

Ekushey Book Fair

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Organised by the Academy in association with Bangladesh Book Publishers and Distributors' Association, the fair will continue till February 28.

The Ekushey Book Fair which has now become a national event, was first organised in 1972 as an expression of cultural renaissance.

But it was only in 1978 that the fair got official patronisation and since then the Bangla Academy has been organising a grand fair on its premises in a grand way every year.

Bangla Academy authorities have taken some special measures this year to maintain discipline and keep the fair free from noise. "No stalls of food or cassette will be allowed inside the fair as they create an unbearable chaos with loud speakers to compete with each other for attracting customers," said an official of the Academy.

"Noise pollution inside the fair will be dealt with very strictly," he said.

"Action will be taken if any stall is found creating noise," he said adding that the authorities were planning to permit mobile food shops inside the Suhrawardy Park opposite the Bangla Academy.

"Arrangements will be made to keep the road in front of the Academy free of congestion. No stalls will be allowed there," he added.

Meanwhile, the participants in the fair have almost completed erecting their book stalls. Rent for a single unit stall has been fixed at Tk 3,500, double unit Tk 6,000 and triple unit at Tk 10,000 this year, the sources said.

For the first time this year, Bangla Academy will launch a web site, putting information and details of the fair on the Internet. A huge digital screen will also be set up in front of the information Centre to keep visitors informed of events, the sources said.

"Bangla Academy Public Relations Officer Sarkar Amin said that special emphasis will be given on creative books this year. "We will keep vigil on the stalls so that obscene books are not sold. Stalls may be cancelled if such books are sold," Amin said.

Director General of the Academy Prof Syed Anwar Hossain told The Daily Star that they were determined to turn the fair from an ordinary one to a real book fair, manifesting the spirit of the Language Movement.

"The Ekushey spirit stands for rebellion and commitment. The rebellion is against evil forces and the commitment is for maintaining our originality," the DG explained.

The fair will remain open from 3 to 9 pm every day. On holidays, the timing will be from 11 am to 9 pm with a two-hour interval from 12 only on Fridays. It will remain open from 8 am on February 21.

Discussions on different topics will be held on the Academy premises every evening as part of the Ekushey programme.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Book Club (BBC), a private organisation, observed Book Day yesterday on the occasion of the Ekushey. A discussion was held at the Central Shaheed Minar.

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The government has taken initiatives to develop the film industry by setting up the proposed institute at a cost of Tk 25 crore and 30 lakh," he said replying to a question from treasury bench member Haji Selim who raised the question on behalf of Shariful Islam Sharif of the same party.

Replying to another question from Khan Tipu Sultan of Awami League, the state minister said the proposed film institute would provide training in direction, editing, photography, sound engineering, acting, and other related areas for development of the film industry in the country.

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Prof Sayeed also said that a media complex would be set up at Argargaon. "Necessary steps including land selection and allocation of money for purchasing the land have already been taken," he said.

Answering another question of Golam Faruq Ovi of Jatiya Party, the state minister said the case of ATV and ATN (Bangla) television channels are not similar. He said ATN has been broadcasting its programmes after due approval of the government and within the set rules and regulations.

Besides, it is giving tax to the government. But, he said, ATV broadcast its programmes without any such approval. He, however, said the government would certainly take action if any violation on the part of ATN is found.

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British MEP caught with drugs decides to resign

LONDON, Feb 1: A British Conservative Member of the European Parliament (MEP), caught recently at the Heathrow Airport with drugs and homosexual pornography, announced on Sunday that he intended to resign, reports AFP.

Shortly before, the Conservative Party had described the MEP's actions which had been reported in the press, as "a very serious offence."

Tom Spencer, was arrested on January 20 at London's Heathrow Airport on returning from Amsterdam. He was found to be in possession of two cannabis cigarettes, a gram of cocaine and a cassette and magazine containing pornographic material.

He was fined 500 pounds (£250 dollars).

Spencer, 50, initially indicated that the incident would not affect his political career. He told journalists on Saturday that he was a homosexual and that his wife had known that he was gay before she married him.

He said that it was with her agreement that he had gone for a weekend break in Amsterdam.

Spencer denied being a regular drug user, saying he had been "foolish" enough to accept the drugs and the prom material from a friend.

However, the Conservative Party, which is keen to avoid any adverse publicity ahead of upcoming European elections, had announced an enquiry into Spencer's behaviour.

On Sunday evening, Spencer who has been an MEP since 1989, issued a statement saying: "I have concluded it in the best interests of all concerned that I should withdraw from the party's list for the next European elections."

The party leadership welcomed the decision.

New CM of Maharashtra sworn in

BOMBAY, Feb 1: The new leader of the ruling right-wing alliance in the western state of Maharashtra vowed Monday to fight rising crime and ensure good governance, in an apparent attempt to prop up his government's sagging image a year before state elections, reports AP.

Narayan Rane was sworn in the state's chief minister Monday after the weekend sacking of his predecessor Manohar Joshi by Bal Thackeray, the powerful chief of the Hindu radical Shiv Sena party. Rane was formerly revenue minister in Joshi's Cabinet.

The Shiv Sena governs the state in a coalition with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party.

"The confidence of the people of Maharashtra in the law and order situation needs to be boosted," Rane told reporters after the swearing in ceremony. "Development work, social welfare will be my priority. This will be my effort."

More than 90 people were killed last year in Bombay, India's financial hub and the capital of Maharashtra state, in gunbattles with police or rival gangs between different mafia groups.

Police registered 332 cases of extortion in Bombay where wealthy film directors and actors and real estate developers were targeted for money by the mob. "Bombay is the center of Hindi film-making."

Home Minister Gopinath Munde who belongs to the BJP, said new people-oriented policies would be implemented in the year before the elections.

From April uninterrupted power will be made available to the farmers, drinking water and better roads will be our target," said Munde.

New technology in molecular science to protect environment

Powerful new technology in molecular science will greatly enhance the appreciation of natural wonders such as comets and aurora, and contribute to the protection and management of the environment, according to a report received from London, reports UNB.

The Atomic and Molecular Physics Department at Reading University in southern England is working with University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology and Daresbury Laboratory in north-west England in a 1.4 million pounds sterling project to develop a high-intensity, high resolution soft X-ray beamline called Phoenix.

The upper atmosphere plays a vital role in the transfer of heat around earth so a knowledge of its behaviour, particularly with respect to pollutants, is vital to the long-term protection of the environment.

The London Press Service report said that Phoenix will form an important mechanism by providing high-intensity radiation in the extreme ultraviolet and soft X-ray regions of the spectrum which will be valuable in many areas of research.

In addition, it could be crucial to the development of devices such as quantum dot lasers and single electron memory elements which will form the keystone of future generations of information technology.

The group's on energy transport mechanisms in molecules, together with fundamental studies of multi-electron processes in atoms, will also lead to a better understanding of upper atmospheric and planetary science by enabling scientists to develop improved theories for such processes.

Foreign Minister Ariel Sharon said, meanwhile, that Israel believed the situation in Jordan was stable.

NATO warning to warring sides in Kosovo Start peace talks or face action

BONN, Feb 1: NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana today warned the warring sides in Kosovo to start peace talks demanded by world powers or face military intervention, reports AP.

"This is the last chance, and I would like to make a call for negotiations in good will to solve this tragedy," Solana said after talks with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder.

Solana stressed that NATO was poised to intervene in the embattled Yugoslav province whenever he in consultations with alliance members, decided the time was right.

"We are prepared to fully support the political channel that has been started by the Contact Group," he said.

The United States and five European nations — the Contact Group for the Balkans — have called on Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanians and Yugoslav envoys pressed efforts today to persuade ethnic Albanian rebels to attend this week's planned Kosovo peace conference.

A Kosovo Liberation Army official hinted last Sunday at opposition to talks in France, last opportunity to reach peace in Kosovo."

Gen Klaus Naumann, head of NATO's military committee, said foreign ground troops would be the only way to keep the warring sides apart after a peace deal, if both sides agree to the deployment.

Should such a mission come about, "We have to accept the idea of a timespan of years," he said on German radio.

Schroeder said the international community was "extremely serious" and that he expects "its resolve will make it clear to the warring parties that they can't play for time."

Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, who had separate talks with Schroeder on Monday, said afterward that Moscow and the western powers had "common strategic goals" in the Kosovo crisis.

Meanwhile, with both the Belgrade government and rebels eyed on Kosovo's majority ethnic Albanians and Yugoslav envoys pressed efforts today to persuade ethnic Albanian rebels to attend this week's planned Kosovo peace conference.

Ethnic Albanian rebels hinted at opposition to the talks over the weekend, saying they were "organised in a rush."

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New Chief Minister of the Indian state Maharashtra, Narayan Rane (L), smiles as Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray looks on Monday following the swearing in ceremony in south Bombay. Rane, a controversial politician who was recently acquitted of the charge of aiding the murder of a political rival, was sworn in as the head of a 45-member ministerial team. —AFP photo

Pentagon unveils \$ 268.2b budget proposal for 2000

WASHINGTON, Feb 1: The Pentagon today unveiled \$268.2-billion-dollar budget proposal for fiscal 2000, billing it as the first substantial increase in military spending since 1985, reports AFP.

The Pentagon's six-year budget plan calls for stepped-up spending on a national missile defence system, the biggest pay hike for service members in 18 years and more money to buy expensive new aircraft and other weapons.

"Although US forces continue to accomplish their missions splendidly, there are warning signs of potential problems," US Defence Secretary William Cohen said.

"Recruiting and retention are increasingly difficult, readiness harder to maintain and weapons modernisation tougher to fund sufficiently this budget will address these warnings."

The Pentagon calculated the proposed increase at 12.6 billion dollars in the year 2000 over its previous spending projections.

But if congress were to approve the proposed budget, the military budget authority would actually increase by only 5.6 billion dollars next year over fiscal 1999, according to the Pentagon's figures outlays would fall from 263.6 billion dollars to 260.8 billion dollars.

The entire defence budget comes to 280.8 billion dollars, which also includes spending by the Department of Energy, which is responsible for the US nuclear weapons arsenal.

The Pentagon's blueprint calls for a 1.2-billion-dollar increase in spending including 6.6 billion dollars to develop and deploy an anti-missile system able to defend the United States against a limited ballistic missile attack.

The commitment of funds to deploy such a system reflects growing US concern that North Korea or another rogue state may be just a couple of years away from being able to hit the United States with an intercon-

tinental missile.

The budget also includes 1.8 billion dollars for US peace-keeping operations in Bosnia and another 1.1 billion dollars for US operations in the Gulf.

Overall spending on weapons procurement was upped to 53 billion dollars in 2000 from 49 billion dollars in 1999.

The Pentagon has said procurement spending needs to climb to 60 billion dollars a year to pay for a wave of expensive new aircraft and warships needed to modernise the US arsenal, that goal will be met at the beginning of 2001.

In fiscal 2000, the Pentagon proposes buying six of the Air Force's new F-22 Raptor, a replacement for the F-15E Fighter that is still in testing, they will cost 1.85 billion dollars.

The Navy would acquire 36 F-A-18E/F Super Hornets for 3.2 billion dollars under the proposed budget for