

# Hartal observed

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people injured in the port town. Some of them were stabbed.

The clashes took place at Galachipa crossing and Ukil Para around 9:30 am. Both the groups exploded crackers and used other lethal weapons.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong reports: The hartal passed off almost peacefully in the port city. All sorts of vehicles, except rickshaws, stayed off the roads.

Cargo handling at Chittagong Port jetties were normal but delivery of goods to and from the port was suspended, because trucks did not ply, according to port officials.

Mills and factories at the Chittagong Export Processing Zone, Nasirabad, Kalurghat, Patenga and Sitakunda Industrial belts suffered production loss due to poor attendance of workers, sources concerned said.

Our Staff Correspondent in Sylhet adds: The 8-hour hartal was observed in all the four districts of greater Sylhet region. Vehicles of all kinds were off the roads during the hartal hours, paralysing normal life. Government and private offices, and business establishments also remained closed.

In Sylhet, district Awami League held a meeting with Syed Abu Nosor in the chair at the court-point. The district Jatiya Party and Jamaat-Islami brought out separate processions and held rallies at Surma-point and Poura-point respectively.

Peaceful hartal was also observed in Habiganj, Sunamganj and Moulvibazar district headquarters.

UNB adds: At least five stu-

dents were injured during the half-day hartal hours in Sirajganj district.

Witnesses said activists of JCD and BCL clashed each other at Tarash Bazar in Tarash Thana during the hartal hours.

All mode of vehicles, excepting the rickshaws, were off the road.

**US Defence Secy visits Pakistan next week**

ISLAMABAD, Dec 29: US Defence Secretary William Perry will discuss the thorny question of US military assistance to Pakistan during a three-day official visit next month, reports AFP.

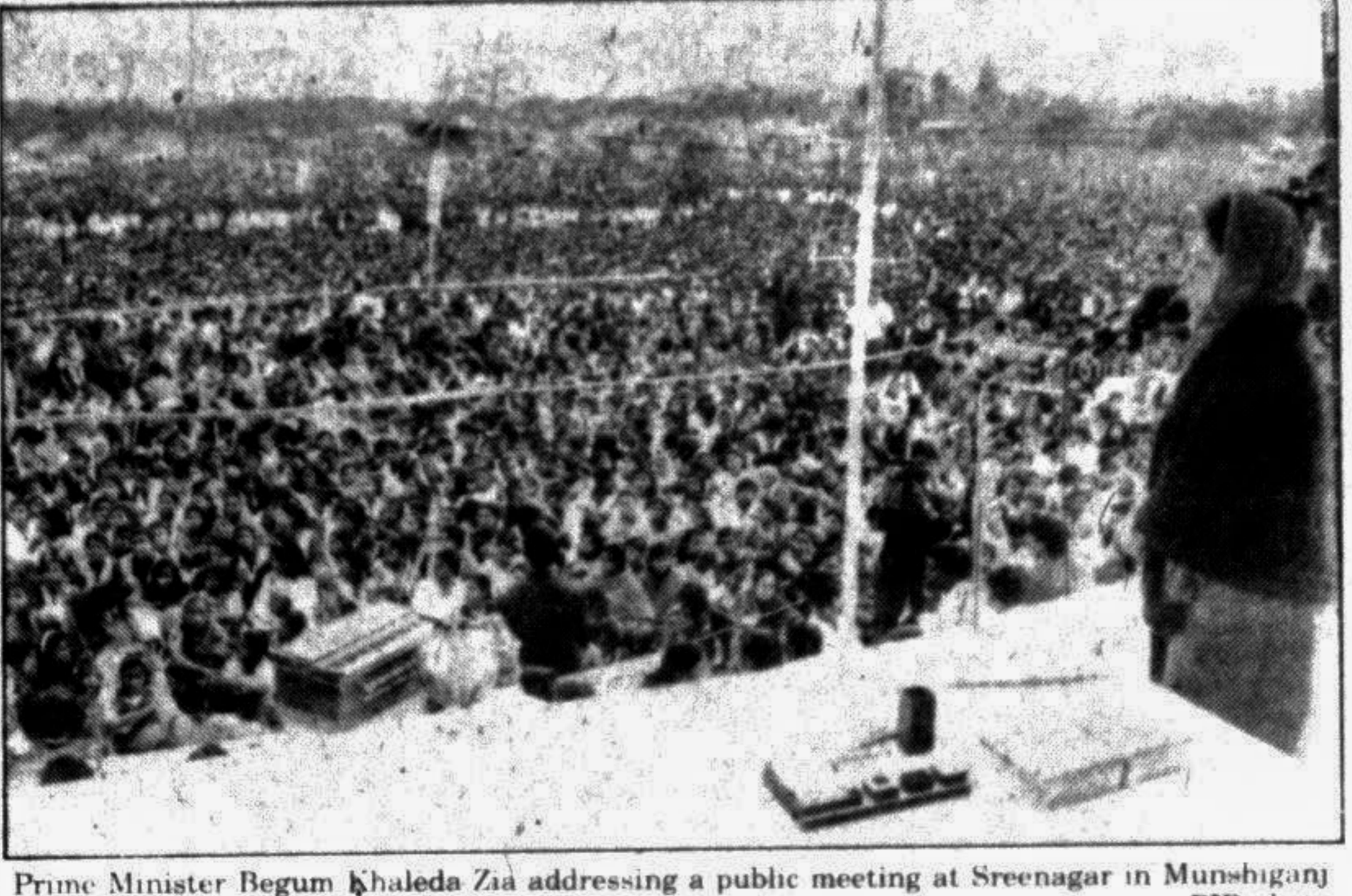
Perry's talks will focus on defence cooperation within the constraints of the Pressler amendment," the spokesman said. The amendment was a US anti-proliferation law under which Washington stopped economic and military aid to Pakistan in 1990.

A stalled deal to supply multi-purpose F-16 fighters to Pakistan will also come up during discussions, he added.

Pakistan paid more than one billion dollars on defence purchases - including 658 million dollars for 38 F-16 planes - which were hit by the Pressler restrictions.

The country's leaders have said the United States should honour its contractual obligation to supply the aircraft and other equipment or return the money.

During the visit, starting January 10, Perry will meet President Farooq Ahmed Leghari and Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto.



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia addressing a public meeting at Sreenagar in Munshiganj yesterday. — PID photo

## Foundation of 2nd Dhaleswari bridge laid

MUNSHIGANJ, Dec 29: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today laid the foundation stone of the second Dhaleswari bridge on the Dhaka-Khulna highway, reports BSS.

In presence of cabinet ministers, MPs and a large number of local people Begum Zia unveiled the plaque of the 406.9-metre long and 10.5-metre wide bridge over the river Dhaleswari at Kuchiamara under Munshiganj district.

The Tk 60-crore bridge will be constructed from the country's own resources within three years.

Communications Minister Oli Ahmad was also present on the occasion.

## PM lays foundation stone of Rupsha bridge today

KHULNA, Dec 29: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will lay the foundation stone of the Rupsha bridge at Labonchora, four and a half kilometres from the city tomorrow, reports UNB.

The 590.50-metre-long bridge will be constructed at an estimated cost of Tk 432 crore. The government will provide Tk 87 crore and rest of the amount is expected to be provided by donor countries and agencies.

The bridge is an election commitment of the Prime Minister.

After laying the foundation stone, Begum Zia will address a public meeting at Rupsha Ferry Ghat in the afternoon.

## JP refutes news about Hassan

By Staff Correspondent

The Joint Office Secretary of the Jatiya Party Azad Sultan, in a statement last night, strongly criticised news reports that Mahmudul Hassan had disagreed with his party's decision regarding resigning from Parliament.

He said Mahmudul Hassan, as a member of the JP presidium, had agreed to abide by the party decision to resign from Parliament.

Azad also said that Mahmudul Hassan's resignation letter carried his own signature. He said he was not aware what 'mysterious' reason had made Hassan commit the political somersault.

Mahmudul Hassan, Sultan said, was elected to Parliament on a JP ticket and therefore, both morally and constitutionally he could not remain a member of Parliament against his party decision.

A photocopy of Mahmudul Hassan's resignation letter was sent along with Azad Sultan's statement.

## Record snowfall in Kashmir

NEW DELHI, Dec 29: Kashmir Valley was cut off from rest of India today by a storm that left huge snowdrifts across its main highway, United News of India said, reports AP.

Srinagar, the capital of Jammu-Kashmir state, is the centre of a Muslim secessionist campaign by guerrillas. India maintains 40,000 soldiers in the valley, which borders Pakistan.

## Menon

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He said, as per the formula given earlier by the Left Democratic Front, the President should head an interim government assisted by advisors.

Menon said, the drama centring the resignation Wednesday night proved it was possible to reach a 'consensus formula' through discussions. He was, however, critical that the parleys had not been conducted openly.

The Workers' Party leader was also critical of the Awami League's alliance with the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat.

He said, his party had always supported the caretaker government issue and in fact had been advocating the formation of such a government from the very inception of the present Parliament.

Menon alleged that the government had failed to carry out its constitutional obligations to protect democracy and Parliament and, therefore, had no right to stay in power.

Responding to a query from newsmen, Menon said it would not be proper for the ruling party to hold by-elections because these would most likely be resisted by some of the opposition parties, and may lead to violence.

Senior leaders of the party were present at the press conference.

# The Midnight File

## UN observer shot on Iraqi-Kuwaiti border

KUWAIT CITY, Dec 29: A UN military observer was shot and wounded today on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border, Kuwait's official news agency Kuna reported. Yvanov Danot, a 32-year-old Romanian, was hit in the thigh. The agency gave no further details on the incident and the United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) was not immediately available for comment, reports AFP.

## Burglary at the house of Diana's lawyer

LONDON, Dec 29: Knife-wielding burglars stole one million pounds (1.55 million dollar) worth of jewellery in a raid on the home of Princess Diana's lawyer. British newspapers reported today. The thieves tied up and gagged the wife of lawyer Lord Mishcon at the couple's exclusive central London flat before wrenching rings from her fingers, reports Reuter.

# Hasina at press confce

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But, she said, the government leaders had created a situation of confrontation for their lust for power.

Referring to Wednesday's last-minute negotiation to prevent the en masse resignation, Hasina said ruling party leaders' latest proposal did not specify the resignation of the Prime Minister but only said the PM would be away from power. Besides, their pre-condition of the opposition giving up agitation programmes 'forced us to submit the resignation letters.'

'Agitation is our democratic and constitutional right,' she stressed. 'Agitations like hartals could be redundant if the government agreed to the Opposition demand.'

The AL chief accused BNP Secretary General Abud Salam Talukdar of making 'untrue statement' regarding the last-minute Government-Opposition talks. 'His statement was highly misleading and not based on facts,' she said.

In this regard she pointed out that government leaders did not mention the PM would resign 30 days ahead of the elections until the last round of negotiation.

Hasina, referring to Salam Talukdar's statement, said it was not true that the Opposition did not agree to the government's proposal for resignation of the PM 30 days before the polls. In fact she added, the government proposal did not contain the resignation issue but only said the PM and her cabinet colleagues would not be in power 30 days before the elections. This means Hasina viewed, the PM would remain but her powers would be curtailed.

Hasina reiterated that they tried their best to resolve the persisting political impasse but failed to succeed due to the ruling BNP's obstinacy and its undemocratic behaviour.

'We resigned from Parliament only to realise people's voting right and help democracy flourish. We believe that people are the source of all power and all our efforts aim at establishing their democratic and constitutional rights,' the AL Chief said.

The AL leader repeated that they would intensify the agitation for elections under a caretaker administration and carry it to a logical end in a peaceful and democratic way.

She once again blamed the BNP government for 'failing to consolidate the hard-earned parliamentary democracy and reciprocate the Opposition cooperation in this regard.'

Hasina was also critical of the role of radio and television which not only broadcast the news of Opposition MPs resignation. But, she said, all international media covered the rare political event with much importance. 'Are the two media BNP's property?' she asked.

The press conference was also attended by senior AL leaders including Abud Salam Azad, Sajeda Choudhury, Tofael Ahmed, Amir Hossain Amu, Suranjit Sengupta, S A M S Kibria, Matia Choudhury and Rahmat Ali.

## AL rally

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Sheikh Hasina for dislodging the government to ensure national elections under a neutral caretaker government.

City AL general secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya presided over the rally, also addressed by party leaders Akhtaru Alam, Prof Fazlul Haq Qamrul Islam, Kazi Iqbal Hossain and Chhatra League leaders Enamul Haq Shah-meen and Ishaq Ali Khan Panna.

## Saifur asks bank directors to concentrate on lending, recovery

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday asked the boards of directors of different banks and development financial institutes to concentrate on matters like lending and recovery of money, reports UNB.

The routine administrative things like promotion, punishment and other disciplinary matters should be looked into by the banks' managements, he said while presiding over a review meeting of banks and DFIs.

Directors representing the government in various nationalised commercial banks (NCBs), private banks, and the chairmen of the NCBs and DFIs attended the review meeting held at the Finance Ministry's conference room.

The meeting reviewed the performance and activities of the directors during their stint at various banks and DFIs.

## Arab normalisation

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negotiations between Syria and the Jewish state.

The weight of Saudi Arabia is considerable and could tone down the enthusiasm of other Gulf state to normalise with Israel, the source said.

Egypt's Foreign Minister Amr Mussa explained that the three countries were "not against" the normalisation of ties between Arab countries and Israel.

"But we are concerned because of the slowness of the peace process and the obstacles on the road, in particular on the Palestinian, and Syrian tracks," Mussa said.

Among the hurdles was the building and extension of Jewish settlements, he added, as a court in Israel threw out a Palestinian appeal to suspend work on a controversial settlement in Ephrat on the occupied West Bank.

Diplomats in the region said Egypt, the first country to make peace with Israel, was backing calls to slow the pace of Arab rapprochement with the Jewish state because it feared its role in the region could be sidelined.

The talks in Alexandria opened just two days after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin travelled to Oman, becoming the first Israeli head of government to visit a Gulf Arab state.

Israel has signed peace with Jordan, agreed to launch Palestinian self-rule with the PLO and opened diplomatic ties with Morocco and Tunisia.

Six Gulf Arab monarchies also eased a trade boycott of the Jewish state in September.

Last week Sheikh Abdel Aziz Ben Baz, the highest religious authority in Saudi Arabia,

## Bus plunge

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Meghna bridge, as part of their winter exercise, immediately rushed to the spot and recovered seven bodies and rescued 20 injured persons.

Six bodies were sent to the Narayanganj General Hospital. The victims were identified as Mukul, 28, of Kalmullah college road of Bhaberchar, minibus driver Haradhan Chandra Das, 55, of R K Mission road, Dhaka. Sonia, 16, of Uttara Spinning Mills, Mirzapur, Suranjani Chandra Biswas, 16, of Rasherbandi, Gazaria, Nur Hossain, 55, of Bhitkandi, Gazaria, and Abul Kashem, 42, of Alipura, Gazaria.

The body of a bus driver of Bangladesh Bank Shamsuddin, 55, was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). The injured persons were sent to different local hospitals and DMCH.

In the second accident at around 11 am, a minibus ran over Saad Mia, 25, who was riding a bicycle near the bridge. The body of Saad Mia was also sent to the Narayanganj General Hospital. Cases were lodged with the Gazaria thana.

# People still hopeful

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I wish both sides had reached an agreement ... yet, I believe there is scope to resume negotiations because it's the question of the future of our country and the people," he added.

Dr. Talukder Muniruzzaman, a teacher of the Dhaka University's Political Science Department observed that the gap between both the camps had been narrowed down during the process of negotiation and general principles were agreed upon.

"Why then do they not continue talking to each other when they know there is no last word in politics?" he asked.

Dr. Muniruzzaman suggested that the Speaker should immediately appeal to the Opposition members of Parliament to return to the House and also bring both the parties to the discussion table.

Salman F. Rahman, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI), commented the impact of the Opposition's resignation would have a serious impact on the country's economy.

"We are really concerned at the development," he said, adding that the FCCCI has convened an emergency meeting of its executive committee Sunday to review the possible implications of the resignation.

**Dudayev**

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40,000 troops to only several thousand Chechens, and have been making significant gains in recent days.

On Thursday, thick clouds of smoke rose from Grozny's industrial district as Russian bombers roared overhead and artillery thudded on the fringes of the breakaway republic's capital.

Airstrikes pounded the already-devastated city throughout the day.

"We simply cannot keep track of how many buildings are destroyed, how many people are dead," Aslanbek Dadayev, of the official Chechen news agency, said.

Heavy fighting raged on the edges of Grozny as Russian forces tried to press their attack on the rebel capital from north and east.

Deafening explosions shook walls in central Grozny but it was not immediately clear where the bombs were landing.

A huge oil containment tank at the sprawling Aslanbeyk Shelipov refinery, in western Grozny, took a direct hit, spewing thick black smoke 500 metres into the air, blocking out the sun in the centre.

An employee at the installation, which has not worked since Russian troops were sent December 11 to restore Moscow's rule in the separatist Muslim republic, said the storage tank contained 50,000 tonnes of oil.

Chechnya's industry is concentrated on the petrochemical industry.

Dr. C. R. Abrar, a teacher of the International Relations Department of Dhaka University, observed that the role of the ruling party and the Opposition in the whole resignation drama would alienate the people from the political leadership.

A caretaker government cannot be a panacea when other basic issues like democratisation of the electoral process, accountability and a limping economy were the most burning questions," he said.

Fazle Hasan Abed, who heads the internationally reputed NGO, BRAC, said that the resignation and its fall-out would entail unfavourable donor response.

When asked if the present situation would disturb the on-going development initiatives in the country, he replied in the positive and said Bangladesh would face even more stormy days from now on if immediate steps were not taken to stabilise the political situation.

"The resignation and the abortive negotiations have, of course, frustrated us," remarked Prof. M. Shahadat Ali, president of the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA).

"Political ego should not become larger than the national interest," he said. "And on that basis, the political organisations now have to prove their responsibility."

Those less articulate, and less privileged, were also less pessimistic about the latest political situation when their reactions were sought by The Daily Star.

A tea-stall owner at Shahbagh, Soleman Mia observed, "If you want an election, you can have it."

"And if you don't want it, still it's your cup of tea ... so why fight?" he quipped.

## Salam

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alised that what they had done was not right, they could still change their decision.

Begum Zia's fresh call just after the mass resignation of opposition MPs was at the centre of discussions in the political arena yesterday.

Talukdar said the BNP standing committee met yesterday to select the candidates for four by-elections.

Salam Talukdar said the standing committee did not discuss the situation arising out of the mass resignation. The meeting with Begum Zia in the chair ended at 11:30 pm.

The BNP nominated Shajahan Hwlader Sujon for Comilla and Prof Kazi Golam Morshed for Natore by-elections. Nominations for Barisal and Sherpur by-election would be announced later on, he added.

Ruling party MP Shahidul Haq Jamal was with the party secretary general when Talukdar returned home around 11:45 pm.

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90 Kakrail, Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. FAX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3267, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA.

# Opposition should revise decision

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Begum Zia expressed her gratitude to the people for their support in her struggle against autocracy, and in the restoration of democracy and the people's rights.

The Prime Minister said she came to politics to restore democracy and the people's rights at a time when the nation and the people were suffering repressions under an autocracy.

Narrating the long drawn negotiations between government and Opposition leaders at various levels to find a solution to the problem, the Prime Minister said her government had always tried to solve all problems within the constitutional framework and through discussions.

Begum Zia said the government would accept any proposal because her party always stood for the democratic process and uninterrupted development and production.

But she regretted that the Opposition's objective was to go to power by any means.

Saying that a particular party had joined hands with the autocrats to go to power, she affirmed that it is not possible.

Giving a brief resume of the anti-autocracy movement and the installation of the democratic government through free and fair polls Begum Zia said the elected government had been solving the people's problems one by one.

Referring to the switch to parliamentary democracy from a presidential form of government through consensus among all the parties, the Prime Minister said an accountable government had now been established.

She said that the opposition parties were scared by the scope and extent of development works done by the BNP government.

That is why, she said, the Opposition had started conspiring to remove the elected BNP government on this and that pretext.

The Opposition, Begum Zia said, had started boycotting Parliament alleging that polls under the BNP government would not be free and fair.

The Prime Minister said despite repeated calls from

## Queen honours 2 Britons for their work in Bangladesh

Two British citizens were awarded the order of the British Empire for their outstanding services in different fields in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

Dr. Keith Pitman and Molly Read have been listed in the Queen's New Year's honours list, according to a British High Commission press release yesterday.

Dr. Pitman was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) as an expert advisor and team leader on development of management of water resources in Bangladesh while Molly Read became a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for her services to the poor people in Bangladesh for many years.

Dr Pitman is now working with the World Bank in Washington with responsibility for regional water issues in the eastern part of the South Asian sub-continent.

He has made a major personal contributions towards understanding the issues over the last 20 years, and to the preparation of Bangladesh's national water plan.

Molly Read, who came to Bangladesh as a Technical Cooperation Officer with Britain's Overseas Development Administration in the late 1970s, worked with destitute children and poor mothers on a nutrition and education project for the last four years, and returned to the UK in December this year.



Bangladesh Rifles personnel manning the area around the Secretariat during yesterday's hartal hours. — Star photo