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Hasina, Khaleda exchange Eid greetings with President

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban Tuesday evening, reports BSS.

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Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban Wednesday night.

She exchanged Eid greetings and stayed with the President for some time, a Bangabhaban press release said.

Municipal polls will be free, fair: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday assured that the upcoming municipal elections would be held in free, fair and impartial manner and urged the people to remain alert so none could snatch their voting rights, reports UNB.

"Local-body elections are not held on party basis and no party symbols are used. People will elect their representatives of their choice," she said addressing the nation over radio and TV on the eve of holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

While alerting all against any designs to undo the voting rights, the Prime Minister reminded that people's franchise had been established at the cost of blood and prolonged movement.

Her caution came in the wake of opposition movement, including hartal on the day of filing nominations on January 26, for cancellation of the municipal election schedule and resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner before going to the polls. Voting for the polls has been scheduled for February 23-25.

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Municipal polls EC won't change date for filing nominations

Star Report

Contrary to rumours, the date for submitting nomination papers for the municipal elections will remain unchanged.

According to the schedules announced earlier by the Election Commission, candidates for the municipal polls have to submit nomination papers on the January 26. Elections are scheduled to be held on February 23-25.

Following the opposition parties' call for hartal on 26 this month, rumours were widespread that the EC would change the date for submission.

"No, there is no scope for changing the date as the law concerned has obliged the EC to announce a fixed date for submitting nomination papers for all local government elections,"

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Announcement

We regret to announce the publication of a 12-page issue instead of the usual 16 pages because of prolonged Eid holidays. We shall revert to our usual format from Monday next. We request our valued readers to bear with us during the next two weeks.

—Editor

Prayer Timings

January 18

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:21	5:26
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:00	4:15
Magrib	5:38	5:40
Esha	7:10	7:20

Source: Islamic Foundation

Inside Today

Article

University Governance under Attack!

Column: Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes Page 4

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Literature

'And God Created the French' by Louis-Bernard Robitaille; and Art; Kazi Ghiyas;

A musician in painting Pages 6 & 7

BNP, allies to boycott President's JS speech

Decision to abstain from business advisory body meets

By Staff Correspondent

In a major policy decision, opposition members in parliament have unanimously decided to boycott the Presidential speech to be delivered in Jatiya Sangsad in its first session, on January 25.

The opposition parties — BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote — have also decided not to attend future meetings of the Parliamentary Business Advisory Committee.

These decisions clearly indicate that the differences between the government and opposition have widened further. The opposition parties have also toughened their stance and are proceeding towards a point of no return, said a top leader of BNP.

The two important decisions were taken at a meeting of the "Liaison Committee" held at 29 Mintu Road with BNP secretary

general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair.

Sources in the opposition said the decisions were finalised on Thursday when opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia held a series of meetings with the representatives of JP, Jamaat, IOJ and other smaller parties of the earlier formed 7-party alliance led by BNP.

Earlier, on Wednesday Begum Zia held an exclusive meeting with President Shahabuddin Ahmed. Bangabhaban sources said the meeting started at 7:15 pm and continued till 8 pm. But details of the meeting could not be known from BNP side.

Briefing newsmen after yesterday's meeting, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the BNP, JP, Jamaat and IOJ have unanimously decided not to join the Business Advisory Committee meetings as the government party has

completely ignored the opposition's opinion and suggestions in running parliament during the last two and a half years.

He said the Awami League didn't implement the suggestions, which the ruling party accepted at the Business Advisory Committee. "As the opposition has no role in running parliament, so the attendance is meaningless," Bhuiyan added.

On President's speech, the BNP secretary general said they have learnt that it will consist of nothing but the "so-called success story of government party." There will be hardly anything reflecting President's own views, he added.

Yesterdays meeting asked the government to immediately accept the 4-point demands and announce a fresh pourashava polls schedule.

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Confusion spoils Eid

By Special Correspondent

A large number of people in the rural areas celebrated Eid on Wednesday instead of Tuesday due to a delayed decision on Shawal moon sighting Monday night.

Many people in the remote countryside had already gone to bed after *tarab* prayer and supper, after taking preparation for *sehri* for the next day's fast.

On a wintry night people normally do not wait longer to retire. Those who woke up for *sehri* had not heard the news which was broadcast at 10 pm. Many missed the news while others do not have radio or TV.

The Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar broke the news of the national moon sighting committee at 10 pm that Eid-ul-Fitr was going to be celebrated on the following day.

The committee headed by State Minister for Religious Affairs, Maulana Nurul Islam, had been in session since evening.

Reports from 54 districts had stated that the Shawal moon had not been sighted and

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They observed Eid on Wednesday

LALMONIRHAT: Jan 22:

Nearly four lakh people of remote villages of Lalmonirhat and Kurigram districts in the country's northern tip observed Eid-ul-Fitr Wednesday as they failed to get the moon sighting news Monday night, reports UNB.

The inhabitants of some 325 villages in Hatibandha and Kaliaganj thanas of Lalmonirhat and Roumari, Rajibpur, Bhurangamari and Nageswari of Kurigram district held Eid congregations Wednesday.

These villagers, mostly day-labourers living in the inaccessible areas across river Dharla, Teesta and Shaniaganj, went on fasting until the news of sighting the Shawal moon travelled to them at midday Tuesday.

On Monday night, the poor villagers of Dauabari, Noali, Mahipur Char, Char Bairati, Paschim, Haldibari Char, Harin Chara, Aminganj and Shailmari returned home from the thana headquarters after 8 pm with the news that the moon was not sighted anywhere across the country.

Since we did not see the moon, we couldn't make any announcement abruptly without checking and cross-checking the information received from different unofficial sources.

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Minister's version

Detailed scrutiny of information about sighting of the Shawal moon last Monday caused an inadvertent delay in announcing Eid-ul-Fitr, said State Minister for Religious Affairs Maulana Nurul Islam, reports UNB.

"Since we did not see the moon, we couldn't make any announcement abruptly without checking and cross-checking the information received from different unofficial sources.

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By Staff Correspondent

Ruling Awami League will hold a series of meetings today to discuss strategy to face opposition movement and upcoming local government polls.

According to party sources, Ganobhaban, the official residence of the Prime Minister and AL supremo Sheikh Hasina has been chosen as the venue for holding three meetings in quick succession starting at 10 this morning.

Meetings of the AL National Committee, Central Working Committee (CWC) and also an extended meeting of the National Committee would be held today in the wake of movement threats from major opposition parties — BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat.

The opposition had already put forward a four-point charter of demands giving a 30-day ultimatum ending on February 5 and also given a nation-wide hartal call on January 26 coinciding with the date of submission of nominations for pouroshava polls.

Many of the presidents and

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Smith Co likely to face termination of contract

the contract if the company did not comply with the terms and conditions of the original contract latest by January 17.

"As talks failed on January 17, we gave them another chance to let us know their stand by 9 am Monday (Jan 18). But instead of coming to terms, they came up with new proposals which are not acceptable," said the PDB official.

A PDB official told UNB Monday night that the Smith Co might have lost interest in the project.

"Right now we've no option but to recommend cancellation of the agreement," he said.

The first barge-mounted power plant in the private sector approved by the government to feed the country's National Grid amid rising demands for power.

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The first barge-mounted power plant in the private sector approved by the government to feed the country's National Grid amid rising demands for power.

They have already enjoyed a three-month extension but are yet to start the work.

On October 14, 1997, PDB signed a 15-year agreement with Smith Cogeneration (Bangladesh) Pvt Ltd, a fully-owned subsidiary of Smith Cogeneration International of USA, to install a 100 MW barge-mounted power plant at Haripur.

According to the original contract, the US company is liable to pay 8.5 million US dollar as penalty and another 3.5 million dollar as liquidity damage latest by Sunday (January 17), and extended the deadline by one more day to give the US company a last chance.

"But they haven't yet fulfilled the conditions. We're planning to forward a letter to the Energy ministry recommending cancellation of the contract," a PDB official said Monday afternoon.

According to the Energy ministry sources, they had earlier advised the PDB to cancel

At least 21 people were killed in separate incidents in different parts of the country since Sunday, reports UNB.

Of them, seven were killed in Chuadanga, two in Chittagong, three in Pabna, two each in Khulna, Feni and Tangail, and one each in Mymensingh, Magura, and Noakhali.

In Chuadanga: Seven people were slaughtered in different places of Chuadanga district since Sunday.

Armed men slaughtered Rahim Bakth, 55 and his son Shafiu Haq, 25 of Bias village in Alamganda thana on Sunday night. Housewife Marjina Khutun, 25, wife of Ekrumul Haq of Jugirhuda village, was hacked to death allegedly by his husband on the same night.

Gunmen picked up local Awami League leader Amir Hossain, 60, and Sahirul Islam, 35, son of Rajab Ali from their houses at Alamganda thana headquarters and slaughtered them at Kulpala village of the same thana on Monday night.

Sadek Ali Bacchu, 50, son of Mohamad Ali of Akandibari village in Sadar thana, was slaughtered at Darbeshpur village after armed miscreants

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21 killed in separate incidents in 9 districts

picked up him from his house on Tuesday night while Asadul Haq, 28, was beaten to death at Gangni village at the same time.

Night guard of Keyat village Buro, 35, son of Somed Ali Biswas of the same village in Alamganda, was picked up by gunmen while he was on duty and was shot dead in Ramda school premise on Thursday night.

In Pabna: Rival group stabbed to death France Mes Palma, 40, of Khalati village in Chatmohor thana on the Eid day while Majid Molla, 40, of Shatikapara village in Faridpur thana was slaughtered by his armed men near his house.

Rubel, 14, son of Mojibur Rahman of Ishurdi Poura area, was beaten to death after a

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BNP leaders 'not allowed' to meet Khaleda at cantt house

By Staff Correspondent

Political leaders were not allowed to meet BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia at her cantonment residence on Eid Day.

A close aide of Begum Zia claimed that Hasanuddin Sarker of Tongi unit of BNP came to meet the party chief to exchange Eid greetings at about 2 pm, but Army personnel at the entrance of Shaheed Mainul Hossain Road didn't allow him.

In the evening, Mirza Abbas and his wife, who went to meet Begum Zia were also stopped by the armymen at the entry of Shaheed Mainul Hossain Road. Later, Mirza Abbas talked with the signatories to the statement are Begum Sufia Kamal.

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Pressure from foes and friends prompts Sena to reverse stand

Pak cricketers in Delhi

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Beaten by condemnation from political friends and foes and beefed up security by the Indian government, Shiv Sena has suspended its threat to disrupt the Pakistan cricket team's tour of India hours before the Pakistan squad led by Wasim Akram flew in here yesterday evening.

The Shiv Sena's dramatic reversal of stand, coming a day after party supremo Bal Thackeray thundered that its activists would thwart the Pakistan tour, was brought off by a request from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpeyi who earlier declared that his government would ensure smooth conduct of the Indo-Pak Test and one-day series beginning this year.

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Mahajan informed media persons that Thackeray told Advani that he was a cricket lover and could not oppose the game as such. But he was concerned about Pakistan's violence in Jammu and Kashmir and ISI-sponsored subversion in other parts of India.

Vajpeyi's request was conveyed by his cabinet colleague and Home Minister L K Advani who flew to Bombay and met