Bhattacharya said.

Bhattacharya's comments were at variance with Indian space scientists who claimed in September last year that their colleagues had acquired the drawings of the engines from Russian experts, despite US objections.

"We have even received drawings of the engine," a senior scientist at the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) in Bangalore city in the south had told Reuters.

Russian officials say Moscow suspended plans to sell the cryogenic rocket technology to India after the United States opposed the 250 million US dollars deal on the grounds that it would violate the missile technology control regime (MTCR).

The MTCR seeks to halt the spread of rocket technology, particularly to the developing world.

The authorities are planning to take necessary steps to prevent further violence.

Police personnel have already taken position around the Lalbagh maidan as several hundred of Jamaat supporters are staying there.

The Jamaat activists and the police are engaged in a stand-off.

The Jamaat supporters are shouting slogans and shouting at the police.

The police are trying to disperse the crowd.

The police are using tear gas shells to disperse the crowd.

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