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NEWS BRIEFS

Public holiday

The government has declared February 15 a public holiday to facilitate the officers and employees of all government, semi-government, autonomous, and non-government offices, institutions and organisations to cast their votes in their respective areas, an official handout said here yesterday, reports BSS.

PM's Ctg visit cancelled

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Feb 12: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's visit to Chittagong and the gas drilling site in the Bay of Bengal tomorrow has been cancelled, highly placed sources said today.
The Prime Minister was expected to arrive at Chittagong airport tomorrow noon and later leave by helicopter for the gas reserve site.
But she cancelled the programme today, source added.

Bangladeshis remit Tk 17 cr

Bangladesh received about Tk 16.79 crore in January as remittance from its nationals living abroad, reports BSS.
Bangladeshi nationals remitted their money through 22,869 foreign money orders.
The total remittance during the current fiscal is about Tk 101.15 crore, says a press release.

Two killed in road accident

COX'S BAZAR, Feb 12: Two passers-by were killed and 5 passengers injured when a bus skidded off the road and fell into a ditch near Teknaf today. The two were identified as Helal Uddin, 12, and Naju Miah, 50. District police said condition of the five injured was critical. They were admitted to Rabeta Hospital. Others were given first aid, reports BSS.

Sehri, Ifar timings

Ram	Feb	Sehri	Ifar
23	13	—	5:36
24	14	5:12	5:36
25	15	5:11	6:57

Khaleda's appeal over Radio, TV Cast votes ignoring all provocations



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday appealed for calm and massive turnout of voters at polling centres on February 15 ignoring anti-election activity and provocation, reports UNB.

"This is the best way you can retaliate all sorts of anti-election activity and provocation," she said in her address to the countrymen over radio and television ahead of the general elections fraught with tension and trouble because of Opposition boycott.

She said casting votes is a sacred duty of all of us and called upon the people to exercise their right of franchise duly in the coming national election.

The BNP chairperson asked all to keep patience and remain peaceful in the

face of all sorts of anti-election provocations.

Seeking vote for her party the BNP chairperson said only if continuity of the democratic process could be maintained through elections, an environment ensuring participation of all parties in future elections would be created.

"Our sincere efforts to that end will continue," she said holding out the assurance to those staying out of the fray.

Begum Zia observed holding of the coming election is mandatory as per the constitutional provisions. "Otherwise, there will be no legitimate government and the country will plunge into a constitutional crisis."

"Knowing all this, she

Anybody trying to intimidate voters will face action

The Election Commission in a joint meeting with law-enforcing agencies yesterday decided to arrest and take legal action against anyone who tries to disrupt the next elections, reports UNB.

Those who would intimidate voters or election officials unleashing terrorist acts or attempt to obstruct voting or provoke others to do so will fall under the crackdown, the meeting decided.

Presided over by Chief Election Commissioner Justice A K M Sadeq, the meeting assured all election officials of proper security by concerned forces.

Present in the meeting were Election Commissioner Justice M Abdul Jalil, Army Chief Lieutenant General Abu Saleh Mohammad Nasim, Naval Chief Rear Admiral M Nurul Islam, Air Chief Air Vice Marshal Jamaluddin Ahmed, EC Secretary M Irshadul Haq, Home Secretary

Govt officials want to be relieved of polls duty

By Staff Correspondent

Junior and mid-ranking officials of the administrative cadre came out of their Secretariat offices yesterday, met the Cabinet Secretary and made a strong plea that they be relieved of election duties on security grounds.

They assembled inside the Secretariat compound at about 11-30 am and met Cabinet Secretary Ayubur Rahman at his office in a body.

The Cabinet Secretary was then in a meeting with other secretaries on the same issue.

The officers told Ayubur Rahman that they were feeling very much insecure to join the election duty on Thursday in view of the growing violence.

While the Home Ministry cannot ensure security of the Prime Minister, how can they

hope to provide safety and security to the junior officers on the polling day, they asked.

They also referred to a few recent incidents in different cities and towns where some field level officers were injured in violence.

The officers also expressed deep concern at the incident in which two officers were injured in a bomb blast on Sunday at the Mohammadpur Residential Model School in the city during a training of polling officials.

The Cabinet Secretary assured them that he would take up the matter with Chief Election Commissioner Justice AKM Sadeque and convey their concern to him.

UNB adds: Meanwhile, in an open letter to the Cabinet

Opposition's barricade programme today

By Staff Correspondent

The mainstream opposition political parties will observe a countrywide day-long rail-road-waterways barricade today demanding the cancellation of the forthcoming general elections.

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The Opposition programme also includes a 48-hour hartal from tomorrow to resist the forthcoming general elections on February 15.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami earlier announced the identical barricade and hartal programmes from separate press conferences on February 5.

The Opposition has also appealed to the people to enforce the dawn-to-dusk barricade across the country wholeheartedly. Rickshaws,

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An election camp in front of the Dhaka College in the city yesterday, three days ahead of the parliamentary polls. — Star photo

Prime Minister assures Editors Fresh dialogue after polls

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday held out the assurance that the government would resume dialogue with the boycotting parties for resolving the political problems after February 15 election which is a stopgap measure, reports UNB.

"The February 15 parliamentary polls will salvage the country from constitutional crisis, but it will not resolve the prevailing political problems. This is why we will sit around the table to ensure a participatory election in future," she said.

"It's my conviction that if we sit for dialogue, we would be able to reach a consensus. After resolving the political dispute, we will take step as per decisions which will come out of talks," the BNP chairperson said exchanging views with the editors of national dailies, news agencies and weeklies at her office.

She said though the election boycotting parties would be out of the House, her party would sit with them. She

however, ruled out the possibility of going by any precondition to dialogue. "There cannot be any precondition to discussion. I will not accept any precondition."

The Prime Minister hoped that the election-boycotting parties would cease violence and maintain peace during the voting.

Begum Zia said her party had wanted to go for polls with all the parties and had no dearth of sincerity, but failed as BNP did not get any cooperation from the three opposition parties in this regard.

Referring to the opposition-unleashed anarchy and violence throughout the country in a bid to resist the ensuing polls, Begum Zia said her party had not chosen the path of violence during the 1986 election held under autocrat Ershad. "We held meetings to create public opinion in favour of our stance explaining the situation."

"There is limit of tolerance. If they (Opposition)

continue their violent activities beyond the limit, we will have no other option but to go tough," she cautioned.

Replying to a question about mid-term election, the Prime Minister said she would not make such commitment. But she hastened to add that her party would continue discussion for resolving the existing problems and expressed her optimism that it would work.

Responding to a question about caretaker bill, the Prime Minister said she would not make any dramatic announcement before the February 15 elections.

She also said there would not arise any question about the credibility of the election as the Election Commission is totally free from government interference and discharging its duties independently.

"My government will never go for stuffing ballot boxes as was done by the past regimes," Begum Zia added. She observed that the per-

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Bombs hurled near Radio, TV offices

By Staff Correspondent

Several cocktails were hurled near the offices of the Bangladesh Television and Radio Bangladesh immediately after the Prime Minister's election projection speech over the state-run broadcasting media yesterday evening.

Besides, at least five vehicles were set on fire while around a dozen others partially damaged as the anti-election activists went on rampage in different parts of the city till last night.

About five home-made bombs were exploded on the road beside the Bangladesh Television building at Rampura around 7:30 pm, police and locals said.

Few crackers were hurled and a private car was set on fire near the National Broadcasting Authority building at Shahbagh at around 8:20 pm, fire service sources said.

At least two cars in the compound of Sonargon Hotel were damaged when two crude bombs went off in the

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People aren't afraid of threats: Hasina

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the government to stop the "farical, one-party elections" to avoid further confrontation and called upon the people to build up all-out resistance against the polls, reports UNB.

"Any government elected through farical voting will be illegal, and thus should not be allowed to be formed," she said urging all concerned not to go the polling centres.

Hasina was addressing a meeting of professionals, intellectuals and cultural activists in front of the National Press Club in the afternoon.

She called upon all the professional groups, government officials, police, BDR, members of the armed forces, and radio and TV workers, including newscasters and cameramen, "not to assist the government in stealing votes by holding the mock election."

Hasina said: "People will impose a curfew on the polling day and will not come out of doors to reject this one-party elections... Government will not be allowed

to play with the voting rights of the people."

She also called upon the people to observe an all-out hartal on February 14-15 to block the elections process, rejected by all opposition political parties.

The Awami League chief directed her party workers, three days ahead of the elections to intensify the current movement to "remove the autocratic government, force it to cancel the February 15 voting and give fresh elections under a caretaker government."

She said: "It is not possible to suppress the people's movement by repression and intimidation. People aren't afraid of threats, they will give a befitting reply after the elections."

She alleged that the BNP government had destroyed all the democratic institutions through corruption and unleashed terrorism across the country to cling to power.

The professional groups, intellectuals and cultural activists, who attended the

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Casting of votes without ID cards allowed

The President has promulgated an ordinance staying the law regarding voter's identity card for casting vote, reports UNB.

Following the ordinance, the Election Commission announced yesterday that the enlisted voters who were not given identity cards would be able to cast their votes without cards in the February 15 elections.

However, those who were issued identity card will have to show their cards during the polling.

The Commission requested the voters having card to show it during voting.

Tragic!

By DMCH Correspondent

A five-month-old baby died when the mother by mistake fed him insecticide instead of his regular dose of medicine, according to medical sources.

The incident occurred at Golakandi under Rugganj thana of Narayanganj district yesterday morning. The baby Roni, died on the way to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) at around 11:30 am, medical sources said quoting family members.

The mother took up the bottle containing liquid insecticide by mistake as it was near the medicine bottle in their residence.

Foreign missions to engage polls observers

The US Embassy in Dhaka will engage some 48 of its staff members to observe the February 15 polls, reports UNB.

Besides, Australian High Commission, Japan Embassy and Canadian High Commission here also requested the Election Commission for permission to their nominees to observe the polls.

Election Commission sources said the UK and the Commonwealth Secretariat would also send their representatives to observe the election, boycotted by the major opposition parties.

The EC has given permission to five local organisations — Coordination Council for Human Rights, Bangladesh CCHRB, Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA), Bangladesh Ain Adhikar Trust, Bangladesh Human Rights and Legal Aid Association, Syihet, and Fair Observation Forum (FOF) — to observe the election.



HOWZZAT!

The Daily Star World Cup Cricket Special will come out tomorrow. This 16-page, four-colour tabloid will contain interesting write-ups, mind-boggling statistics and intriguing photographs of your favourite stars.

Make sure you get The Daily Star tomorrow, and everyday.

telecast live the match offered to Sri Lanka as a consolation game following the boycott by Australia and West Indies of their matches here on February 17 and 25 citing security concerns.

The Australians pulled out of their World Cup opening match here after the January

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31 Tamil Tiger suicide bomb attack that killed 87 and wounded 1,400 in downtown Colombo.

Since then, the government here has revamped security by handing over responsibility to the military to protect this capital of one million people.

Under the new security arrangements, an army major general will head a special unit that will be responsible for protecting Colombo

against attacks by the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), officials said.

Units from the army, navy and air force have been assisting police in manning road blocks and vehicle searches but the latest government decision would put the army in charge of drawing up security plans.

Meanwhile, Colombo's luxurious Taj Samudra hotel is keeping 14 rooms vacant just in case the Australian and West Indies cricket teams change their minds and play in Sri Lanka after all.

"We still have some hopes that players will come," said accommodation manager Johann Cooke. "But we also have our doubts."

Asked who will pick up the bill if the two squads fail to turn up, he said: "It's not come to that stage yet."