

Crimes against women Cabinet approves draft bill seeking 'special provisions' for punishment

By Staff Correspondent

The cabinet yesterday approved a draft bill seeking "special provisions" for punishment for crimes against women and children and terrorism, cabinet sources said.

The bill is likely to be introduced in the current session of parliament.

The weekly cabinet meeting was scheduled to be held on Monday last, which was the Jall Killing Day. The meeting was rescheduled for yesterday, a minister told The Daily Star.

The cabinet meeting, which was chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also fixed the procurement price of Aman paddy, Aman rice and wheat.

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Hartal had no link with Aid Group meet, says Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia has said that yesterday's hartal had no link with the ongoing Aid Group meeting in the city.

"It (the hartal) had a specific purpose of protecting fundamental democratic rights (of the people) and the independence and helping consolidate those... As the largest patriotic political party, BNP always places national interests, development and democratic struggle above all", she said in a statement last night.

The Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad accused the present "autocratic" government of using police and ruling party "terrorists" to foil the

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Raising forex reserve main challenge: Kibria

Finance Minister Shah AMS Kibria told the donors that the government has taken up a fairly heavy agenda for reforms which cut across the political and administrative systems as well as economic policies, reports UNB.

The government will focus on improving the institutional capacity for economic management," he said in his opening statement at the annual meeting of Bangladesh Aid Group that began in the city yesterday morning.

The Finance Minister told the meeting that the government would continue implementation of structural reforms, pursue the necessary adjustment policies and maintain macroeconomic stability.

The main policy challenge for FY 1998 is to raise foreign

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City BNP jt meet today

An emergency joint meeting of Dhaka City BNP will be held at 4 pm today at 29 Minto Road, the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, reports UNB.

City unit presidents and general secretaries of the party front organisations, all thana BNP presidents and BNP-backed DCC ward commissioners will be present at the meeting.

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Aid Group meet begins in city

Donors unhappy over growing political intolerance

Star Report

Bilateral donors yesterday voiced their concern at the "increasing growth of political intolerance, violence and intimidation in the country" at the annual Aid Group meeting in the capital to determine the quantum of aid for the next fiscal year.

The present confrontation between the current government and the opposition appears to be ushering in a new cycle of violence, intimidation and instability," the country's 15 bilateral development partners noted in a joint statement issued on the first day of the two-day meet.

"Violence in the universities, which is condoned and even encouraged by political parties, is another manifestation of this climate of intolerance," they said.

The development partners sincerely hoped that all members of political parties will res-

pect the call of the Honorable President of Bangladesh for tolerance and accommodation in the interests of the country as a whole, and settle their differences in Parliament, and not by violence.

The statement was signed by heads of the delegations of US, UK, Japan, European Commission, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland. It was submitted to Chairperson of the meeting Meiko Nishimizu, the World Bank's Vice-President for South Asia.

The meet reviewed the macro-economic situation in the country on the first day.

The donors almost unanimously suggested that the government should improve its foreign exchange reserve position by adopting a more flexible

exchange rate management, check borrowing from the banking system, improve its aid utilisation capability, and expedite privatisation programme.

They also called for improvement in law and order and also in the customs and revenue departments.

The donors suggested that the government should have a stated policy on privatisation.

In reply, the government side said its main emphasis is on maintaining a low inflation level and assured the donors that steps are being taken to improve foreign exchange reserve.

It also said steps have been taken to remove procedural and institutional bottlenecks in project implementation.

Highlighting its outlook for FY '98, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria said the government will

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Political scene overtakes normal agenda at meet

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Unquiet political scene and deteriorating law and order overtook normal agenda at the top of which was macro-economy on the first day of the two-day annual Aid Group Meeting deliberations in Dhaka yesterday.

The government came in for severe criticism from donors, while Finance Minister SAMS Kibria, accompanied by top civil servants, led the defence.

"The onus lies on the government... to create a situation so that the opposition can operate," one source said, summarising the donors' mood at the inaugural session.

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High time for political parties to reach consensus: President

By Staff Correspondent

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday said socio-political disorder, chaos and frequent hartals have become impediments to investment and development activities in the country.

The President underlined the need for consensus among the political parties on ways for ensuring an 'overall economic development'.

He, however, said that tolerance to each other's political ideology and mode of activities was necessary for reaching any consensus and forging negotiations among the parties.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed made the observations while inaugurating a seminar on 'Quest for National Consensus Building in Bangladesh,' held at the auditorium of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in the city yesterday afternoon. Prof Muzaffer Ahmed of the Dhaka University presided the inaugural session.

"Socio-political disorder, chaos and frequent hartals have become the impediments to investment of capital and development activities in the country," the President said, adding that it was high time for the political parties to reach a consensus "on the ways to achieve an overall economic development."

According to him, consensus of the political parties is necessary to address problems like high growth rate of population, unemployment, and lack of industrialisation. Consensus is also necessary on issues related to peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and allowing 'transit' to others.

It is only natural that all would not think in same direction, the President said. "But all socio-political forces have to reach consensus on certain issues when it comes to the question of national existence, welfare of the people and keeping

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14 killed in Nandail road accident

KISHOREGANJ, Nov 4: Fourteen people were killed and 62 others injured in a road accident on Kishoreganj-Mymensingh highway in Nandail thana of Mymensingh district today, reports UNB.

Police said the accident occurred when a truck, carrying supporters of a UP election candidate, fell into a roadside ditch at Chanta Bazar at about 1 pm, killing nine people on the spot.

Five others died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital. Those who died on the spot were identified as Abdul Mannan, 40, Ziaul Haque, 30, Raham Ali, 55, Baharuddin, 48, Abdul Ali, 40, Sujon, 13, Hafizuddin, 50, Mamun, 10, and Malek, 32 of different villages of Nandail Thana.

Zahuruddin, 58, Shaheb Ali, 50, Barak, 20, Rafiqul, 20, and Shamsuddin, 50, died at Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

The other injured persons are now under treatment at MMCH.

UP chairman candidate shot dead in Magura

MAGURA, Nov 4: A UP chairman candidate was gunned down allegedly by his former comrades in the outlawed Sarbahara Party at a village in Shaikha thana of the district tonight, reports UNB.

Villagers said 25-30 heavily armed activists of an underground group fired on Sonnasi Kumar Biswas, 40, at 8 pm when he was campaigning at his Singra village. He died on the spot.

The killers fled firing dozens of shots.

The ill-fated Sonnasi, a candidate from Dhoneswargati union parishad, wanted to return to a normal life surrendering his arms.

Additional policemen from the district headquarters were sent to the spot, where the body was lying.

BNP, 6 parties to demonstrate in city today

By Staff Correspondent

Seven political parties including BNP have decided to stage separate demonstrations in the city today to protest what they called armed attacks on pickets by Awami League activists under police shelter during yesterday's half-day hartal in the city.

The decision was taken at a joint meeting of the parties held at the Minto Road official residence of BNP Chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia. Begum Zia presided over the meeting, a BNP press release said.

The joint meeting also decided that the on-going agitation

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Ctg Customs appraiser withdrawn

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Nov 4: Chittagong Customs House today has withdrawn the principal appraiser of Group-10 for his alleged involvement in the illegal import of reconditioned cars from Japan, an authority

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A tokai jumps over the burning rags and waste paper for fun during the hartal hours yesterday. This picture was taken from North South Road in the city.

— Star photo by Anisur Rahman

Call for change in mind-set for S Asian cooperation

By Staff Correspondent

Political leaders, diplomats and businessmen yesterday called for change in the mind-set of the people within and outside the government to improve the prospects of South Asian cooperation.

The participants felt that the winds of change, bringing greater cooperation in other parts of the world, were being stemmed and hindered in South Asia due to the traditional attitude and unbending mental behaviour of both politicians and other sections of people.

The dialogue on "Prospects of South Asian Cooperation", organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), was participated by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak, former Indian foreign minister and Rajiya Sabha member Pranab Mukherjee and included at least 60 other participants. However, due to a tightly drawn schedule and shortage of time, only half of those present got an opportunity to participate.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad said that the current political will manifested

by the South Asian leaders had led to a dynamic re-awakening. Samad Azad lauded the efforts of the current political leaders in South Asia in trying to usher in a change for development and prosperity in their respective countries.

Water Resource Minister Abdur Razzak lamented that it was a truism that political leaders while in opposition speak one thing, but when they are in government, more often than not, often shift their opinion and position.

Pranab Mukherjee observed that the South Asian region has been generally unable to keep pace with the changing world scenario.

He said that the region has increased in population but its resources were not being exploited in proportion.

Mukherjee said the South Asian market which has a population of 1.2 billion people is one of the largest in the world and stressed that "We should work out a common development strategy for regional benefit."

Calling for change of the traditional mind-set, the former finance and foreign minister of India asked, "Why cannot we have within SAARC free trade zones?"

Morshed Khan suggested that the tariff barriers should be eased stating that, "Investors know no borders."

Farooq Sobhan stressed upon the need for more frequent contact between the commerce

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Asian Art Biennial from tomorrow

The Asian Art Biennial exhibition organised by Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy will begin in the city tomorrow, reports BSS.

A total of 35 countries are participating in the 25-day exhibition. Artists and representatives from a number of countries have already arrived here to participate in the exhibition and seminar, a press release of Shilpakala Academy said.

Gold chains worth Tk 6 lakh seized at ZIA

Zia International Airport Customs Authority on Monday night seized 1211 grams of unauthorised gold chains worth about Taka 6 lakh, reports BSS.

According to a Kurmitola Customs House press release, the chains were recovered on the basis of a tip-off from a prayer room on the second floor of the Terminal Bhaban at zero hours.

The Customs authority could not arrest anybody.

A departmental case was registered in this connection.

Signing of accord with Unocal delayed

Star Report

Signing of an agreement between the government and a US company, Unocal, on the Western Region Integrated Project (WRIP) which includes development of the Shahbazpur gas field, is being delayed because of difference of opinion among Petrobangla officials over some clauses of the project which appear to conflict with the national interest.

Besides, a Petrobangla committee to finalise a Gas Purchase Sales Agreement (GPSA) under the WRIP, has not yet been formed.

On October 14, the Energy Ministry instructed the Petrobangla and Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB) to finalise negotiations with Unocal and sign the WRIP by October 30.

Talking to this correspondent a Petrobangla official claimed that such an instruction was "unprecedented" and that it "surprised" them because "most of the proposals made in the WRIP needed technical analysis" before making any final agreement.

The proposal of Unocal will cause a loss of two to three billion US dollars to the country. No Petrobangla official wanted

to take the responsibility of signing the agreement, because, they believe this agreement is bound to be counter productive and would create repercussions," the official said on condition of anonymity.

However, Unocal claims that the WRIP, one of few such inter-

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(Left) Candidates in the Union Parishad elections submitting nomination papers at the TNO office in Narayanganj yesterday. (Right) A queue of candidates outside the office.

— Star photo

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