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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.

Prime Minister exchanged Eid greetings and stayed with the President for some time. 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 on their choice," she said addressing the nation over radio and TV on the eve of holy Eid-ul-Fitr.

While alerting all against any design 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 pouira elections 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 fixed the date for announcing a list of candidates 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 days.

—Editor

Prayer Timings

January 18		
Azan	Jamaat	
Fajr 5:21	5:26	
Zohr 12:45	1:15	
Asr 4:00	4:15	
Maghrib 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

Star Literature

'And God Created the French' by Louis-Bernard Robitaille; and Art; Kazi Ghyas; 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 parties 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 Okya 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 Minto 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 unitedly 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.

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

See Page 12 Col 1

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 tarabi prayer and supper, after taking preparation for sehur for the next day's fast.

On a wintry night people normally do not wait longer to retire. Those who woke up for sehur 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

reports from four districts said it had been sighted. This left the committee in great confusion. The committee members included representatives from the Meteorological Department, Space and Remote Sensing and Research Organisation, Maulana Aminul Islam, Principal of Alia Madrasa, representatives from Baitul Mukarram and Islamic Foundation, Secretary, Religious Affairs

See Page 12 Col 6

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

See Page 12 Col 4

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 moonighting news Monday night, reports UNB.

The inhabitants of some 325 villages in Hatibanda and Kaliganj thanas of Lalmonirhat and Roulmari, Rajshahi, Bhuriganj and Nageswari of Kurigram district held Eid congregations Wednesday. These villagers, mostly day-labourers living in the inaccessible areas across river Dharla, Teesta and Shaniajan, 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, Pashchim, 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.

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Smith Co likely to face termination of contract

A foreign power company is likely to face termination of contract as they could neither pay the fine for failure to begin work on schedule, nor sign supplementary agreement with the Power Development Board, till Monday, reports UNB.

PDB is considering cancellation of the agreement signed with US-based Smith Cogeneration for a 100-MW barge-mounted power plant at Haripur, near Dhaka.

PDB asked Smith Cogeneration 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

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.

According to the original contract, the US company is liable to pay fines of 10,000 US dollar per day for failing to install the plant on schedule.

The Smith Co neither paid the fine, nor signed any supplementary agreement to continue the work.

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 near the capital city. The project was scheduled to be implemented within 10 months of signing the contract.

It was one of the four barge-mounted power projects in the private sector approved by the government to feed the country's National Grid amid rising demands for power.

A senior 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 started commercial production in Khulna in October last year.

Another foreign company, New England Power Company (NEPC) with its Bangladeshi partners, already began construction of another 100 MW barge mounted power plant at the same site at Haripur. The plant is scheduled to start commercial production by April this year.

Attempt on poet Shamsur Rahman's life

By Staff Correspondent



Poet Shamsur Rahman

Renowned poet Shamsur Rahman miraculously escaped attempt on his life when a group of three armed men failed in their bid to hack him to death. The incident occurred on the eve of Eid day at the poet's Shyamoli residence in the northern part of the city.

Two assailants, armed with a pipegun and a Chinese axe were caught red-handed by neighbouring private security men while the third assailant escaped leaving behind his pipegun.

Police said Mahtabuddin was identified as the man who attacked the poet with the axe. He was assisted by Fazle Elahi Hassan and Azad. All the three are young men in their early twenties. Azad, who managed to

escape from the spot, remains still untraced.

The assailants, during interrogation, claimed that they acted on the orders of their supreme commander Shawkat Osman alias Sheikh Farid who claims to have links with an international organisation — Harakat-ul-Jihad, based in the Middle East.

Police has launched a countrywide manhunt for the accomplices of the killing attempt. The Criminal Investigation Department has already taken over the case.

Our correspondent from Barisal informs that the town's Kotwali police also arrested one Iftiar Haider alias Rinku from Natullahbad bus terminal for his alleged involvement with

the attempt on the life of Poet Shamsur Rahman.

Arrested Rinku confessed to the police that he belonged to an organisation called 'Harkut-Uz-Jihad' — a hitherto unknown extremist group. He also confessed that he had taken training at a secret camp run by the extremists at Ukhiya in Cox's Bazar.

Giving his instant reaction after the incident Poet Shamsur Rahman said, "I do not believe in miracles, but the way I escaped death was nothing short of it."

Narrating the macabre incident to The Daily Star, the Poet said the attackers, numbering three, arrived at his home on the eve of the Eid day at around 10 pm.

Protest rally on Jan 25

A citizens' rally will be held on the Central Shaheed Minar premises on January 25 to protest the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman, reports BSS.

A group of the youths attacked the elderly poet at his Shyamoli residence in the city on Monday with lethal weapons.

A group of prominent citizens of the country at a meeting on Wednesday at city's Bashiruddin road with National Professor Kabir Chowdhury in the chair took the decision to hold the rally, a press release said.

They also formed a committee.

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Attack condemned

Different socio-cultural organisations and individuals have condemned the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina talked to the poet over telephone and condemned the attack.

Rashed Khan Menon, S A Malek, Nirmal Sen, Amir Hussain Amu, Abu Zafar Obaidullah also condemned the attack on the poet's life.

Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) adds: Thirteen eminent citizens have expressed concern over the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman. In a joint statement they said such act is an outcome of deep-rooted conspiracy of the fundamentalists against the pro-liberation forces.

The signatories to the statement are: Begum Sufia Kamal.

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AL meets today to discuss strategy

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, Ganobhavan, the official residence of the Prime Minister and AL supreme 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 pouira polls.

Many of the presidents and

See Page 12 Col 8

21 killed in separate incidents in 9 districts

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 Bakh, 55 and his son Shafiqul Haq, 25 of Bias village in Alamdanga thana on Sunday night. Housewife Marjina Khatun, 25, wife of Ekramul Haq of Jughruda village, was hacked to death allegedly by his husband on the same night.

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

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

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

Night guard of Keyat village Burro, 35, son of Samed Ali Biswas of the same village in Alamdanga, was picked up by gunmen while he was on duty and was shot dead in Ramdia 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 Shatkapara village in Faridpur thana was slaughtered by armed men near his house.

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

See Page 12 Col 2

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 Sarkar 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 army men at the entry of Shaheed Mainul Road. Later, Mirza Abbas talked with the

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Pressure from foes and friends prompts Sena to reverse stand



Pakistani cricket captain Wasim Akram (centre) departs from a morning workout with Saeed Anwar (right) and an unidentified teammate in New Delhi yesterday. The team is now in India for a series of Test matches for the first time in more than a decade, and surrounded by heavy security as a Hindu radical group threatens to disrupt the tour.

—UNB/AP photo

Pak cricketers in Delhi

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Jan 22: Besieged 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 Pakistani tour, was brought off by a request from Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee who earlier declared that his government would ensure smooth conduct of the Indo-Pak Test and one-day series beginning tomorrow.

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

Thackeray on an unscheduled and unusual mission Wednesday morning.

Advani and Thackeray met for an hour at a hotel near Bombay airport after which a joint statement was read out by Vajpayee confidant and Indian Information and Broadcasting Minister Pramod Mahajan who announced the Sena's suspension of the threat for only this year.

See also page 10

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.

While sports circles in India heaved sigh of relief following Shiv Sena's suspension of

See Page 12 Col 3

12 rifles looted from jute mills in Jessore

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Jan 22: Unidentified miscreants looted 12 rifles and 155 bullets early Wednesday morning from Ansars on duty at the security-room of the Akij Jute Mills at Noapara under Abhoynagar thana in Jessore, 30 kilometres off Khulna city.

The Ansars deployed there to guard the mills were reportedly dozing, keeping the rifles on the floor and the door of the security room open.

But the FIR at the Abhoynagar thana states that an organised group of 15 masked young men stormed into the security room firing shots at the Ansars at about 3-30 am. They confined the Ansars in another room at gun point and looted the rifles and bullets and then escaped raising slogans in favour of an outlawed organisation. They also exploded hand bombs and fired several blank shots. Ansar Bishnupada Saha was injured as the miscreants fired shots while entering into the security room of the jute mills, the second biggest in the Jessore industrial belt, the FIR said.

Police rushed to the spot and took all the Ansars into custody

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জাতীয় পুষ্প প্রদর্শনী '৯৯

হান : শেরে বাংলা নগরস্থ ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলা মাঠের সম্মুখস্থ স্থান

তারিখ : ২৭-৩০ জানুয়ারী '৯৯
সময় : সকাল ৯টা - রাত ৮টা

ফুল অনুরাগীদের জন্য সুখবর

ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলা '৯৯-এর অংশ হিসেবে আগামী ২৬শে জানুয়ারী হতে ৩০শে জানুয়ারী পর্যন্ত চতুর্থ জাতীয় পুষ্প প্রদর্শনী '৯৯ অনুষ্ঠিত হতে যাচ্ছে। রপ্তানি উন্নয়ন ব্যুরো কর্তৃক আয়োজিত উক্ত প্রদর্শনী শেরে বাংলা নগরস্থ ঢাকা আন্তর্জাতিক বাণিজ্য মেলায় একই প্রাঙ্গণে অনুষ্ঠিত হবে। প্রদর্শনীটি ২৭শে জানুয়ারী থেকে ৩০শে জানুয়ারী '৯৯ প্রতিদিন সকাল ৯.০০টা থেকে রাত ৮টা পর্যন্ত জনসাধারণের জন্য উন্মুক্ত থাকবে।

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