

Leaders of trade bodies say Polls have undermined people's voting right

Star Report

The February 15 parliamentary polls have severely undermined the people's right to elect candidates of their choice, representatives of different trade groups said yesterday.

Talking to The Daily Star, they feared that the national economy would continue to suffer since there was no sign of an end to the lingering political crisis.

Leaders of the groups maintained that the government has committed a blunder by going for elections without the participation of the opposition parties.

Shabbir Yusuf, Chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association, said: The turn out of voters in the February 15 polls was very poor. This election will fail to bring about any short or long term solution to the long-drawn political crisis. In such a situation, the national economy would suffer the most.

Due to political instability over the last two years, overall export of Bangladesh has marked decline. In the jute sector, foreign buyers have become very concerned. There has been no major decision in the sector in the last one year, because everybody was waiting for a solution to the political impasse. As a result, India, our biggest competitor, has taken the full advantage of our internal situation.

We had almost attained a take off stage. But it would now take another three years to offset the setback.

Now, this is the time to decide our political and economic objectives, which should remain unaffected despite all our problems.

M A Zaman Manju, Senior Vice President Bangladesh Shop Owners' Association, said: According to different observers and election monitoring groups, the turnout of voters in the February 15 polls was less than 15 per cent.

The BNP bagged 31 per cent votes in the 1991 elec-

tions. So, this time, 16 per cent of BNP votes was not cast. It shows that the BNP supporters have abstained from expressing their opinion.

BNP leaders have indicated that they would bring amendment to the Constitution, providing for a caretaker government. If this is the situation, BNP leaders should have done it earlier to save our time and many lives.

On the other hand, the opposition parties have also proved that they lack far-sightedness. They should have pressed for accommodating the caretaker government issue in the 12th amendment to the Constitution.

S U Haider, President of Bangladesh Handicraft Manufacturers' and Exporters' Association, says: The way the polls were held without the opposition is not correct. If the political situation is not healthy, the economic sector would be damaged.

The trade bodies have deep relation with the overall economic survival of the country. Thus, the business community is very concerned over what had happened in the name of election which major opposition parties boycotted.

To reach solution, we have to rise above petty political interests. Now we need a survey on what the commonman really wants.

Khandaker Ruhul Amin, President of Bangladesh Restaurant Owners' Association, says: We believe that the Constitution is for the benefit of the people. A number of surveys have showed that an estimated 83 per cent of the people want elections under a caretaker government. The BNP should have been wise enough to understand this.

To find a solution to the political crisis, the main responsibility lies with the ruling party. BNP should now hold talks not only with the political parties, but also with different professional groups and trade bodies.

Political crisis must end

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building up infrastructural facilities and expansion of poverty alleviation programmes.

Both sides decided to conclude the annual discussion for cooperation between the two countries by March/April this year.

Earlier, initiating the discussion the Finance Minister thanked the German government for its support and assistance to Bangladesh since the independence of the country.

Nilphamari

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ploding hand bombs.

Police lobbed tear gas shells, used batons and opened fire which left Kamruzzaman killed and five injured.

Later, the mob attacked some 30 residences of the district officials at the Staff Quarters and officials of the law enforcing agencies elsewhere in the town.

The DC said the mob also set fire to the residence of a first class magistrate, Abdul Majid.

Witnesses said the mob also attacked a vehicle of the fire brigade and stormed its station in Pura Bazar area of the town.

Three of the injured — Sanu, Pradip and Shamsul Huq — were shifted to Rangpur Medical College from Nilphamari Sadar Hospital in a critical state.

Local journalists said that the body of their colleague was not returned on demand and kept at the local police station till the filing of this report at about midnight.

A tense situation is prevailing in Nilphamari town.

World Cup

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both BTV and Star Sports but BTV's telecast is doubtful due to Eid-ul-Fitr falling on that day. Delayed coverage of the Sri Lanka-Zimbabwe game will follow the other match on Star Sports.

A defeated English team take on Holland at Peshawar on February 22 while joint favourites Australia begin their campaign against Kenya the next day.

Hasina

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not the country, nor the industries.

They also expressed solidarity with the opposition programme and said they would give all-out support to "ensure the fall of this illegal government," the press release added.

FBCCI vice-president Rashiduzzaman Duda, DCCI president Ali Hossain and Metropolitan Chamber president Samson H Chowdhury were, among others, present in the meeting.

Awami League leaders, including Abul Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan, Amir Hossain, Amu, Tofael Ahmed, Abdul Razzaque and Suranjit Sen Gupta, were also present.

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia with the recipients of 'Ekushey Padak' for the year 1995 at Osmany Memorial Hall in the city yesterday. —PID photo

PLO urges foreign nations to defy Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb 19: The PLO today called on foreign nations to defy Israel and continue to visit the PLO headquarters in Jerusalem known as Orient House.

"I am asking them to go on in their policy which they were implementing all the time," Faisal al-Husseini, the leading PLO figure in Jerusalem told Reuters.

Israeli Internal Security Minister Moshe Shahal said on Sunday he would ban foreign ministers' visits to the site in accordance with Israel's policy of barring Palestinian diplomatic activity in Arab East Jerusalem.

Shahal's move came as main Israeli opposition head Benjamin Netanyahu declared the future of Jerusalem would be the focus of his campaign in early national elections called last week by Prime Minister Shimon Peres. The election, originally slated for October, will now take place in May or June.

Husseini said the ban was

contrary to peace agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation.

"It will be a violation of the peace agreement... It (Orient House) is not part of the Palestinian authority so he has no right due to the agreement to forbid people from coming to this place," Husseini said.

Israel and the PLO are to hold final status talks beginning in May. Jerusalem is one of the thorniest issues left for final talks.

Palestinians want East Jerusalem as the capital of a future state. Israel, which captured the Arab half of the city in the 1967 Middle East war and annexed it, claims all of the city as its indivisible capital and vows never to cede any part of it.

AFF adds: A Palestinian official said The United States must intervene to stop the spread of Israeli settlements on the West Bank if it wants the PLO to scrap class in its

charter for the destruction of Israel.

Ahmed Korei, a senior PLO negotiator with Israel, told the Arabic daily Al-Hayat: "If the US wants us to amend the PLO charter, it must also make Israel understand the need to stop colonisation."

Korei, who said colonisation was continuing at an increasing rate, insisted that the United States play a role in stopping the spread of Jewish settlements.

"If the Israelis seriously want to work towards a peace treaty, they must stop the colonisation, this applies equally to Jerusalem because no Palestinian will accept a solution which does not resolve the Jerusalem question," he said.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher pressed Palestinian President Yasser Arafat to amend the PLO charter during his last Middle East peace shuttle earlier this month.

'Police action on students of JN Hall pre-planned'

By Staff Correspondent

A White Paper, published by the Ekatturer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee on the January 31 police action on the students of Jagannath Hall of Dhaka University, has claimed that it was pre-planned and politically motivated.

The 72-page White Paper was based on interviews of 95 students, teachers, employees and journalists covering the incident and newspaper reports.

The police action was an attempt by the government of Begum Khaleda Zia to win support of fundamentalist forces like the Jamaat-e-Islami and pro-Pakistan groups who, along with Awami League (AL), are now opposing the government," the White Paper said in its nine-point conclusions.

It further alleged that the motive of the attack was also to appease Pakistan.

The White Paper also claimed that Jamaat's press statement condemning the incident was to please the AL and termed it an "act of political hypocrisy and a bid to hide the party's misdeeds."

It also said that the AL refrained from taking any programme to protest the incident "to establish it as an anti-India political force. Such a role by the country's pioneering pro-liberation political party was contributing to the rise of communal and fundamentalist forces."

In its five-point recommendations, the White Paper felt that a case be filed against Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury.

Indian minister favours job quota for Muslims

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Sitaran Kesri, Welfare Minister of India, Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao's government said here today that he was personally in favour of reservation of jobs for Muslims in government services.

In an interview with BSS at his office chamber here today Kesri said, "The reservation issue should be pursued for Muslim and members of other minority communities in consideration of their prevailing deplorable socio-economic conditions."

In this context, he recalled the observations that he had made at a seminar, organised by Aligarh Muslim University at the Indian International Conference Centre (IICC) in Delhi in August, 1993.

Kesri who is known for his pro-people approach to politics made it clear at the seminar that to improve the socio-economic conditions of Muslims and other minorities, there is need for their reservations also in educational institutions.

He said, "The loyalty of Muslims who opted to stay back in India instead of migrating to Pakistan at the time of 'division' of India, cannot be challenged." In this context, he recalled with respect the contributions of Indian Muslim leaders including Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Dr Zakir Hossain.

When asked what the government would do for the reconstruction of historic Babri Masjid, Kesri said as the matter is before the court it is difficult to make any comment on it. He, however, hastened to add: "If the Muslims are hurt for the demolition of the mosque, I too feel equally hurt."

Criticising the followers of

Sangha Parivar, Kesri said, "It is a tragedy that for religious belief one migrant to India is called a traitor while the other a refugee."

Kesri listed a number of steps initiated by his ministry and approved by the government for the welfare and development of members of minority communities.

He said the Rao government has constituted national minority financial development institution with a fund of rupees 500 crore. He said since the launching of the corporation a total of 11 thousand Muslims have been benefitted by it.

London blast

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whether it was a man or a woman.

Four of the nine people taken to hospitals were seriously injured and one was in critical condition. Three suffered 'significant' head injuries and the middle-aged bus driver was in intensive care with chest injuries. There were also 'walking wounded', police and hospital officials said.

Police hope they may be able to recover video tape from security cameras on the bus.

The explosion occurred as people were streaming out of nearby theatres and bars.

Only hours before the blast, Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, urged Britain to start peace talks immediately.

Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams told a rally in Belfast on Sunday: "We want to talk and we want to have peace, but we must have justice and we must have freedom."

Ekushey Padak

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gold medal, a citation and Taka twenty thousand.

Begum Asma Abbasi received award on behalf of her husband Mustafa Zaman Abbasi while Shaqfat Nizam received the award on behalf of his father, Shaheed Intellectual Nizam Uddin Ahmed.

Introduced in 1976, the state-level 'Ekushey Padak' is being given to the renowned litterateurs, artists, educationists and journalists each year as recognition of their notable contributions in different fields of national life.

The Prime Minister said congenial atmosphere has been created in the society with the establishment of democracy and freedom of expression.

Only democratic atmosphere, she said, can ensure creative activities of intellectuals, writers and artists.

She said the spirit of Ekushey had paved the way for the establishment of sovereign and independent Bangladesh.

Ekushey February, Begum Zia said, enkindles the successes of our national life and inspires us to go ahead.

She paid tributes to the martyrs of the language movement, liberation war and democratic movements of the past.

Ministers, educationists, litterateurs, artists, journalists and cultural organisers were present on the occasion.

Cabinet Secretary Ayubur Rahman conducted the function.

Ekushey

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edly to give democracy a concrete shape, to eradicate poverty and illiteracy and endeavour to establish universal human values.

Various political parties, student organisations and socio-cultural bodies have drawn up elaborate programmes to observe the day. These include discussions, seminars, milled mahfils and placing of wreaths at the central Shaheed Minar.

A three-day programme of the Bangladesh Shipakala Academy will begin at midnight on February 20 through placing of wreaths and offering prayer at the Central Shaheed Minar.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) has expressed its inability to cooperate with the Amar Ekushey Uddhapan Committee this year in protest against the Prime Minister's planned visit to the Central Shaheed Minar in the small hours of February 21.

DUTA took the decision at an emergency meeting of the Association's executive committee held at the Dhaka University Club yesterday evening with its president prof ATM Zahurul Haq in the chair, says a press release.

The meeting also decided that the president and general secretary of the Association would refrain from discharging the duties of coordinator and joint coordinator respectively of the Uddhapan Committee (Committee for observation of the Shaheed Day).

It said that the decision of non-cooperation was taken in the view of the incidents at the Jagannath Hall centering PM's visit to Bangla Academy on February 1 and the political situation following the holding of 'one-party' elections on February 15.

The members of the DUTA, however, would visit the Central Shaheed Minar through a rally from the DU Club at 6 am tomorrow to place wreaths, the press release said.

7 get Ekushey Padak '96

The government has conferred the Ekushey Padak for 1996 on seven persons for their contributions to their respective fields, reports BSS.

The following persons have been awarded the Ekushey Padak for 1996:

Literature — Hasnat Abdul Hye and Rahat Khan; Arts and Culture — A K M Feroz Alah (Feroz Shah) posthumous; Education — Prof Abdul Hye (posthumous); Prof Sirajul Islam Chowdhury and Prof Mohammad Shajahan; and Journalism — Kamruzzaman.

The Midnight File

Coalition govt in Turkey

ANKARA, Feb 19: Turkey's Motherland Party leader Mesut Yilmaz announced today that he and Islamist leader Necmettin Erbakan had agreed to form a coalition government. "We've agreed on most matters, and our friends will start talks for distribution of ministries Wednesday," Yilmaz told a news conference with Erbakan, reports AFP.

Indian SC rejects petition against telecom deals

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: India's Supreme Court opened the way today for privatisation of the telephone system, dismissing petitions challenging the participation of the private sector in providing basic services, reports AFP.

The petitions are dismissed, Judge AM Ahmadi said.

The court rejected all 10 petitions opposing the privatisation of the state-owned telecommunications monopoly and hailed the government's policy as an "historic departure" from the past.

The court had ordered the government in December to put its privatisation plans on hold until it could rule on the petitions submitted by private individuals and groups and opposition members of parliament.

The petitions have objected to the privatisation of the telephone system on various grounds, including the government's failure to establish an independent telecommunication regulatory authority before issuing tenders.

Indian opposition parties have attacked the government of Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao over its handling of the privatisation process and have demanded the resignation of Communications

Minister Sukh Ram.

The opposition has accused Ram of acting improperly in the tender process, in which a little known firm, Himachal Futuristic Communications Ltd from his home state, submitted bids totalling a staggering 27 billion dollars.

Ram has denied the allegations and has accused the opposition of carrying out a "politically motivated" campaign against him.

Indian Textile Minister resigns

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Textile Minister Kamal Nath resigned from Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's cabinet after his name was linked to the unfolding black money scandal, the United News of India said today, reports Reuters.

In his letter to Rao, Kamal Nath said he was resigning because his name had been linked to a scandal which has rocked India's political system.

UK company to set up denim factory in Ctg

R G Foster Textile Machinery Ltd of the UK will set up a joint venture denim factory in Chittagong, an official handout said in the city yesterday, reports BSS.

The project, worth nine million US dollars (over Taka 36 crore), will cover all aspects of denim production from spinning, through indigo dyeing, weaving and finishing to make-up.

Roger Gregory, Managing Director of R G Foster, made an announcement to this effect in London following the company's participation in the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) sponsored trade mission to Bangladesh in November last year. Gregory also took part in the British trade mission to Bangladesh in November 1994.

Gregory said that a site for the factory had already been identified and it contained all the basic infrastructures needed.

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Eid tomorrow

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pious occasion they prayed for peace and progress of the people and the nation.

The government earlier announced a 3-day holiday on February 20, 21 and 22 for the Eid.

A home-going spree has begun and people are thronging railway stations, bus and launch terminals to go home to celebrate the Eid with man and dear ones.

Newspapers will bring out special supplements today and the Radio and BTV will broadcast special programmes on the Eid Day.

The main Eid-congregation in the city will be held at the National Eidgah Maidan under the management of the Dhaka City Corporation. In the congregation, where thousands of devotees including President Abdur Rahman Biswas and Begum Biswas will offer prayer, special *munajat* will be offered seeking divine blessings of the Almighty for continued peace and prosperity of the people as well as unity, integrity and solidarity of the Muslim Ummah.

In the National Eidgah maidan arrangements will also be there for the women to say prayer.

Four congregations will be held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque. The first *jamaat* will be held at 7 am, the second at 8 am, the third at 8-45 am and the fourth at 9-30 am.

BSS adds from Chittagong: According to Chittagong Central Eid Jamaat Committee, the main Eid *jamaat* will be held at Chittagong stadium at 8 am to be led by Khatib of Shahi Jama Masjid Syed Anwar Hussain Jaber Al-Madani. Eid *jamaats* will also be held at Jamaatul Falah Maidan, Shah Jama Masjid, Pologround, Jamboore Ground, Halishahr Eidgah Maidan and a scores of other mosques and Eidgahs.

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Clinton greets Khaleda

US President Bill Clinton has wished Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and the people of Bangladesh a happy and prosperous Eid-ul-Fitr, reports BSS.

"Mrs Clinton joins me in wishing you and all the people of Bangladesh the blessings of a peaceful and prosperous Eid-ul-Fitr," President Clinton said in a letter sent to Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday.

President Clinton said the United States looks forward to working with Bangladesh in a spirit of friendship and cooperation on the many challenges that lie ahead.

"On this holy occasion, we look back with gratitude at your government's generous contribution towards international peacekeeping efforts and remember especially the many Bangladeshi peacekeepers.



A local resident checks out her flattened home yesterday after an earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter scale hit this Indonesian island north-east of Irian Jaya's mainland. Fifty four people have been reported dead, with some 28 missing, as a result of the tremor and the ensuing tidal wave. —APP/UNB photo