

Speaker's ruling

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 of the ruling and the relevant clauses the Speaker consulted," the official said.

He also said that a number of MPs had, in writing, disowned their resignations submitted on December 28.

"I know their names but I will not disclose them. Don't ask me for their names," he requested this reporter during the telephonic conversation last night.

Meanwhile, a senior Opposition leader last night told The Daily Star that if the Speaker declared the resignation letters invalid then the situation would turn very different.

The leader, a presidium member of the Awami League, said that the opposition members could have postponed their resignations if the Prime Minister had made the public statement of her intention to resign ahead of the elections even a minute before the letters were submitted to the Speaker on December 28.

"If the Speaker declares our resignation letters invalid then we have to think twice about submitting them again because our basic demand has been fulfilled," the AL leader, who held an important position in the Opposition parliamentary group, said.

"The Prime Minister's decision that she would step down before the next elections has now been made public and we can start discussions from that point again," he added.

He also said that Sheikh Hasina had given another chance to the ruling party in her public speech yesterday at the Bangabandhu Avenue.

"The people expected a more aggressive speech and another package of agitational programmes from the Opposition yesterday but our leader reiterated the demand of forming an advisory council under the President."

MCCI chief's note of caution

By Staff Correspondent
 President of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) Anis Ud-Dowla yesterday urged the business community to be cautious about handling the present situation arising out of the political standoff lest they are misunderstood for meddling in political matter.

The MCCI president made the call in a written speech during a meeting of the leaders of the country's business chambers and trade associations.

In his speech, made available to The Daily Star, Dowla said a trade body would definitely highlight the views of the business community, but it is not for any trade body to strive for political reconciliation or act as an intermediary amongst political parties.

"We firmly hold the view that the business group must not try to establish itself as the third force in politics. This is a highly dangerous game and runs the risks of being misunderstood," the MCCI chief said.

He said the business community is no doubt entitled to judge whether political uncertainty affects development but its assessment is not final. Even among the business community, there can be differences of opinion, he added.

He also said that those who are opposed to hartals must concede that peaceful hartal is a democratic right whereas those who enforce hartals through intimidation must take the responsibility for infringement of civic liberties of the people.

"The government should be asked to open up TV and radio to the opposition political parties for expression of views. If they are given such freedom of expression, the crude form of hartals, damaging of cars, etc. are expected to vanish," Anis Ud-Dowla said.

"I am quite sure that most of the political parties do not want to disrupt production or increase popular suffering," he said and added that they would come to realise the damaging effects of hartals if individual case studies are prepared professionally, giving the views of the affected employers and workers as to how hartals dislocate production and cause public miseries.

He said such studies will also help mobilise public opinion against hartals. The business community should, therefore, lay down some do's and don'ts for observance of hartals so as to make them peaceful, he said.

The businessmen should also identify the real issues that must be addressed to improve the economy, including improvement of the external perception of the country's economic potentials and creation of a "level-playing-field", the MCCI president said.

The AL leader, who played a vital role during the negotiations with the ruling party, said, "It needs a constitutional amendment to form the council under the President."

"If the ruling party accepts the demand for an advisory council then the Opposition MPs may reconsider returning to Parliament to vote to amend the Constitution," he added.

BNP Secretary General Abdus Salam Talukdar, however, said that everything now depends on the ruling of the Speaker.

About the AL leader's latest proposition, Talukdar said, "It can be discussed, but we do not know what kind of ruling the Speaker is going to deliver."

He said he did not have any discussion with the Speaker regarding the matter.

Talukdar said the BNP high command did not discuss the issue.

No provision in Constitution for mass resignation

There is no provision in the Constitution for mass resignation from Parliament, said a senior minister and ruling party leader yesterday, reports UNB.

Housing and Public Works Minister Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah termed the mass resignation of the opposition MPs as 'unprecedented'.

"There is no precedence of such resignation in the history of parliamentary democracy," said the Barrister, adding, "Even the architects of the Constitution didn't think of such resignations."

He said although there is a provision for resignation in Article 67 (2), there is no provision for paralysing the constitutional and parliamentary process by tendering resignations en masse.

The minister was addressing as chief guest a public meeting at Demra, organised by the thana chapter of the BNP.

Homecoming

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 gansitions followed her.

Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to Dhaka on January 10, 1972 after nine months of captivity in Pakistan during Bangladesh's War of Independence. His homecoming was marked by a tumultuous reception.

The day's programme also included hoisting of party and national flags at party offices and holding of rallies and discussions. The AL held a public rally yesterday afternoon at Bangabandhu Avenue where Sheikh Hasina spoke.

Organisations which garlanded the portrait of the Bangabandhu included the Bangabandhu Parishad, the Bangabandhu Shishu Kishore Mela, Joy Bangla Sangskritik Olkya Jote, Bangabandhu Shilpi Goshtha and the Dhaka Youth Forum.

Survey for oil

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 and different ministries were earlier advised to keep the survey route of the Ross Seal clear of any fishing net or vessels during the survey period for the next 25 to 30 days.

Bangladesh Navy ships, which are carrying out their winter exercises in the Bay, are learnt to have decided to keep away from the path of the Ross Seal.

This is the first such survey for exploration hydrocarbon reserves in about 1500 kilometers in the Bay since 1974.

The two foreign companies had previously carried out some preliminary surveys in the area according to a seven-year agreement on gas and oil exploration with the government signed on May 5 last.

Livestock

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 in the city. The conference has been organised by the Commonwealth Veterinary Association and Bangladesh Veterinary Association.

Presided over by Vice President of Commonwealth Veterinary Association Dr DD Wanasinghe, the inaugural function was also addressed by Fisheries and Livestock Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Minister for Animal Resources Development of West Bengal Government Mehbub Zahidi, Director General of Livestock Services Department Dr Nazir Ahmed, Treasurer of Commonwealth Veterinary Association Dr WJ Pryor and President of Bangladesh Veterinary Association Dr M Fazul Haque.

Some 30 representatives from Australia, India, Sri Lanka and Pakistan are participating in the conference.



Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry president Salman F Rahman addressing the general council members at the Shipakala Academy auditorium in the city yesterday

FBCCI

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 "We are above all political consideration and affiliation when we talk about business. We are asserting our position in the present situation only to protect the interests of the business community," the FBCCI chief said.

Earlier, in the morning, a closed door meeting of the chamber and trade association leaders at the FBCCI building agreed to publish a white paper shortly on how the political unrest has been affecting the business community and hampering the economic development of the country.

The meeting also decided to empower the FBCCI to take any decision for the protection of the business community.

Against this backdrop, an emergency meeting of the executive committee of the FBCCI has been called today at 11 am to discuss and decide what the business community can do to cope with the problems arising out of the political crisis.

PM: Police

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 In many cases, she said, they have been accused of misusing their power and taking steps in collaboration with criminals to harass the people. It seriously hampers the image of the police, she said.

Begum Zia observed that crimes were increasing with the population boom and directed the officials to take more effective measures to contain criminal activities.

Referring to a report of the police magazine 'Detective', which showed that number of crimes rose to 69,196 in 1994 from 66,126 in 1993, she said, police officers have to take the responsibility of reducing this trend.

"There are many crime-free cities in the world. If they can do it, why can't we?" she said and hoped that the police would discharge their duties properly in line with the aspirations of the people.

Biman

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 adding that the two planes would cost the national airlines 153.75 million US dollar.

Biman has been trying to procure two mid-haul aircraft since 1992 because its international and regional schedules suffered major dislocation because of a shortage of aircraft.

The official said Biman would get two Airbus on wet-lease to cover the interim period till 1995.

The official said that the Biman Corporation would soon sign an agreement with the Airbus Industry.

The manufacturers would also provide training support and spares to Biman according to the terms and conditions of the sale contract.

Trade show from tomorrow

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 38 firms representing 80 US companies took part in the trade show.

Held at a local hotel the press conference was also attended by M Nurul Islam, vice president of ABEF, A Gafur, the executive secretary of the forum, and Donald M Bishop, director of USIS.

"We hope that the US trade show would provide an opportunity to a wide spectrum of people from Bangladesh to see the products manufactured in the United States," Cookson said.

Responding to a question, the ABEF president noted that US direct investment in Bangladesh includes indirect investments through the stock market, some in the garments sector while the US Citibank is also involved in financing the Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company Project.

He, however, observed that there are good prospects for direct US investment in Bangladesh if the government goes ahead with the privatisation initiatives in the power and telecommunications sectors. There are also good prospects for attracting US companies assembling elec-

Hasina's call to govt

From Page 1 Col 3
 Justifying the opposition MPs' prolonged boycott of Parliament and their eventual resignation, as well as the current agitation including hartals, the AL chief said, all those things were done just to ensure that the voters exercise their right to franchise freely and peacefully, enjoy their democratic and fundamental rights and get rid of the misrule by the BNP.

How justified was it to remain in Parliament where the treasury bench had rejected all the bills and proposals brought by the opposition for public welfare by the sheer strength of its majority? What else could we have done other than quitting? she posed.

"All our acts are designed for the welfare of the people," she said.

The AL leader called upon her audience to carry forward the party programmes announced earlier and to prepare for an all-out agitation to realise the demand for polls under a neutral caretaker administration by unseating the BNP government.

Referring to the Bangabandhu's return to a free country from a Pakistan jail on this day in 1972, Hasina said the countrymen could not have celebrated their victory in the Liberation War if the great leader had not returned home.

"The situation would have been quite different had this national leader failed to come back," she said.

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BNP standing body meet not held

By Staff Correspondent
 A scheduled meeting of the ruling party standing committee could not take place yesterday as a number of important members were out of the city, the BNP Secretary General said yesterday.

He said that the meeting may be held today if most of the 14 members of the 15-strong standing committee are available in Dhaka.

BNP sources said that Oli Ahmed, ASM Mostafizur Rahman and Mirza Golam Hafiz could not turn up for the meeting.

Portfolios

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 prised many, especially the four ministers, who attended their offices yesterday as usual.

Sources close to the ruling party leadership said that the changes were aimed at re-vamping the government's functioning which, according to them, is essential in the current political situation.

"Some more portfolio changes, as well as induction of one or two new faces, are not unlikely," sources said.

Observers maintain that the recent price hike of foodgrain might have prompted the change in the Food Ministry, while a desire for more dynamic growth in the civil aviation sector may have called for a change of guard.

When asked to comment about his new assignment, Mir Shawkat Ali said, "To me, a ministry is a ministry. It is up to the Prime Minister to pick whom she wants — it is the privilege of the Prime Minister," he said.

"I am a worker and I would love to work," he added.

Major (ret'd) Abdul Minnan would only say, "I will do my best to accomplish the job and carry out the responsibilities."

The two other ministers were not available at their residences for comments at the time of writing this report.

After the sacking of Barrister Nazmul Huda and the death of State Minister for Education Principal Yunus Khan last November, the number of members of the council of ministers now stands at 40.

During the September '93 reshuffle, Akbar Hossain, Mir Shawkat Ali and Dr A Moeen Khan were inducted in the Cabinet. Earlier, Shamsul Islam Khan, who was heading the Ministry of Industries, resigned on health ground and was replaced by A M Zahiruddin Khan a technocrat.

The Midnight File

Murayama in US for summit with Clinton

WASHINGTON, Jan 10: Japanese Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama arrived Tuesday for a summit with President Clinton and new Republican congressional leaders. He came on the heels of an agreement increasing foreign access to Japanese financial services markets. Both governments played down the two countries' trade rivalry in preparation for Murayama's talks and working lunch with Clinton Wednesday, instead stressing their close overall relations and recent progress in some economic areas, reports AP.

US for broader security dialogue with Pakistan

ISLAMABAD, Jan 10: US Defence Secretary William Perry, starting a two-day trip to Pakistan today, expressed hopes for a broader security dialogue and both sides sought to play down their dispute over nuclear policy, reports Reuters.

Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto said his visit, the first by a US Defence Secretary for 12 years, showed that relations were developing despite a US ban on military aid imposed in 1990 over suspicions about Pakistan's nuclear policy.

Both countries have broadened the nature of their relationship to encompass other matters, particularly investment and peacekeeping cooperation worldwide, Benazir told reporters.

"There are differences between the US and Pakistan — no two nations can agree all the time," Perry said in a statement after arriving in the Pakistani capital from Israel.

"But I'm not here to dwell on what might be wrong in our relationship — I'm here to promote a broader security dialogue that will help us build on what's right about it." During the Cold War, the United States lavished military and economic aid on Pakistan, the main conduit for western aid to Afghan guerrillas fighting Soviet occupation.

Reagan no longer recognises his friends

NEW YORK, Jan 10: As he slides deeper into the mists of Alzheimer's disease, former President Reagan no longer recognises old friends and once referred to a set of books as trees, his biographer says, reports AP.

"About six months ago, he stopped recognising me. Now I no longer recognise him," Edmund Morris wrote in the January 16 issue of The New Yorker magazine.

Describing a recent visit with Reagan, Morris wrote: "For all the willingness with which he showed me, his framed photographs, his jelly bean jar, and his view of the Hollywood Hills, I did not feel his presence beside me, only his absence."

At one point, Morris commented on a display of lead soldiers on a shelf and Reagan said, "He — We — we had to make space, uh — move those trees." Mystified, Morris finally realised that Reagan was referring to a red-bound set of his own presidential papers, relegated to the shelf beneath the soldiers.

Procession for safer roads in Cox's Bazar

From Our Correspondent
 COX'S BAZAR, Jan 10: Film star Elias Kanchan led a mass procession in the town this afternoon as part of his country-wide campaign for safer roads.

The procession over, a rally was held in the town where Kanchan urged the inhabitants of Cox's Bazar to vote for those who would commit to ensure security and safety in roads and highways during next parliamentary elections.

Taslima

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 The trial of Taslima Nasreen in the Metropolitan Magistrate's court, scheduled to begin January 15, will now be delayed. If convicted, Nasreen could be jailed for two years.

"We are of the view that the sanction can be given by the government ever, at this stage of the trial," Justice AKM Sadek, the presiding judge said in his ruling.

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