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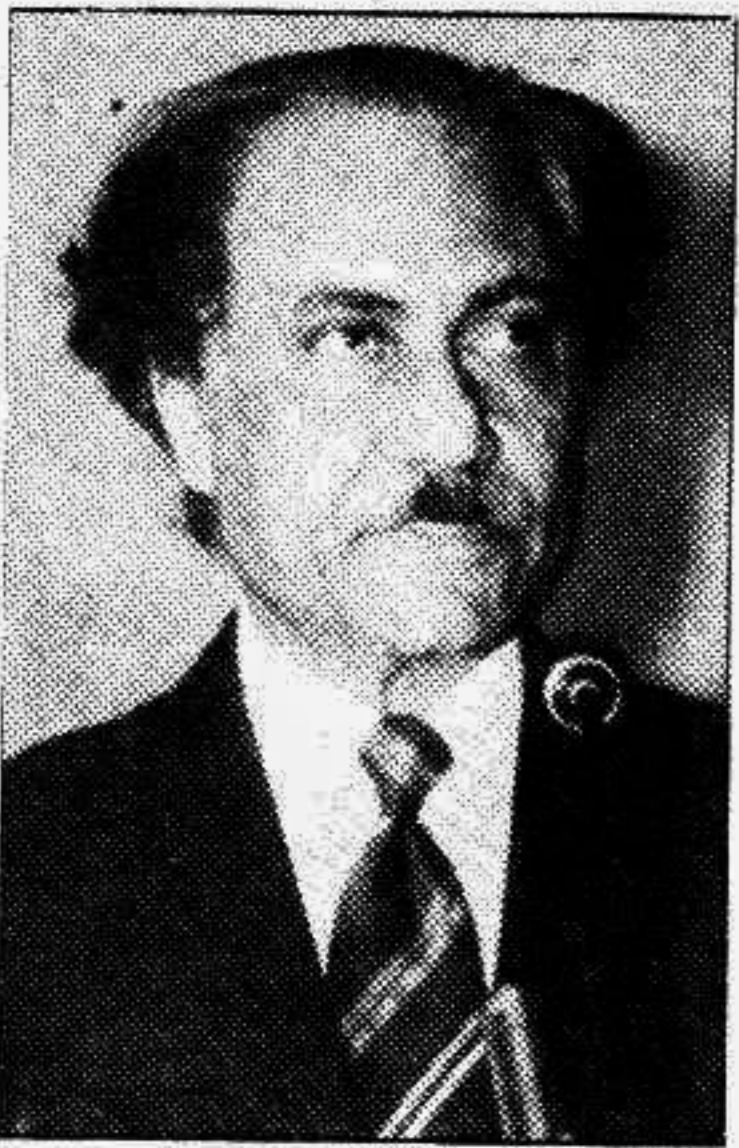
The Daily Star



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President's passionate appeal

Come out of narrow confines of party interests



A moment of despair!

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has made a passionate appeal to politicians to sincerely pursue economic development and practice democracy for the wellbeing of the nation, reports UNB.

"We must come out of the narrow confines of party interests when it is the question of nation's welfare. We must refrain from activities which may harm our economic development," he said in his New Year's address to Parliament yesterday.

As the President delivered his 38-page written speech in the evening, opposition lawmakers, except some Jatiya

Party members, boycotted his address on the plea that it is not the President's speech but a mere documentation of the government's "false praises."

Shahabuddin reminded that the people of this country have created a unique history in "winning our freedom and in the establishment of democracy."

He said: "We have passed 27 years since gaining our independence. For a nation, 27 years may not be a long period of time. And for a generation, the period is not short either."

Apparently reminding the politicians of their task, the President said: "All of us must

be sincere in the pursuit of economic development and in the practice and culture of democracy."

He pointed out future challenges in view of the current world economic order and said, "We have to survive competing with the stronger economies."

In an oblique reference to the opposition's planned agitation, President Shahabuddin said: "We can't indulge in any activity or programme that is likely to plunge our economic and productive infrastructure into crisis."

About the task for the future generation in the new century, See page 11



All quiet on the opposition front

The opposition sans 11 JP MPs found no reason to listen to the President yesterday.

Business calls for dialogue between parties

Business leaders said both the government and opposition parties should sit across the table to avert a hartal which would hamper the national economy, reports UNB.

Expressing a strong voice against hartal, they told the news agency yesterday that major political parties should find out ways to avoid confrontation and narrow down differences on key national issues to create an investment-friendly atmosphere.

"The government and the opposition parties should sit across the table to avoid confrontation and reach consensus on national issues," said DCCI president MH Rahman.

"Otherwise, political parties should bear the responsibility of all the odds to national economy," said FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo.

Mintoo suggested national elections be held once in every three years "if political parties are reluctant to allow government to complete its five-year term."

To avert hartals, he said, all parties should sit together to decide that national elections should be held in every three years.

Pointing to the adverse impact of hartal on the economy, Mintoo said they were trying to recoup the losses caused by the worst flooding last year. Hartal at this stage again will push the economy downward.

The total loss of hartal cannot be quantified in monetary terms, he said. "If GDP goes down by 1 per cent, it should be attributed to hartals and floods."

"How will you calculate the nutrition loss of a day-labourer or rickshawpuller who could See page 11

Former President Biswas says

Former President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday said that during his presidency, his speeches in the Parliament were endorsed by the Prime Minister and her office.

Talking to UNB in the wake of a controversy kicked up by the opposition over the issue, he said, his presidential speeches used to contain two parts — objective and subjective.

The objective part, mainly containing accounts of various development programmes and achievements of the government, was prepared by different ministries, while the subjective one, on matters like one Liberation War, contribution of national leaders to democracy and independence, was drafted by the President's Office. See page 11

Over 5000 police, BDR deployed in city

More than 5,000 police and BDR men have been deployed in the capital city to maintain peace during the 18-hour hartal from 6am today called by the opposition to realise its four-point demand, reports UNB.

The strategy to deal with the strikers were decided at a meeting yesterday of senior police officials at the Razarbagh police headquarters. Dhaka Metropolitan police commissioner Shamsuddin Ahmed presided over the meeting.

"All policemen have been directed to remain calm in the face of any provocation by the strikers," said a senior police officer attended the meeting.

The DMP Commissioner cautioned that stern action would be taken against vandalism.

Police have identified some points as 'troubled spots' including Naya Paltan, Nawab See page 12 Col 6

Bangabhaban bid to broker deal fails

By Nurul Kabir

A presidential attempt to forge a negotiation between the country's two conflicting political camps was nipped in the bud yesterday as opposition rejected his proposition.

An hour before the Jatiya Sangsad went into session at 4:05 pm yesterday, President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed requested the BNP secretary general over telephone to join the parliament session and call off the 18-hour hartal beginning this morning, sources in the BNP said.

If the opposition agreed to the proposal, the President assured the BNP leader that he would use his good office so that the governing party deferred the already announced schedule for the municipal elections to a date acceptable to the opposition, the sources added.

When BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan

pointed out to the President that the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner was very important to the opposition, the President said that it was not possible "right at the moment," according to the sources.

Bhuiyan, however, communicated the presidential proposal to BNP chairperson Khaleida Zia, who eventually urged the proposition to be unacceptable, a top ranking BNP leader told The Daily Star.

While talking with her party secretary general on the issue, Khaleida Zia also told him that the opposition did not have any room for compromise over the CEC's resignation.

Besides, she wanted to know whether the ruling party had contacted any BNP leader. On a negative reply from Bhuiyan, she told him that it was useless See page 12 Col 8

18-hour hartal today: Threats to continue if 'govt fails to behave'

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition parties will enforce an 18-hour hartal today and have threatened to continue the country-wide shutdown if the government fails to behave.

"We will contact with each other over telephone and announce the action programme instantly if any major incident takes place during the hartal hours," said an influential leader of the four-party liaison committee that met yesterday at Jamaat-e-Islami office in the city.

Sources said representatives of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat and Islamic Oikya Jote prepared a draft for a possible course of action programmes if the situation arises.

The possible programmes will be discussed in the policy-making forums of the respective parties, a source said. They are considering options such as non-stop hartal, road blockade, non-co-operation and en masse resignation from parliament.

Initially, it was decided that mass contact programmes in all municipal areas would be carried out, and separate rallies at all municipalities on February 8 and demonstrations and meetings at district level on February 15 be held.

The liaison committee in a resolution said that Chief Election Commissioner Muhammad Abu Hena has again proved that the municipal polls cannot be free and fair by extending the deadline for submission of nomination papers. This also proved that no election could be free and fair under the present CEC who is working to implement the design of the government.

"The legitimacy of the opposition parties' four-point demand, including resignation of the CEC, have once again been proved through controversial and objectionable role of the CEC," it added. See page 12 Col 7

PM asks home minister Look into pre-'96 'false cases' against AL men

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday instructed the home minister to look into the cases filed against Awami League workers during the "pro-democracy movement" prior to the June 1996 general elections.

Sheikh Hasina, also president of ruling Awami League, gave the instruction while presiding over a meeting of AL Parliamentary Party at the Sangsad Bhavan when a party lawmaker made a strong plea for withdrawal of "false cases" against party workers during the rule of Ershad and BNP.

After the Prime Minister's instruction, a good number of AL lawmakers were seen meeting Home Minister Rafiqul Islam at the Sangsad Bhavan office of a senior AL leader.

Mentionably, the major opposition party BNP has long been demanding withdrawal of "false cases" against party workers, lodged during the tenure of the present government.

Yesterday's hour-long ALPP meeting before the Jatiya Sangsad sitting also took stock of the latest political developments in the country against the backdrop of a renewed Opposition threat to thwart the ensuing pourashava and city corporation polls, meeting sources said.

The AL chief asked her party lawmakers to help build 'hartal-free' zones throughout the country but, specially warned against any sort of coercion, the sources said. See page 12 Col 1

Opposition except 11 JP MPs boycotts president's speech

By Staff Correspondent

All BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami MPs and majority of the Jatiya Party (JP) members were absent in the House when President Shahabuddin Ahmed delivered his New Year speech yesterday.

Defying the party decision, 11 JP lawmakers led by communications minister Anwar Hossain Manju were in the House to hear the president speak at the first session of the year.

Before the House went into session, BNP explained to the press why it chose to abstain.

"We're boycotting the presidential speech as it was decided and approved by the Cabinet. It's no longer the President's speech but a statement by the government," Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof Badruddoza Choudhury told reporters. "The speech the President is

going to deliver in the House is not his own. The government has undermined the President by 'approving' his speech at a Cabinet meeting. Our protest is not against the President, rather we're sympathetic to him," he told the press at his Sangsad Bhavan chamber at 5:10 pm. Shahabuddin Ahmed began his speech at 6:20 pm.

Choudhury described Shahabuddin Ahmed as a "very competent and respectable person" and said BNP had "deep respects" for him.

There was nothing wrong with the President making references to the achievements of the government, he said, but it should also point to its failures to portray a complete picture.

"Will there be any mention of spiraling prices of essentials, rape incidents at Jahangirnagar University and elsewhere,

the frequent murders and other criminal incidents?" Choudhury asked. "The President can't speak on such issues."

"The President can't be blamed because his speech has been decided by the Cabinet. It never happened in the past," he added.

"Once the Cabinet decides something, it becomes binding upon the President. The prime minister or other ministers can advise the President about his speech. But in this case, the Cabinet decided the content of the speech," said BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

He claimed that while BNP was in power the President used to collect statements from various ministries and consult senior ministers before finalising his speech for parliament. See page 12 Col 1

Municipal polls BNP leaders, workers asked not to file nominations

By Staff Correspondent

BNP National Working Committee has urged the party leaders and workers to refrain from participating in the "farjical" pourashava (municipal) elections, reports UNB.

The request came from a meeting of the working committee yesterday morning with BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair.

Party vice-presidents, joint secretary general, office-bearers, members, members of the chairperson's advisory council and MPs were present.

The meeting also directed the party leaders and workers not to file nomination papers in the election and instead take programmes to mobilise public opinion against the municipal polls.

The issue of municipal polls boycott and the current political situation came up for discussion in the meeting, which categorically said there is no election atmosphere in the country.

The government and the Election Commission have failed to create the atmosphere, the meeting said. See page 12 Col 2

Manju leads 'dissident' JP team to JS

By Staff Correspondent

The 12th session of the country's Seventh Jatiya Sangsad that began yesterday witnessed a clear division in the Jatiya Party's parliamentary group.

Defying instruction of JP Chairman H M Ershad, 11 out of 33 party MPs joined yesterday's sitting of the parliament under the leadership of Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju, former general secretary of JP.

This is for the first time in the political history of Bangladesh that a parliamentary group of a political party got divided.

Other JP legislators who joined the sitting were Tajul Islam Chowdhury (Kurigram), Mustafizur Rahman (Kurigram), Mohammad Golam Fossain (Kurigram), Sharfuddin Ahmed Jhantu (Rangpur), Noor Mohammad Mandal (Rangpur), Ahsan Ahmed

(Nilfamar), Zulfiquar Ali Bhutto (Jhalakathi), Golam Farook Ovi (Barisal), Tasmina Hossain (Perojpur) and Jinat Hossain (Chittagong).

Manju led the team to the House five minutes after the sitting began at 4:05 pm.

Earlier, he had a discussion with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Manju was expelled from the JP a few weeks ago.

JP chief Ershad who joined the four-party opposition alliance earlier issued instruction to his party lawmakers not to attend the opening sitting of the parliament's 12th session.

But Anwar Hossain Manju and his supporters in the JP parliamentary group found the instruction illegal. "The decision was not made in the party's parliamentary wing," Manju told newsmen later at his Sangsad Bhavan office. "We are not See page 12 Col 6

Link with extremist group 4 including 2 foreign nationals arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Four more people including two foreign nationals were arrested yesterday from a madrassah at Mollartek of Dakkin Khan under Uttara thana in the city for their alleged link with Harkut-Uz-Jihad, an Islamic extremist group.

Two of them were identified as Baktiur and Abul Kalam while details about one South African and one Pakistani could not be known.

Police seized 'important' documents from their possession.

Members of the National Security Intelligence, DB and CID raided the madrassah at Mollartek yesterday morning.

Meanwhile, the Joint Investigation Cell (JIC) yesterday instructed the three-member team that went to Chittagong to stay there for further investigation.

CID sources in Dhaka said they have received 'important' information regarding activities of Harkut-Uz-Jihad in Chittagong.

"We have got a list of extremist leaders," the sources said without disclosing their identity. Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong quoting police said the CID team yesterday raided the Lalkhan Bazar 'Kharji' madrassah. The team was aided by local See page 12 Col 2

O Level exams after midnight tonight

By Staff Correspondent

Timings of O'level examinations in Bangladesh under the University of London have been rescheduled again due to the Opposition-called hartal, officials at the British Council here said.

According to the revised programme, the examinations which were scheduled to be held today will now be held after midnight and in the early hours of the morning.

The scheduled examinations of the morning session will begin at 1.30 tonight and the afternoon examinations at 4.30 am.

Tomorrow's examinations have also been rescheduled. The examinations which were to begin at 9 am will now start at 3 pm. The afternoon examinations will begin at 6.30 pm.

The timings were rescheduled for the second time due to extension of the hartal hours, it was learnt.

Several anxious parents telephoned the offices of The Daily Star last night to know the changed schedules and enquired how they would take their wards to examination centres at such unusual hours.

Bomb attack on BNP procession in Khulna

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Jan 25: At least four persons were injured, one of them seriously when a procession of BNP activists came under bomb attack by AL supporters in Phulbari area under Khayaban Ali thana this evening.

Both the groups were locked in clash for about ten minute disrupting transport services on Khulna-Jessore highway. Some buses and private cars were damaged during the clash, police and eyewitnesses said.

The district and city units of BNP jointly brought out a torch procession in the town this evening in support of tomorrow's 18-hour hartal. JP and Jamaat also brought out separate processions in the city in support of the hartal.

City Awami League also brought out an anti-hartal procession.

ATV director Sohel Chy held, placed on remand

By Staff Correspondent

One of the directors of ATV was arrested from his Uttara residence in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

He was identified as Sohel Chowdhury, a paid director of the satellite channel. He was arrested in connection with case filed against ATV with Motiheb thana, police said. CMM was produced before the Sohel's court yesterday and was placed on a four-day police remand, they added.



Warming up

Ahead of today's 18-hour nation-wide shutdown, BNP leaders march in a procession in the city yesterday evening to drum up support. — Star photo by Anran Hossain

'Unite against religious fanatics, save democracy'

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a citizens' rally in the city yesterday called upon the people to unite against the religious fanatics "hatching conspiracy against the democratic process in the country."

They called for a unity of pro-liberation forces to fight against the religious extremists and urged the government to stop politics of religion for the sake of the country's democracy and to maintain a congenial atmosphere.

Held at the Central Shaheed Minar, the rally was organised to protest the attack on the life

of veteran poet Shamsur Rahman.

The renowned poet came under attack from some youths allegedly belonging to a religious group at his Shyamoli residence in the city on January 18.

Presided over by National Professor Kabir Chowdhury, the rally was attended by prominent citizens including ministers, MPs, teachers, political leaders, cultural activists and NGO representatives.

Water resources minister Abdur Razzak said the religious extremists have started new

conspiracy when the government has been trying to establish peace and democracy in the country.

He urged the countrymen for launching a united movement to root out the extremists from the country.

AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu also emphasised a united movement against the communal forces.

Condemning the attack, he said it was not only on the poet, rather on the democracy and the spirit of the country's Liberation War.

Dhaka City Mayor Mohammad Hanif said they (fundamentalists) would never dare to attack pro-liberation activists if "we were united to resist them."

Prime Minister's political adviser Dr S A Malek said the government alone will not be able to resist the communal forces. "A concerted movement is needed to root them out of the country," he said.

Kabir Chowdhury, in his presidential speech, said that the attack on the poet is not new, it is the result of a deep-

rooted conspiracy of the extremists against the pro-liberation forces.

He stressed the need for a "social resistance" against the religious extremists who are using religion as a weapon of exploitation.

The rally was addressed, among others, by Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, KM Sobhan, Hasan Imam, former VC of Rajshahi University Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Kazi Aref Ahmed, Advocate Kazi Iqbal, freedom fighter Abdul Ahad, Barrister Amirul Islam, ADAB chairman

Kazi Farook Ahmed, Muzahidul Islam Selim, Bangla Academi director general Prof Sayed Anwar Hossain, Prof Abdul Mannan Chowdhury, Mahbub Ahmed Chowdhury, Khorshed Alam, Asaduzzaman Noor, Ali Zaker, Advocate Sayad Ahmad, Amena Ahmed, and Ayesha Khanam of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad.

Later, a protest rally was brought out from the Central Shaheed Minar in the evening that paraded different city streets.

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by Shahed Latif

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Supplements

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Prayer Timings

January 26		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-22	5-26
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-42	5-45
Esha	7-10	7-20

Source: Islamic Foundation