

Documents gutted at divisional EC office

By Staff Correspondent

Some 'important' documents were gutted in a fire at the Dhaka Divisional Election Commission office at Shegun Bagicha in the city yesterday morning.

The cause of the fire, which broke out in the office at about 10 am, could not be known. Fire Service sources said.

The burnt documents, mostly of the City Corporation Elections of 1994, were stored in about 300 sacks in four rooms of the office located on the fifth floor of the 12-storied building known as Commissioner Bhaban in Shegun Bagicha, police said.

Some other documents which were saved from the fire were also partially damaged by water during the fire-fighting, police added.

Four units of the Fire Brigade from the headquarters took about one hour to extinguish the flames. Fire Service sources said.

A general diary was filed with Ramna thana in this connection, police said. Officials of the law enforcing agencies visited the spot, police added saying that they were investigating the incident.

Election Commission officials were not available last night for their comment.

In Chittagong, property worth about Tk 20 lakh were gutted in a devastating fire at Sarabkunda Bazar in Sitakunda thana early yesterday.

The fire originated from an electric short circuit at a kerosene shop at about 5:30 am. Some 10-12 shops with valuable goods were burnt to ashes.

Emergency fuel depot in city

An emergency depot to face any abnormal situation of petroleum products in the city and its adjoining areas was commissioned yesterday, reports BSS.

Energy and Mineral Resources Minister Dr Khan-daker Mosharrar Hossain inaugurated the operation of the depot in the morning.

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) installed the depot having a capacity of two thousand tonnes of petroleum products (29 lakh litres) at Kurmitola on the side of Cantonment Railway Station at a cost of Taka four crore twenty three lakh from its own fund. Located on three acres of land, the depot has four separate reservoirs for kerosene oil, petrol, diesel and octane. Meghna Petroleum Company Limited, a marketing window of BPC, will run the depot.

The inaugural function was addressed by Energy and Mineral Resources Secretary Mohammad Faizur Razzak and Chairman of BPC Mohammad Fazlul Hoq.

Flag meeting on Tamabil Feb 2

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Jan 25: The BDR and BSF will hold another round of battalion commander-level flag meeting on February 2 to discuss the Tamabil border dispute.

A tense situation prevailed in the area for several days as the Indian authorities tried to construct a pucca building near the 'no man's land' on January 15 violating the international border convention and BSF and BDR exchanged about 70 rounds of gunshots on the next day.

Both the BDR and BSF deployed additional troops and border trade remained suspended since January 16.

BDR and BSF held a flag meeting on Jan 18 but it yielded no results. However, the BSF has suspended the construction works.

Rao should quit for fair probe into Hawala Case: BJP

NEW DELHI, Jan 25: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) today demanded that Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao should step down from office so that a fair and impartial inquiry could be held in the multi crore Hawala case, reports PTI.

The party spokesperson, Sushma Swara, told Press persons that fair and impartial inquiry was not possible in a case in which Prime Minister was also involved.

"If the government is really interested in an honest inquiry into the case, the Prime Minister should step down and let CBI do its job," he said, adding: only this would put an end to politics of blackmail and cover up.

She ridiculed the CBI contention that the statement of SK Jain, the main accused in the Hawala case was merely an oral one and not corroborated.

In Barisal town, a fire broke out following bomb blasts at a residence at Hospital Road yesterday in which property worth about Tk 10 lakh was gutted.

Police said the incident took place at about 5 am when two crude bombs went off at the residence of Advocate Keshab Chandra.

Firefighters rushed to the spot and extinguished the fire in two hours of frantic battle.

Rajshahi BNP denies report on resignations

RAJSHAHI, Jan 25: BNP leaders here today denied that about 4,000 local leaders and workers of the ruling party and its front organisations had resigned, reports UNB.

In a joint statement, BNP central Vice-Chairman Emran Ali Sarkar and Assistant Organising Secretary and city Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, district BNP President Advocate Abdul Hye and four local leaders said the news was totally "baseless, fabricated and motivated."

They, however, claimed that three expelled leaders — Nadim Mostafa of district JCD, and Salauddin Babu and Kalachand of city BNP — were involved in propaganda to tarnish the party image.

Meanwhile, some 32 leaders and workers of JCD Paba thana unit, including its President Shahin Ali and Secretary Wadud Hasan Pmtu, today tendered their resignation protesting the expulsion of the three.

In a joint statement, they also demanded immediate release of city JCD President Sayeed Hasan, who was arrested from the city on January 21.

Food situation satisfactory, says minister

Food situation in the country is satisfactory and the present stock of foodgrains is nearly double the stock during the same time last year, Food and Agriculture Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said here yesterday.

In an exclusive interview with BSS at his secretariat chamber, the Food Minister said against an estimated requirement of two crore 22 thousand tonnes of foodgrains, the projected production this year is one crore 92 lakh tonnes.

He said production of 16.76 lakh tonnes of *aus* met the target while that of *aman* crossed the target of 91 lakh tonnes.

The present stock of foodgrains with the government is 10.17 lakh tonnes against 6.67 lakh tonnes this time last year, the minister said.

Giving a breakup, he said 7.62 lakh tonnes would be available through food aid, 9.75 lakh tonnes through government import and 10 lakh tonnes through private sector import.

31 cultural bodies call to stop Ershad-style polls

Thirty one cultural organisations of the country yesterday called upon the authorities to abstain from holding the general elections in an autocratic-style, reports UNB.

In a joint statement, the leaders of the organisations expressed their concern over what they described as a ploy to hold "an Ershad-style election," denying the demands of the mainstream opposition parties, in the name of protecting the Constitution.

The statement signed, among others, by general secretary of Sammilite Sanskritik Jote Golam Kuddus, general secretary of Arittita Samonaya Parisad Hasan Arif, Kamal Pasha Chowdhury of University Charusilpi Sangsad, Liakat Ali Laki of Loko Niyadal and Mohon Raihan of Jatiya Kabita Parisad.

Earlier, Syed Isa filed a complaint with the district election commission office on Monday requesting it to ensure security for them.

Appointment transfer

Aziz Ahmed, an officer on special duty (OSD) of the Ministry of Establishment, has been transferred to the Ministry of Energy, Power and Mineral Resources as Additional Secretary. Member of the Administrative Appeal Tribunal Syed Khairul Islam has been made OSD (Joint Secretary) of the Ministry of Establishment, said an official handout last night.

Director of BFIDC M Hafizur Rahman-2 and Joint Secretary of Agriculture Ministry, Abdul Halim have been transferred to the Ministry of Water Resources as Joint Secretaries, the handout said, reports UNB.

Manpower export to Malaysia

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The Malaysian government is convinced in such an arrangement.

Options like recruitment by both the official and private agencies and endorsing by a government body for the Malaysia market also came up for discussion in the meeting, the sources said.

In fact, officials said, the private agencies have already sent to Malaysia some 3,000 people who were in pipeline when the authorities there suspended recruitment from Bangladesh. The BOESL as the official recruitment agency had endorsed the consent.

The deadlock in migration was created when the Malaysian government put an unofficial embargo on recruiting Bangladesh workers following influx to the newly industrialised country, mainly in first few months of last year.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina exchanging views with intellectuals at the party office in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Army called out to foil possible sabotage Kashmiris vow to disrupt Republic Day celebrations

SRINAGAR (India), Jan 25: The Indian army was called out here today on the eve of Republic Day as the authorities moved to foil threats by Kashmiri Muslim separatists to sabotage the celebrations, reports AFP.

Soldiers in olive green patrolled parts of Srinagar, the summer capital of the strife-torn northern state of Kashmir, and set up barricades on streets to prevent possible violence by Muslim militants, officials and residents said.

Security was tight at a stadium here where a top government official is to review a military and police parade tomorrow as part of nationwide celebrations.

Troops took over several houses and buildings located near the stadium, positioning themselves on roofs.

"We have made foolproof security arrangements for tomorrow," an army officer told AFP. "We will not allow militants to carry out their threats to sabotage Republic Day."

Leave has been cancelled for policemen, the officer added.

Kashmiri officials said security had also been tightened in the state's winter capital Jammu, where a

string of bomb blasts during Republic Day last year killed eight people and wounded more than 100.

The authorities sealed off Jammu stadium weeks ago in a security move.

Muslim guerrillas fighting to end Indian rule over Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, have vowed to disrupt tomorrow's official celebrations. They have also appealed to the people to observe a "black day" tomorrow.

"It may be Republic Day for the Indians, but not for us as we have never considered ourselves part of India," said Shahb Shah, a prominent leader of Kashmiri separatist drive which has left more than 12,000 people dead.

"It is a black day for us," added Umer Farooq, chairman of Kashmiri's freedom conference. "Any day celebrated by Indians is a day of mourning for us."

On Wednesday, a former state lawmaker from the Congress(I) party of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao was shot dead by militants despite the security arrangements.

Paramilitary troops and Kashmiri police, assisted by militants-turned-informers, patrolled Srinagar in addition to the soldiers, witnesses

and informed that a cultural institute will be established in Turkey soon where Bangla language and Bangladeshi culture will be given due priority.

The ambassador apprised the Prime Minister that President Suleman Demirel was very keen about Bangladesh and expressed his desire to visit the country at a convenient time.

In reply, Begum Zia said: "We will be very happy if the Turkish President comes to visit our country. We are eagerly waiting to welcome him in Bangladesh."

She said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will make formal invitation soon to the Turkish leader for visiting Bangladesh. Begum Zia also extended an invitation to Turkish Prime Minister Tansu Ciller to visit Bangladesh.

During the meeting, Kuthu Ozuvenic also conveyed the greetings of Turkish Prime Minister to Begum Zia.

Begum Zia assured her government's all-out cooperation to the new Turkish Ambassador.

The Turkish envoy said the two countries, with their broad and liberalised policies, can boost bilateral trade to their mutual benefit because of the close cultural, historical and religious ties between them.

By expanding trade and economic relations, Ambassador Kutlu Ozuvenic said, the two nations can have meaningful cooperation.

Referring to the cultural ties between Turkey and Bangladesh, the envoy emphasised on further strengthening cooperation

and informed that a cultural institute will be established in Turkey soon where Bangla language and Bangladeshi culture will be given due priority.

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Resist 'farcical' polls: Hasina

Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the countrymen and all involved in the electoral process to resist government's "conspiracy to snatch people's franchise through a mock vote," reports UNB.

"At any cost, the one-party farcical election should be stopped," the opposition leader said.

Exchanging views with some poets, litterateurs, dramatists and cultural activists at the Awami League central office, she said the government was desperate to stage a "farce" in the name of election to cling to power to protect its "ill-gotten wealth, amassed through corruption, misrule and terrorism."

But, said the AL president, the people will never accept this "farcical" election, they will not allow BNP to play with their rights, fate and future.

She called upon the people to resist the "conspiracy" of "snatching voting right of the people in the name of farcical election" wasting crores of taka from the public exchequer.

She told the noted poets, writers, cultural activists of the country that the demand for election under a neutral, non-party caretaker government is not to protect petty interest of any party, it is to guarantee the voting right of the people.

Poet, Shamsur Rahman, Dr Borhan Uddin Khan Jahangir, Kalim Sharaf, Ruhah Khan, Santosh Gupta, Rokunuzzaman Khan, Razia Matin Chowdhury, Dr SA Maleq, M R Akhtar Mukul, A B M Musa, Habibur Rahman Milon, Rafiq Azad, Altaf Mahmud, Ramendu Majumdar, Ferdousi Majumdar, Shafiqur Rahman, Kabori Sarwar, Tarana Halim, Jamal Uddin Hossain and Liakat Ali Laki, among others, attended the meeting.

Abdus Samad Azad, Prof Qamruzzaman, Abdul Momin, Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Anwar, Abdur Razzak, Dr Mohammad Selim, Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, Syed Fazlul Huq, Begum Matia Chowdhury and Obaidul Qader of Awami League were present.

He was elected unopposed after the Election Commission accepted the withdrawal of a candidate who filed his nomination to contest Rafiq from Comilla-3 constituency.

The candidate, Election Commission sources said, informed the EC office concerned of the withdrawal of his candidature few minutes after 5 pm on January 23.

With Rafiq's return, the number of the BNP candidates elected unopposed rose to 44 from 45 constituencies. Communications Minister Oli Ahmed has been elected unopposed in two seats.

Now 1,450 candidates will run in 255 constituencies in February 15 elections, boycotted by all the major opposition parties.

PM's public meet

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She would spend two-day each at the greater districts and the next programme would take place at Sylhet to be followed by Chittagong.

Details of the programme were yet to be finalised.

BSS says: Begume Khaleda Zia has no scheduled programme to visit Khulna on January 27 as reported by a section of the press Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) sources said last night.

Khulna City BNP sources informed over phone that the Prime Minister has a scheduled programme on that day at Bagerhat where she is expected to inaugurate the Khan Jahan Ali Airport and attend other official programmes.

Since she has no programme at Khulna on that day, the news item creeded by a news agency and carried by a section of press is not correct, the sources said.

Meanwhile, the Khulna city BNP in a press release issued yesterday urged upon the journalists to refrain from this sort of untrue news which might spoil the excellent relations between media men and the BNP.

The earnings would see a further downturn in coming months unless the government takes emergency measures to explore new manpower markets in Brunel, Singapore, Laos and Taiwan, said a BMET official.

Manpower export also shrank on an average to 15,527 people per month in 1994 from 20,375 the previous year. As a huge number of

Recuperate from an illness he suffered in November, when he was hospitalized for a week. US officials said he had suffered a stroke.

Prince Sultan said nothing about Fahd's health or how long he will need to recuperate.

AFP adds: King Fahd appeared on television smiling and talking to acting leader crown prince Abdullah and other royal family members late on Wednesday.

The 74-year-old King was shown next to his sons Prince Faisal and Prince Abdul Aziz at the Yamama Palace in Riyadh. He has not held any official meetings since he was admitted to the hospital for a week on November 29.

The last time King Fahd appeared on television was when he handed over power temporarily to his half-brother Abdullah on January 1.

One stabbed to death

By Staff Correspondent

A young man was stabbed to death in the city's Siddique Bazar area in the early hours of yesterday.

The victim was identified as Habib, 30. The doctors pronounced him dead when he was rushed to the Mitford Hospital with severe injuries in his chest and legs.

Habib sustained injuries when a group of unidentified people attacked him with sharp weapons in front of the Farid Sandal Factory at around 3 am, police said.

The motive behind the killing could not be ascertained immediately. Police filed a case accusing three persons. However, none was arrested till last night, sources said.

Habib, son of late Falu Miah, was residing in the area for about 15 years, police said.

Japan's opposition wants Hashimoto to quit

TOKYO, Jan 25: Japan's opposition called today for Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to quit over the country's housing loan mess, blaming his period of tenure as finance minister in 1990 for the crisis, reports AFP.

"The prime minister should resign from parliament," Naohiko Okubo of the New Frontier Party told the Upper House.

Okubo said Hashimoto should take the blame because he headed the finance ministry when it imposed curbs on bank lending to the real-estate sector.

Chretien shuffles cabinet

OTTAWA, Jan 25: Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien announced sweeping cabinet changes today to bolster his fight against Quebec separation and bring new blood into the government, reports Reuter.

In his first cabinet overhaul since taking office in 1993, Chretien replaced two senior ministers, Andre Ouellet of Foreign Affairs and Roy MacLaren of International Trade. But budget deficit-slashing finance minister Paul Martin kept his post.

Train derails

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But sensing that the train was heading on a disjointed abandoned line, the locomotive halted it immediately. At least 10 people received minor injuries as panicky passengers jumped from the train during the sudden brake.

The angry passengers tried to ransack the rail station but high railway officials, including Chief Operating Superintendent Sheikh Habibullah and Divisional Traffic Officer S Nur, pacified them assuring proper actions in this regard.

The rail authorities suspended Assistant Station Master TK Mitra and two pointsmen — Nurul Absar and Shafiqul Islam — in an instant punitive action.

Rail-communications in Chandpur-Laksham section remained cut off four about three and half hours following the incident. The train service in the section resumed at about 12 am.

Some 16 passengers were killed and more than 100 injured as two trains collided at Kogaish between Meher and Hajiganj rail stations on January 8.

US favours

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The US will continue to encourage these efforts, he said.

"In the near term," the spokesman said, "we also encourage all parties to avoid violence, coercion, or interference in the right of voters to cast their vote peacefully for their chosen candidate, and to permit the fullest possible observation and transparency of the election process."

BNP using

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residence of AL leader Abdus Samad Azad, the meeting was attended by AL leaders Tofael Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, JP leaders Anwar Hossain, Manju and Moudud Ahmed, and Jamaat leaders Sheikh Ansar Ali, Ali Ahsan Md Mujahid and Qamaruzzaman.

The Midnight File

Syria, Israel resume talks

WASHINGTON, Jan 25: Peace talks between Israel and Syria have made a good start but no "dramatic results" are expected from the current round being held near Washington, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher said today. The talks have gotten off to a good start, Christopher told reporters of the talks which resumed on Wednesday in Maryland after a break of nearly three weeks, reports Reuter.

Riyadh denies rift over royal succession

RIYADH, Jan 25: Saudi Arabia will not be steered from the West and there is no rift over royal succession, the defence minister said in an interview published Wednesday, reports AP.

At the beginning of the year, ailing King Fahd put Crown Prince Abdullah, his half-brother, in temporary charge of the government. Abdullah is said to be more conservative and traditional than Fahd.

Foreign press reports that the Abdullah would "steer the kingdom away from the West in general and the United States in particular" were untrue, Prince Sultan bin Abdul Aziz told the Asharq Al-Awsat daily.

Abdullah is continuing the monarch's policies, Prince Sultan, the king's brother, said.

Abdullah has on occasions been critical of Saudi Arabia's alliance with the United States, but he is not considered anti-American.

Fahd's reign has been marked by rapid modernization and close ties with the United States.

The king, who has ruled since 1982 and is in his early 70s, said he needed time to recuperate from an illness he suffered in November, when he was hospitalized for a week. US officials said he had suffered a stroke.

Prince Sultan said nothing about Fahd's health or how long he will need to recuperate.

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Stabbed to death

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Chowdhury, said that Shaha, who hailed from Faridpur, was going to Kawran Bazar market to purchase goods for the shop in the morning.

Meanwhile, extortionists assaulted one Jashim, 35, a fruit vendor, in New Market yesterday afternoon. He was admitted to the DMCH with severe injuries, hospital sources said.

In another incident, one Moslem Fakir, 25, was stabbed by extortionists when he was returning to his house at Syedabad area in the city early hours yesterday. The attackers snatched his gold chain. Fakir is a shopowner at DMCH.

DU gunfight

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Gopalganj Group was ousted from the hall in the last week of December, according to reports.

Meanwhile, the Vice Chancellor of the University visited the hall at around 9 am.

He assured the students of necessary measure to take action against the persons involved in the violence, sources added.

Voter turnout

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set the impact of the ruling party campaigns, they said. But such programme would antagonise the people and give the ruling party an opportunity to blame the Opposition for the people's sufferings, they pointed out.

Talking to The Daily Star, a number of opposition strategists said that another focus of their campaign would be on the movement of the Prime Minister.

"She will face protests and demonstrations wherever she goes," said a front ranking opposition leader, who declined to be named.

Jatiya Party Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju claimed that voters in general were giving no importance to this 'one-party' election.

He apprehended that the ruling party would try to show a turnout, "may be even much more than the national average of 45 per cent."

But, he said, through a co-ordinated mass contact programme at grassroots level, the Opposition will convince people about the futility of the ensuing elections.