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The Daily Star

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People want polls, opposition after power: Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday assured her political opponents that her government would resign three months before Parliament election which will be held next year under a caretaker government ahead of the due time, reports UNB.

"Why are you going for oust-government movement? We have already decided on national polls in 2000 and whoever in power would stand down three months ahead for fair voting," she said speaking as chief guest at the biennial conference of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) at the Jatiya Press Club.

The prime minister advised the opposition parties to launch movement on socio-economic issues wherein the people have a stake, instead of calling hartal, since political issue regarding the change of power through ballot stands settled.

Her remarks came as the BNP-led opposition alliance had threatened boycott of the municipal elections due for February 23-25 and marathon shutdown to forestall the non-

See Page 12 Col 5

Hartal threat Business leaders worried, to meet soon

Business leaders, worried by the opposition's threat of a series of hartals next month are planning to sit together in a day or two to discuss the situation, reports APB.

Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), which represents most of the industrial sector, has taken the initiative for convening a meeting of the leaders of various chambers and trade associations.

"The meeting is expected to take place in a couple of days," one business leader told the news agency yesterday.

He said they would try to meet the leaders of both the ruling and opposition parties to draw their attention to the plight of the business community caused by unidentified assassinations and agitation programmes.

The business leader who preferred not to be quoted said the owners of the industries and

See Page 12 Col 8

Khulna city tense as Juba League leader shot dead

From Staff Correspondent KHULNA, Jan 30: Anwar Hossain, 32, joint convener of Juba League city unit was gunned down by unidentified assailants at around 9:15 tonight on the premises of Awami League office.

Police said the assailants also exploded bombs during the attack. He died on way to Sadar hospital.

Many leaders and activists of the party were present in the office during the incident, police and eyewitnesses said.

The deceased belonged to Whip Group of the party which has strained relations with Manzurul Imam Group on different issues.

The killing of Anwar sparked violence in the city as supporters of the deceased went on rampage damaging cars and shops.

Both the groups of the party were found taking position with firearms at different key points to attack each other.

Police said the murder of Juba League leader was a sequel to intra-party rivalry.

Police forces have been deployed in Awami League office and the residences of top party leaders.

Access to Justice: The Gram Adalat Model; The Genesis of Lok Adalat; and Lawscape Page 5

Prayer Timings January 31 Azan 5-23, Fajr 5-23, Zohr 12-45, Asr 4-00, Maghrib 5-42, Esha 7-10

Opps return today opting for in-House showdown

By Nazmul Ashraf

The Jatiya Sangsad session resumes this afternoon with the Opposition members returning to House with plans to launch a scathing attack on the Treasury bench.

The government, according to opposition sources, will come under fire regarding a number of issues including the ensuing municipal elections, which the opposition has vowed to resist.

The BNP-led opposition parties in parliament have decided to join the session as part of their anti-government campaign, opposition sources said. The session is due to resume at 4.30 pm today.

Leader of the Opposition and BNP chief Khaleda Zia yesterday instructed the whips of the Opposition to contact the BNP MPs to ensure their presence today, said a source close to her.

Prior to entering the House, said the source, the BNP MPs would also discuss briefly their strategies to face the Treasury Bench.

Reached by telephone last night, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan confirmed his party's participation in the business of the House to-

day. However, Bhuiyan denied having any plan to hold a meeting of the party lawmakers today to discuss their strategies in the House. "We'll decide our strategies after watching the government's treatment to us on the floor of the House," he explained.

Two other opposition parties -- Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami -- will also follow the BNP to join the session.

Before leaving for the United Kingdom on Thursday, JP Chairman HM Ershad had also asked the party MPs to attend the parliament session, JP sources said.

Jamaat-e-Islami leader ATM Azharul Islam told The Daily Star that their MPs would also meet before entering the House.

This year's first session began on January 25 when all the MPs belonging to BNP and Jamaat-e-Islami and majority of the Jatiya Party members were not present in the House protesting "government interference" in the presidential speech delivered on the opening

See Page 12 Col 4

Deadly waste sends Buriganga dying



Pockets of land have emerged in once-mighty Buriganga. This picture frames the "dying" river at Hajaribagh point. — Star photo by A K M Mohsin

By Staff Correspondent

The Buriganga is dying. Please save it.

This passionate appeal came from speakers at a discussion meeting on "Present Status of the Buriganga River and Water Bodies of Dhaka" held at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Environmentalists, journalists, teachers, NGO workers and students participating in the discussion said if the pollution and encroachment of Buriganga continue at the present rate, it will die off within the next 10 years.

They said the river is now a dumping ground for deadly wastes. More than 82 per cent of human wastes of the city are dumped here. And wastes from tanneries in Hajaribagh are the biggest pollutants.

Mohammad Reazuddin of the Department of Environment (DoE) said that scientific tests conducted by the department showed that pollution in the river water was higher than previous years. He said a DoE survey identified 113 installations encroaching upon the river. The offenders include households, mills, factories, dockyards, markets, madrasahs and mosques.

Reazuddin said 50 acres of Buriganga land have been encroached upon by 244 occupants. Of the land, 38.7 acres under Kotwali circle being encroached upon by 157 occupants, 7.01 acres under Tejgaon circle by nine occupants and 4.3 acres under Keraniganj thana by 78 individuals.

The survey also identified 249 industries along the bank of the river that are responsible for water pollution in the Buriganga. See Page 12 Col 1

Opposition will also reschedule hartals

By Staff Correspondent

The opposition parties have threatened to reschedule their hartals if the government keeps offices open on the weekend to offset the impact of the shutdown.

The opposition threat follows the Prime Minister's announcement to shift public holidays to hartal days.

An influential member of the opposition liaison committee told The Daily Star that the opposition parties would only consider Friday due to Juma prayers. "Otherwise we will follow the government's rescheduling," he said.

However, the opposition will not continue shifting hartals if the government keeps rescheduling holidays one after another. In that case, the liaison committee member said, opposition parties would extend hartal.

Another opposition leader said the government had started playing a cat-and-mouse game through rescheduling the submission of nomination papers for municipal elections on January 26.

"We had no plan to resort to the foul play but we are being forced to do that," he added. The liaison committee member said the Prime Minister's "arrogant" decision forced the opposition to sit "instantly" to finalise hartals for February. "We sat on Friday evening and finalised 48-hour and 96-hour hartals when we came to know about PM's threat. Otherwise we would have taken a decision on the hartals a couple of days later."

A senior BNP leader, while giving reaction to the Prime Minister's announcement, said there was no legal basis for the rescheduling. See Page 12 Col 6

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A senior BNP leader, while giving reaction to the Prime Minister's announcement, said there was no legal basis for the rescheduling. See Page 12 Col 4



Vajpayee fasts for religious tolerance

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee observed a day of fasting today seeking sectarian peace on the 51st anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, reports AFP.

The Hindu nationalist politician announced the start of the well-publicised fast after paying homage to the Indian independence hero at a black-stone mausoleum here.

Vajpayee laid flowers at the memorial, located near the Jamuna river, and then observed a brief silence in memory of a man revered as "father of the nation."

Hundreds of supporters thronged his official residence. See Page 12 Col 8

Govt 'indecisive' whether to continue VGF programme

By Reaz Ahmad

No foodgrains were channelled through the VGF programme this month as the government remained "indecisive" whether to continue it.

Officials in the food and relief ministries can not say whether the programme would be revived next month. "The issue may come up for discussion at a meeting on February 27," said one official.

Some two crore vulnerable poor were supplied foodgrains through 42 lakh VGF (vulnerable group feeding) cards under the programme during the post-flood months till December last year.

The officials said the food ministry has already cautioned the government against a "lean period" from February to April till harvest of Boro paddy and insisted on developing a mechanism for distribution of foodgrains and creation of jobs through more projects under Food For Work (FFW) programme.

The government had also planned distribution of foodgrains at "fair price" in the city and divisional headquarters through cards. But it is also taking longer time than planned. The cards have not yet been prepared. The sources however hoped that two lakh cards for the urban poor would be ready by early February.

Involvement of madrassah at Lalkhan denied

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Jan 30: Deen Madrasah Sangrokkam Parishad, Bangladesh (DMSPB) today denied involvement of Lalkhan Bazar Madrasah in any arms training or its link with any extremist organisation like Harkatu-uz-Jihad.

Addressing a press conference at the press club here, convener of DMSPB Ahmed Sagor said "Lalkhan Bazar Madrasah as its routine work gives physical training to its students between Asr and Magreb prayers. But some vested quarters have started false propaganda against the madrasah."

Sagor called upon all concerned to refrain from any "false propaganda" against the

tutions through employees co-operatives. Food Ministry had earlier wrote to all government and semi-government offices asking for "quick response" in this regard but the response was "very poor," the sources said. They said, in several inter-ministerial meetings since November last, the food ministry "vigorously hammered" on one point that FFW (food for work) projects have to be started in full swing to ensure food security during the "crucial first quarter of 1999". Some FFW projects got underway at thana levels only this month. Relief Ministry is now planning field level inspection to see the progress achieved so far and has asked for sending projects proposals under FFW immediately. Talking to The Daily Star earlier this month an expert from the IRR in the Philippines had stressed on careful observation of the after-effects of last year's deluge and said that the period between the Aman season and the next harvesting season would be the most crucial period for Bangladesh. After the flood, the government had calculated a crop loss of 22 lakh tonnes in addition to normal yearly food gap of 21 lakh tonnes. See Page 12 Col 7

Biswa Ijtema begins

By Staff Correspondent

The three-day Biswa Ijtema, the second largest Muslim congregation after Hajj, began yesterday morning on the bank of the river Turag at Tongi.

Devotees from across the country and about 70 foreign countries are attending the Ijtema.

The Ijtema will end with the Akheri Munajat tomorrow morning. President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, members of the cabinet, high gov officials and diplomats of the Muslim countries in Dhaka are expected to attend the Akheri Munajat.

Renowned Islamic scholars and thinkers from home and abroad will be delivering speeches and religious sermons at the congregation.

Buses, mini-buses, trucks and trains including special trains are carrying the devotees round the clock. Many of them are travelling on roof tops of the trains. See Page 12 Col 1

BTV won't telecast live Akheri Munajat

Bangladesh Television (BTV) will not telecast live the Akheri Munajat of the Biswa Ijtema on February one, an official hand-out said, reports BSS.

The decision was taken by the BTV following a request by the Ijtema Committee.

Training of interns not effective 'Community-based' lessons needed

By Naimul Haq

Training of doctors during internship in medical colleges is not effective and appropriate for the country's needs, particularly in community settings.

The training should be on community oriented healthcare facilities, research and teaching.

This was stated by some newly graduated doctors and policy makers in a recent study, conducted under a project styled Further Improvement of Medical Colleges (FITMC).

One hundred doctors who completed internship training recently were questioned during the study. More than 75 per cent of the respondents expressed the view

that the present training programme is not supervised effectively while about 90 per cent said performance of intern doctors need to be assessed after completion of their training.

Regarding the time allocated for different disciplines during training, about 90 per cent of them did not agree that the present programme was appropriate.

More than three quarters of them said that interns undergoing training in surgery also need training in obstetrics and gynaecology.

Ninety-four per cent of the respondents agreed that the training programme should include "community-based lessons" to motivate doctors to

work among rural communities. The existing training is not also "documented" and so proper evaluation after training can not be done, they said.

Most of them agreed that medical graduates eventually need to work in community hospitals.

Throughout the world medical schools and colleges are implementing community-based teaching programme for students. Why should this not be introduced in Bangladesh? said a retired professor of Dhaka Medical College who is a policy maker now.

Earlier, a team of foreign reviewers said that the standard of teaching in country's medical colleges and training of

intern doctors was "extremely poor". They visited different medical colleges in April last year and analysed the curriculum, teaching, student guidance, environment and resources.

While agreeing that the existing training programmes for interns were inappropriate, some teachers involved in the training told this correspondent that there was also lack of commitment on the part of the government to improve medical education in the country.

They noted that frequent transfer of teachers at medical colleges were causing the major problems in the way of improvement of medical education. See Page 12 Col 3

Attempt on poet Arrested 9 to be produced in court today

By Staff Correspondent

Nine of the remanded 17 people, who were arrested for their alleged involvement in the attack on poet Shamsur Rahman, are likely to be produced before the CMM's Court today, police said last night.

Police so far arrested 18 people who are alleged to be activists of Harkatu-Uz-Jihad, an extremist organization, from different parts of the country after the attack on the poet at his Shyamoli residence in the city on January 18.

The Joint Investigation Cell (JIC) took remand of 17 of them for five days in two groups. One group of nine includes Mahtabuddin and Fazle Hasan, who were caught during the at-

ttempt on poet. See Page 12 Col 6

Military courts to be set up throughout Pakistan

LAHORE, Jan 30: Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said today he had decided to set up military courts throughout the country to combat a wave of violence, report Reuters, AP.

Sharif made the announcement in Lahore, capital of the central province of Punjab, two days before the Supreme Court was due to begin hearing petitions challenging the validity of the military courts in Karachi. The Supreme Court has already halted the carrying-out of death sentences passed by the military tribunals.

Interior minister Shujaat Hussain told Reuters in Lahore that the government wanted to set up further military courts around the country to speed up trials of people charged with violence. The number of courts had not been decided.

It depends upon the requirement of different areas, Hussain said. Meanwhile, six people were killed, including a four-year-old child, by a bomb which Pakistani officials said was made in neighbouring India.

The bomb was placed beneath the seat of a horse-drawn cart that was carrying eight passengers. All but one of the passengers died of their injuries. The eighth person is in critical condition, police said. Seven other people, who were standing nearby, also were injured in the explosion, they said. The bomb exploded as the horse-drawn cart crossed a bridge near Sialkot, some 60 kilometers north of Lahore. A paramedic, who didn't want to be identified, said that the scene of the bombing was horrific. An official of the Punjab provincial bomb disposal squad said the explosive was Indian-made and weighed more than 13 pounds. The official refused to give any further details.

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