

BNP urged again to join JS

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday began discussion on the Presidential address in the House with most of the Treasury bench members urging the BNP lawmakers to join the session.

The Treasury bench members were critical of BNP for boycotting the session while discussion on the speech of a "neutral and non-controversial personality like Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed" was going on. They reiterated their call to the Opposition MPs to end their boycott for greater national interest.

Jatiya Party legislators were, however, critical of the President for his "unequivocal support" to the government steps taken so far.

Participating in the discussion, Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed said he hoped that the BNP would return to the House if it wanted well-being of the people and to make parliament the centre of all national activities.

He alleged that BNP was conspiring to disrupt development activities and foil the congenial atmosphere. People will try

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Fitra fixed at Tk 25 per head

The Fitra for this year for Dhaka and its adjoining areas has been fixed at Tk 25 per head which is equivalent to the price of 1.65 kg wheat or flour, reports UNB.

Elsewhere in the country the Fitra will be the local market price of the same quantity of wheat or flour, said a meeting of the Islamic Foundation in the city yesterday.

Director General of the Foundation, Morshed Hossain presided over the meeting. Khatib of Baitul Mukarram Mosque Maolana Obaidul Huq was also present, among others.

The meeting was informed that the amount for Dhaka and its adjoining areas has been fixed after surveying the price of best quality of flour in the open market.

Singapore Airlines proposes to lease 2 F-28 aircraft to Biman

By Special Correspondent

Bangladesh Biman has started weighing a proposal from the Singapore Airlines to dry-lease at least two F-28 4000 series aircraft to replace the similar aeroplane that was badly damaged during the crash landing in Sylhet last month.

It is considering a proposal from the Australian National Airlines to dry-lease a F-28 to jumpstart its limping domestic service, now run by one ATP.

But the Australian proposal ran aground on terms and conditions, which made the Biman authorities look for alternative sources to procure F-28 aircraft.

The management of the airline was busy yesterday trying to dry-lease at least one aircraft, preferably a DC-10 to carry the extra load of passengers during the Hajj pilgrimage, beginning from March.

The management received four proposals from different companies. It discussed three proposals earlier and will take up the fourth today to reach a final decision, Biman sources said yesterday.

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Gram Parishad polls thru' adult franchise from March likely

By Mizan Ali and Reaz Ahmad

Election of Gram Parishads is likely to begin from March on the basis of adult franchise, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman has said.

The election will be held in a staggered schedule like that of the recently held union parishad election, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sources in the ministry said the government plans to involve the Election Commission in the Gram Parishad election. "It is likely that the Deputy Commissioners and Thana Nirbahi Officers will be entrusted with the responsibility," one source said. But the compo-

sition of the election conducting body is yet to be finalised, he said.

LRGD and Cooperatives Ministry has already prepared rules for holding the election of 40212 Gram Parishad under 4,468 unions, the sources said.

A copy of the draft rules prepared by the ministry was obtained by The Daily Star.

As per the draft rules, Returning Officers (ROs) will be appointed by the election conducting body from among government officials and headmasters of government or private schools.

The ROs will conduct the

elections according to the Gram Parishad Act and the provisions of the rules to be finalised.

As per the draft rules, the presiding officers and polling officers will be appointed by the election conducting body from among government employees and assistant teachers of schools. Sufficient polling officers will be appointed to assist the presiding officers.

One or more than one polling centres will be opened depending on the area of the Gram Parishad and each centre will have separate rooms for

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PM's question-answer session 'Rights of Bangalees in CHT not curtailed'

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament yesterday categorically rejected the notion that the peace accord has curtailed the Bangalees' right to possess or protect their property and civil rights in the CHT, reports UNB.

Responding to a question from Panchanan Biswas (AL-Khulna) during the PM's question hour, she said it is also not correct that the DC's authority relating to lands in the hill districts has been curbed by the agreement.

Under the provision of the peace accord, the Prime Minister said the Bangalees living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) will have the right to possess and protect their lands. She said the Deputy Commissioners (DCs) would enjoy the same authority as they did in the past.

Referring to Clause 64 of the

1989 Act relating to lands, Hasina said that without prior permission of the Parishad, no place or land within the hill districts could be leased, sold out or transferred as amended by a provision of the peace agreement.

However, this provision will not be applicable for the reserve forests, Kaptai hydro-electric project area, Betbunia satellite area, state-owned industrial units and the lands recorded in the name of the government.

Hasina also said that after signing of the peace agreement, foreign donors and aid giving agencies have pledged financial assistance for the development of the CHT.

In reply to a question from Mir Sakawat Ali Daru (AL-Bagerhat) she said heads of government, politicians of different countries of the world and

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Three bills placed in JS

Three bills titled Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Bill 1998, Private University (Amendment) Bill 1997 and Dhaka Electric Supply Authority (Amendment) Bill 1998 were introduced in the House yesterday, reports UNB.

Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yusuf placed the first bill for establishing the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University with all the assets and liabilities of the Institute of Post Graduate Medicine and Research (IPGMR), Dhaka.

The bill contains detailed description of the proposed university including its power and authority, teaching method and rules of appointing its VC, pro-VC, treasurer, registrar, controller of examination, teachers, officials and employees, their duties and responsibilities.

Education Minister A S H K

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Consultation meet on Japanese grant from Jan 24

A two-day annual consultation meeting on Japanese grant and technical assistance to Bangladesh will begin in the city on January 24, reports UNB.

A Japanese delegation comprising representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) will arrive in Dhaka today to participate in the meeting.

The consultation will cover the existing economic cooperation as well as the future areas of cooperation between the two friendly countries, said an official handout yesterday.

The annual consultation forms the basis for Japan's future assistance to Bangladesh, particularly for the next financial year.

The delegation members will also pay a courtesy call on Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria on January 26 and will visit several project sites on

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Alleged assault on GM Eight BB employees suspended, 2 held

Bangladesh Bank has suspended its eight employees allegedly for assaulting a top official, official sources said yesterday, reports UNB.

Md Shamsuddin, General Manager (Administration), was roughed up and his room ransacked by a group of employees on Monday.

Authorities set up a three-member probe committee, headed by Executive Director of the Bank Harinarayan Majumder. Two other members of the committee are General Manager Farid Ahmed Chowdhury and DGM Shamsul Huq.

The suspended employees are: Kamal Mia, president of Bangladesh Bank Employees Association, Ahsanul Habib and Ilyas Sheikh of Dhaka branch office and Manjurul Huq, general secretary of the Association, Md Ferdous Alam,

Rakhal Chandra Kar, Md Aminul Islam and Md Nur Mia of the head office.

Police also arrested two officers of the central bank for their alleged involvement in the incident. The arrested are M Ashfaq Ali and M Hashim Iqbal.

Meanwhile, a protest procession of the employees association came under attack yesterday at noon. Witnesses said the CBA supporters hurled chairs from the procession from the fourth floor of the building.

Police later recovered an axe and some hockey sticks from the CBA office.

The general secretary of the employees association said they were not involved in the attack on General Manager Shamsuddin and termed the incident as an "arranged game"

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JS body to probe alleged corruption in buying Tk 100 cr medical instrument

A meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare Ministry was held at Sangsad Bhaban yesterday with its president Dr Kazi Abu Yusuf in the chair, reports UNB.

The meeting decided to constitute a parliamentary sub-committee headed by State Minister for Health Prof M Amanullah to inquire into the alleged corruption in buying medical instrument of Tk 100 crore under Health Ministry.

The other members of the sub-committee are Dr H B M Iqbal and Alhaj M Tajul Islam Chowdhury.

The meeting discussed the management of district hospitals, medical college hospitals and specialised hospitals.

The meeting also discussed bed-pattern and its improvement at different hospitals, formation of thana and district health committees, matters relating to shortage of doctors and appointment of new doctors, delay in joining of transferred doctors and formation of vigilance team and measures to ease scarcity of medical staff.

The meeting decided to construct the Health and Population Building at Mahakhali by removing the illegal establishment there.

Muggers stab 3, snatch Tk 64,000

By Staff Correspondent

Muggers stabbed three persons and snatched Tk 64,000 from them in two separate incidents in the city yesterday.

Police said a gang of muggers injured Abul Kashem, 40, and snatched Tk 46,000 from him when he was passing Shib Bari area near the Dhaka University campus at about 11 am.

Kashem was travelling in a rickshaw to go to Gulistan from his house in Indira Road. The attackers in an autorickshaw intercepted Kashem's rickshaw, stabbed him and snatched the money. He was taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), hospital sources said.

Ramna police arrested one person identified as Sirajul Islam from near Osmany Uddyan in connection with the mugging.

In another incident, a group of about five muggers stabbed two persons identified as Masum, 30, and Shajahan, 32, near the passport office in Agargaon area at about 11:30 am and took away Tk 18,000 from them. They were taken to the DMCH.

However, Mohammadpur police said they did not have any information in this connection till last night.

Fake bank loan Case against 6 in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Jan 20: The District Anti-Corruption Bureau has filed a case against six people for their alleged involvement in misappropriation of about Tk seven crore from the local branch of Sonali Bank.

The case was filed with Khulna thana against six persons including the Managing Director of Star Seaford Industries Limited, Muhammad Muslim, and the former General Manager of Khulna region of Sonali Bank Mahmudul Haque.

The other four accused are former AGM of the corporate branch of Sonali Bank Malik Abdul Ahad, former senior officer Mollah Ekram Hossain, former store clerk Matru Rahman and former senior godown keeper Shawkatul Rahman.

The FIR states that the accused bank officials helped the MD of the fish processing company to take loan by forged means in the name of exporting frozen shrimps.

3 arrested with rice stolen from foreign vessel

From Quazi Amanullah

KHULNA, Jan 20: Mongla police in cooperation with Navy personnel arrested three persons on Monday from the Pasur channel and recovered 243 bags of rice worth about Taka three lakh, stolen from a Panamanian vessel MV Alexandra.

The arrested persons are Islam, 30, Belal and Aziz Fakir, 35.

The vessel, now stranded at Herbaria, about 20 km from Mongla port, was coming to the port on October 20, 1996 to load raw jute for Brazil. It was carrying 5,000 tonnes of rice from Vietnam to Mozambique. But it got stranded following a fire in its engine-room in which five crew died.

The local agent of the owner of rice earlier managed to unload over 2,000 tonnes of rice from the vessel. But the rest quantity could not be unloaded as the port authority filed a case for realising demurrage charges

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No massive denationalisation of mills Accord signed to form wages commission within a month

Government will announce the national minimum wages for industrial workers within next six months that will be effective from July 1, 1997, reports UNB.

A high-level committee will be constituted to recommend the wages and relevant laws formulated to implement the wages, according to a 12-point agreement signed between the government and the Samik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (SKOP) in the city yesterday.

The government and the SKOP signed the agreement which also said that a wages commission, also comprising the workers representatives, would be formed within a month.

As per the agreement, all

regular workers will get a lumpsum of Tk 1,000 in advance while 'badli' (temporary) workers of Tk 500 pending implementation of the wages commission award. The advance will be deducted from the total payable amount, decided by the wages commission.

Labour and Manpower Minister MA Mannan, State Minister for Jute AK Faezul Haque, State Minister for Textiles KM Jahangir were present at the signing ceremony of the agreement, where it was hoped that owners of private sector mills and factories will also provide similar facilities.

Labour and Manpower Secretary Muhammad Ahsan Ali Sarker signed the agreement on behalf of the government while

27 workers leaders for the SKOP.

According to the agreement, the government has agreed not to undertake any massive denationalisation of the public sector mills and factories.

About the industrial units for which tender has already been floated for privatisation, necessary steps will be taken after consultation with the SKOP and the workers leaders of the units concerned.

The agreement mentioned that a high-level committee will be formed to make suggestions for amending the labour law to make it pragmatic and more democratic.

The committee will submit its report within next six

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Three Karnataka ministers join rival party

NEW DELHI, Jan 20: A day after India's governing United Front coalition launched its re-election campaign, a key partner split today in its southern stronghold, reports AP.

Three ministers and three other state lawmakers resigned from the ruling Janata Dal Party in Karnataka state and joined a rival group that has aligned with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party in the campaign for next month's general elections.

This was the second jolt suffered by Janata Dal in the past six months. The first came when leader Laloo Prasad Yadav led a faction away after being charged with corruption.

Meanwhile BJP leader Atal Behari Vajpayee has asked the government to seek special permission of the Swiss authorities to make Bofors documents public since this was an important national issue.

Sonia addresses polls rally in Hindi

NEW DELHI, Jan 20: Eager to establish that she is part of India, the Italian-born widow of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi addressed voters today in Hindi — as she campaigned for the Congress Party, reports AP.

"I consider myself to be a daughter of India and have come here in that capacity," Indian news agencies quoted Sonia Gandhi as telling a cheering crowd of several thousand people in the eastern state of Bihar, India's Hindi heartland.

Gandhi, 51, became an Indian citizen soon after her marriage to Rajiv Gandhi in 1968, but has been criticised by political rivals as an outsider.

She learned Hindi from a tutor at home and has occasionally made speeches in the language. Today was the first election rally she has addressed in Hindi.

Opinion polls show the cen-



trist Congress Party once led by Rajiv Gandhi is trailing the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party in the run-up to elections next month. Sonia Gandhi had shunned politics, but agreed to help Congress and began campaigning last week. She is not running for office herself.

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BMTF, Khulna Shipyard to be handed over to Army, Navy

By Rafiq Hasan

The government has finally decided to handover the Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory and Khulna Shipyard to the Armed Forces.

The state-owned enterprises had been awaiting privatisation for long.

Privatisation Board sources said that the decision has been finalised to handover the Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) in Gazipur and Khulna Shipyard in Khulna to the Army and Navy respectively. Terms and conditions of the transfer will be decided later.

"Senior officials of the Armed Forces, Defence Ministry and Privatisation Board will sit in a joint meeting on Thursday to discuss what could be the terms and conditions of handing over those projects," a

PB source said. The meeting would also discuss the sharing of more than Tk 364 crore liabilities of the enterprises.

The Machine Tools Factory at Gazipur has been shut down since 1994 after incurring huge losses amounting to more than Tk 300 crore since it was set up in 1964. After the closure of the factory the government considered a number of options regarding the future of the country's lone machine tools factory, but no decision was taken earlier.

One of the option was to sell the factory to a private company for continuing production but none showed interest to bear Tk 300 crore liabilities. Then the government decided to set up the proposed Gazipur export processing zone at the factory premises. But the proposal

was later dropped and shifted the EPZ site to the nearby Mauna area in the district.

Another proposal which was being considered was to annex the BMTF with the nearby Ordnance Factory under the army. This proposal also remained shelved for more than a year. Since then the Privatisation Board included the factory in the list of 56 state-owned enterprises to be denationalisation during the current fiscal year.

Some foreign companies came up with proposals for buying the factory. Among them, Youngone, from South Korea and a leading foreign investor in the country, was prominent. It proposed to buy the factory and convert it into a mini-EPZ for Korean entrepreneurs.

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Shafiullah says he didn't get chance to try killers

Former Army Chief Major General (ret'd) K M Shafiullah yesterday said he could not hold court martial against the killers of Bangabandhu due to adverse situation, reports UNB.

"I had the authority to hold court martial. But I didn't get the opportunity because of the overall situation," he told the trial court during cross-examination as the 45th prosecution witness in the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

Cross-examined by the de-

fence lawyers, the PW said obviously he would have issued the order for holding court martial had he got the chance.

But General Shafiullah added he didn't consider proclamation of martial law as the main reason for not getting the opportunity to hold the court martial.

The witness denied that martial law was proclaimed immediately after the assassination of country's founding president Bangabandhu Sheikh

Mujibur Rahman on August 15 morning.

He said, "I heard Dalim had made such an announcement... you know, we had discussions for the next three days whether the martial law and executed or not."

Asked whether he made any attempt to resist the radio announcement, Shafiullah replied: I didn't issue any specific directive. I ordered to tame the entire situation.

Apart from the Bangaband-

hu's phone call to send troops, he said, the then Prime Minister Mansur Ali had also phoned him (Shafiullah) to arrest Khandaker Mushtaque and rescue Bangabandhu.

"I can't recall what exactly the Prime Minister told me. However, he obviously asked me to send troops. I replied, yes, I'm seeing to it," the PW-45 said responding to a query.

Replying to a suggestion, the then Chief of Army Staff refused to call the August 15

changeover a successful coup under the chain of command of the army.

He also said there was no discontent among the army personnel following the formation of Rakkhi Bahini and the "facilities given to them."

"There was also no deprivation in the army," the witness informed the trial court. However, there was a propaganda about Rakkhi Bahini, he claimed.

Responding to a defence

lawyer, he said the Rakkhi Bahini was under a division of the President's Secretariat. "The place where they stayed was later turned into Savar Cantonment."

Shafiullah informed the court that photographs of the dismissed and discharged officers were not displayed at the entrances of the cantonments as at that time there was no such provision in army.

About various versions of

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