

As a last-ditch effort failed to bring the boycotting Opposition to a negotiation yesterday, the Chief Election Commissioner said he would request the government to take initiative to create a congenial election environment, reports UNB.

Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Jamaat-e-Islami boycotted the scheduled meetings with the Election Commission yesterday.

Hena convened separate meetings with the political parties — who already have rejected the municipal election schedule — in a bid to create a peaceful atmosphere during the upcoming local-body polls.

Talking to newsmen at his office in the afternoon over the latest situation with the municipal election, the CEC, in an oblique reference to the Opposition parties, said he believed that any problem could be solved through discussion.

Referring to BNP and Jamaat stand regarding the scheduled meetings with the EC and the parties separately, Hena said: "I would have been very happy if they had joined the meetings."

"However, I believe, still there is scope for discussions with them."

Abu Hena said he organised the meetings with an open mind and hoped that the Opposition parties would join the meeting with open mind too.

Election Commission sources said that the CEC and the Election Commissioners waited the whole day in hopes that the Opposition parties would turn up in a change of mind.

In the morning, they told UNB, Additional Secretary of the EC Aziz Ahmed Chowdhury had reminded BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan over phone of the set parleys between BNP leaders

and the EC.

However, talking with the senior EC official the BNP leader refused to join the meeting.

The Election Commission also contacted the Jamaat leaders regarding the reconciliatory meet, but also to no avail.

Meanwhile, staying off the fray, the Opposition parties from their rallies in the city yesterday called a second spell of nationwide hartal for February 9 to 10 in their bid to thwart the election.

As per latest available data, 525 chairman candidates are contesting election to the 140 municipalities while 590 commissioner and 1688 women commissioner contestants vying for 1333 commissioner and women commissioner seats respectively.

There is only one chairman hopeful was left in each of Gopalpur, Ghatail, Narria, Laxmipur and Basurhat municipalities.

But, they were not declared elected as there are appeals against cancellation of nominations in those municipalities.

A total of 24 nomination papers in the post of chairman were cancelled by the returning officers while 135 withdrew their candidature. A total of 682 candidates filed their nomination papers for chairmanship in the 140 the municipalities.

A total of 755 commissioner candidates and 126 women commissioner candidates withdrew from the race, EC sources said.

Presently, a total of 5990 candidates for the post of 1333 commissioner and 1688 for women commissioner posts are contesting the elections.

The non-party municipal election will be held in phases on February 23, 24 and 25.



Artistes presenting inaugural song on the opening day of the 6th International Short Film Festival '99 at the Central Public Library premises in the city yesterday.

Work on 'Panasi' project progressing fast

PABNA, Feb 4: Work on Panasi multipurpose project is progressing fast involving over Tk 100 crore, reports UNB.

The 'Panasi', a massive development project of BADCO for socio-economic development of the rural people started from January this year with an initial fund of Tk 40 lakh.

Official sources said BADCO has undertaken the project to boost agricultural production, create employment opportunities, eradicate poverty for socio-economic development and to maintain the ecological balance in 24 thanas of the three districts.

Under the project a total of 75 kilometres of canal will be re-excavated for irrigation network and water outlet. Some 20 cross dams and control structures will be constructed and 300 ponds will also be re-excavated.

During the current fiscal year, three ponds will be excavated and 30 infrastructures will be constructed for water reservation and supply, official sources said.

At least 250 deep tube wells will be installed and 500 irrigation canals would be constructed to improve and expand irrigation facilities.

A total of 4,500 farmers will be trained up to implement the project, the sources added.

Besides, a total of 500 metric tons of seeds will be procured and supplied to the farmers to encourage cultivation of different crops.

Moreover, 100 kilometre of feeder road will be constructed, valuable timber and fruit bearing trees will be planted in the project areas. Some 24 demonstration farms will be set up to acquaint the farmers with the modern methods of cultivation. The farmers will also be imparted training on fish culture and poultry farming.

Talking to UNB the project director Ranjan Kumar Mitra expressed the hope that the project would be a successful one like Borenda project by improving the living standard of the rural people of 24 thanas of the three northern districts.

For handicraft factories in rural areas

'Govt to extend all possible assistance to entrepreneurs'

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed yesterday told the Jatiya Sangsad that the government would extend all possible assistance to the interested entrepreneurs for setting up handicraft factories in the rural areas, reports BSS.

The minister was replying to a private members' resolution moved by Awami League member Wazuddin Khan for setting up one handicraft factory in Bhangauna thana under Pabna district.

Ahmed said under the open market economy, the government can play a supporting role for setting up industrial units and promoting investment in the rural areas, particularly in the rural areas.

He pointed out that the Awami League government under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took decision in the first cabinet meeting to encourage investment and industrialisation in the country on a priority basis.

Wazuddin Khan earlier moving his resolution submitted that the establishment of handicraft units in the rural areas could provide fruitful job opportunities for the unemployed people.

Moving amendments, Shamsul Alam Pramanik (BNP-Naogaon), Haji Mohammad Selim (AL-Dhaka), Mohammad Shahidul Islam (MP-Jhenaidah), Shaheen Manwaru Huq (AL-Women seat) and Gazi Mohammad Shahjahan (BNP-Chittagong) demanded the setting up of similar handicraft units in their respective constituencies.

Khan, however, withdrew his resolution following the request of the commerce and industries minister.

Earlier, a total of four private members' resolutions were introduced in the House on the first private members' day of the winter session.

Three other resolutions were moved by Mohammad Jalaluddin Talukder (AL-Netrokona) for setting up a branch of Agrani Bank at Kamalanda, Zafurul Islam Chowdhury (BNP-Chittagong) for setting up one para-medical institution in each district headquarters and ABM Abul Quasem (AL-Chittagong) for constructing a ringroad around Chittagong city.



Minister for Fisheries and Livestock A S M Abdur Rob inaugurated the Fem Com Film Festival on fisheries at the Goethe Institut yesterday.

Short Film Festival begins

The sixth International Short Film Festival began in the city yesterday, bringing together 213 films, movie celebrities and film critics from across the globe, reports BSS.

Poet Shamsur Rahman formally inaugurated the nine-day festival, the country's biggest film extravaganza, organised by the Bangladesh Short Film Forum at the Public Library Auditorium.

Inaugurating the festival, Shamsur Rahman said, "Though short in length, the short films as a medium of art are not short in its content, message and depiction."

Presided over by chairperson of the festival committee Hasanat Abdul Hye, the inaugural session was also addressed by elderly journalist and filmmaker Obaidul Haque, executive president of the forum Amrul Islam and secretary of the festival committee Tareque Shahriar.

Polish legendary filmmaker Krzysztof Zanussi, and Indian film personality Aparna Sen, could not attend the inaugural function due to delay in their flight schedules.

Referring to the focal theme of the festival — "free cinema, free expression" — Shamsur Rahman said, "a slogan this is very significant, but whenever we want to express freely, some quarters threaten to kill us."

He said those evil forces sometimes physically assault the persons of the cultural arena who often speak against fanaticism, not against religion. Those quarters were not happy with the activities of those people who work for human welfare and progress, he added.

The poet, who seems to be frustrated by the recent activities of the extremist groups, said, "Knowledge is now helpless to terrorism." He urged all to resist the activities of those evil forces and lead the nation towards right directions.

Journalist Obaidul Haque expressed the hope that Dhaka would be turned into a capital of the alternative movies following the successful conclusion of the festival.

Fem Com film festival held

By Staff Correspondent

The Fem Com Film Festival on fisheries was held at the Goethe Institut in the city yesterday.

Inaugurating the festival, A S M Abdur Rob, Minister for Fisheries and Livestock, said that there should be education and motivation of the people to improve the fisheries situation. He felt that Fem Com had made a brave endeavour towards this goal.

D K Chowdhury, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock, said that fisheries remain a vital part of our economy with a production of lakhs of metric tons of fish every year. The electronic media should encourage our society to comprehend the importance of fisheries, he added.

Simon Bland, Chairman of DFID also speaking on the occasion said that the purpose of his organisation, associated with fisheries, was to remove global poverty and there was need to raise the awareness of the people in general.

He pointed out that our fisheries were being threatened by over-fishing in the same areas. He said that suitable steps should be taken to improve the situation of fisheries, and that this could be done only by working together.

On the occasion, a documentary on fisheries was shown. There was also a drama serial comprising seven episodes entitled "People of the Flood", which is a multimedia project on community-based fisheries management.

Bldg of Willes Little Flower opens tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

The newly constructed six-storied building of the Willes Little Flower School in Kakrail will be opened at the school premises tomorrow, Minister for Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives Zillur Rahman will inaugurate the building as chief guest at 10 am.

All the school students and their parents have been requested to be present on the occasion.

Occidental to begin operation of Jalalabad gas field this month

Occidental is likely to begin commercial operation of Jalalabad gas field at the end of this month, officials at Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry said, reports UNB.

They hoped that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina would inaugurate the commissioning of the supply of the gas in national grid through its north-south pipeline.

Test of the plant and supply to the national grid has already been successfully completed and more examinations will take place today and tomorrow.

Of the four wells of the Jalalabad field, two are ready for operation and have already been connected with the plant. The rest two wells will be connected within four to five days.

Official sources said experimental supply of 60 mcmfd from the plant to the national grid will begin on February 7 and it will continue for next seven consecutive days.

If the result of the experiment is positive, they said another test of supplying 100 mcmfd to the pipeline will take place for next seven days.

An official at the ministry said the commercial operation will be inaugurated if all the tests and experiment give positive result and plant and pipeline found stabilised.

Danish minister to visit CHT Apr 15-18

Danish Minister for Development Cooperation Poul Nielson, MP will visit the Chittagong Hill Tracts from April 15 to 18, reports UNB.

The planned visit of the Danish Minister was disclosed when Charge d'Affaires of Denmark in Dhaka Finn Thilsted met Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Minister Kalparanjana Chakma at his office in the city yesterday.

During the meeting, they also discussed Danish support to set up a development and monitoring unit in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Ministry, said an official handout.

Saudi national arrested from Sheraton Hotel

By Staff Correspondent

A Saudi national was arrested on charge of attempting to steal valuables from Sheraton Hotel on Wednesday, police said.

He was identified as Samir Md Saed Jahraan, son of late Md Saed of Muktabelliza of Saudi Arabia.

Police quoting the FIR lodged by the Sheraton Hotel management said the accused tried to steal valuables from the hotel. Police, however, could not say what kind of valuables he tried to steal.

When contacted Sheraton hotel management declined to say anything about the incident.

He was produced before the CMM's Court yesterday and the Court sent him to Dhaka Central Jail. A case has been lodged with Ramna thana in this connection.

JS body on Ministry of Defence meet held

A meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on the Ministry of Defence was held yesterday at the Sangsad Bhaba with its chairman Major General (Retd) K M Shaifulah in the chair, reports BSS.

The meeting discussed the organisational structure, manpower, budget allocation, instrument, training programme and future planning of Bangladesh Air Force (BAF) and its existing problems and measures of solution.

JS snippets

From page 1

Jatiya Party's Tajul Islam Choudhury blamed the LGRD minister "for frustrating him" by not acting on the promises the minister had given Choudhury earlier.

Hamid tried to comfort the JP MP before his question was answered. "You know, so many people make so many promises at so many places. But how many of them act according to their words?"

An apparently offended minister then claimed, "But I try to keep my promises, at least those given on the floor of the House."

"I didn't mean you, honourable minister. I was speaking of others..." explained the Chair.

Physician-turned-parliamentarian of JP Rustam Ali Faraji asked the LGRD Minister if he would take any steps to deal with diarrhoea in his area.

Before the minister could say anything a smiling Deputy Speaker quipped, "But you are supposed to benefit from the spread of diarrhoea, doctor shaheb."

The Chair invited the LGRD minister to respond to the star-marked questions by AL lawmaker Mostafizur Rahman Fizu.

Despite the announcement and his microphone put on, the minister was seen going through papers on his desk. He came back to his senses only when AL whip Mizanur Rahman Manu whispered something to him. It's not that Manu alerted him but the microphone caught Manu's whispers.

Embarrassed, the minister jumped on his feet saying, "Oh I see, the microphone is on."

But an unmindful minister sat down before completing reading out the printed answer. As the Chair pointed out that he had left part of the written reply, he rose again and finished.

Known for his sense of humour and Dhakaite dialect, Haji Mohammad Selim was once again source of some fun in the House. Told to read out his advice, the young Haji said, "I left my advice at home. Please allow me to present it another day."

Fate of Dhaka WTC uncertain

By Mustak Hossain

Construction of the ambitious World Trade Centre (WTC), Dhaka has become uncertain as the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) is yet to get any prospective investors, a highly placed source in the EPB said.

"Two foreign firms, one US and the other French, have shown interest so far for its construction. But the proposals are inconsistent with the guidelines set by the EPB," the source told The Daily Star.

The government is in a hurry to build the multipurpose complex as it plans to hold the Non-Aligned Summit (NAM), scheduled for 2001, in it, the source said.

The EPB, entrusted with the task, is planning to construct the complex on a 5.46 acre land at Kawran Bazar in the city.

The proposed ultra modern high-rise complex will have, among other things, a 5-star hotel, a massive exhibition centre with large exhibition space, shopping areas, large office blocks, shopping arcades, and recreational and car parking facilities.

NGOs under fire in JS

NGO activities and expenditures came under fire in Parliament yesterday with some lawmakers citing financial irregularities and allegations of fleecing small debtors in rural areas, reports UNB.

Minister in charge of the Prime Minister Office in Parliament Tofail Ahmed told the House that punitive actions had been taken against some of the non-governmental organisations for various irregularities.

Responding to queries from Haji Selim of the ruling Awami League, Rafiqul Islam Bakul (BNP) and Zeenath Hossain (JP), he said NGOs are controlled by the NGO Bureau and they are subject to punishment under law of the land for any violation of NGO rules for committing any other offences.

According to official figures, 145 foreign and 1149 local NGOs are working for development in socio-economic sectors alongside the government. Areas of their work include poverty alleviation, empowerment of women, micro-credit, family planning and environment.

Haji Selim alleged that there were reports that some NGOs raised money from people on false promises of giving jobs, but misappropriated that in the name of savings. Tofail said punitive actions were already taken against some of them.

Rafiqul Islam Bakul alleged that some NGOs give loan at high rate of 14 per cent and resort to "inhuman torture" to the loanees who fail to repay the money in due time.

Tofail avoided a straight answer but said "The government wants to ensure smooth function of the NGOs as well as protect the interests of the people."

When Zeenath Hossain wanted to know about the amount of foreign aid received by the NGOs annually, the minister said it would be approximately Tk 1000 crore. Nearly 2.5 lakh people are engaged in NGO activities in the country, he informed the House.

Death anniversary

By Staff Correspondent

The 5th death anniversary of eminent shipping personality and former journalist Hasan Imam Chowdhury will be observed today.

A *milad mahfil* will be held at his residence at House No 730, Road No 26, CDA residential area Chittagong after Asr prayers on the same day.

Chowdhury began his journalistic career in now defunct 'The Evening Chronicle' in the early 50's in Chittagong.

Obituary

Syed Fayaz Alam, son of the late Syed Sahab Alam, of the Dhaka Nawab family, died in the city yesterday. He was 73, says a press release.

Qul Khwani will take place February 6 also Asr at 4:30 pm at the residence of Col (Retd) Serajul Islam, House No-428, Road No-30, New DOHS, Mohakhali.

Exhibition of Juki Apparel Machinery begins in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Feb 4: A four-day exhibition of Juki Apparel Machinery began at local hotel here this morning, reports BSS.

The exhibition arranged by Juki, a Japanese company, was inaugurated by first vice-president of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) Mahbub Ali at a simple ceremony held in this connection.

Managing Director of Juki-Bangladesh Sakaria Bhuiya, managing director of Juki-Japan Sughihara, Representative of Juki-Singapore and many garment owners were present on the occasion.

Juki-Japan managing director Sughihara said that sixty per cent of Juki apparel machinery were used in Bangladesh. He also said that more than sixty countries of the world also use Juki apparel machinery.

An office of Juki-Bangladesh was also inaugurated in Chittagong today.

Three killed on Dhaka-Ctg highway

FENI, Feb 4: Three people were killed and six injured in a fatal accident on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway near Mohammad Ali Bazar today, reports UNB.

Police said the accident occurred at about 5 am when a furniture-laden Senbagh-bound truck from Kishoreganj skidded into a roadside ditch.

Vehicle fitness drive launched

Communications Minister Anwar Hossain yesterday launched a programme for displaying tax, fitness and route permit labels on windscreens of motor vehicles, reports UNB.

He stuck fitness stickers on the windscreens of some vehicles at Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) office at Mirpur.

The minister also visited the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-assisted vehicle inspection Centre project at the BRTA premises and expressed satisfaction over the progress of construction work.

Construction of five such centres in the country is nearing completion at a total cost of Tk 44.87 crore, said an official handout.

After the launching of the centres, fitness inspection of motor vehicles will be done with computerised equipment.

BRTA clarification

In a letter yesterday, BRTA Chairman A N Hussain has clarified some questions raised in an editorial published in The Daily Star on Feb 3. The clarification is as follows:

The new system of displaying labels (sticker) on the windshield of vehicles is applicable for the whole country and not for the capital only.

The authorised post offices in all the district headquarters and 18 post offices earmarked in Dhaka City presently receiving tax and fees from vehicles will also issue windshield tax label.

BRTA has office in 36 districts. The BRTA functions of the remaining districts are performed through deputing of officers on fixed days from those 36 districts. The owners and drivers of vehicles of these districts who already know the days when BRTA officers visit these districts will be able to collect fitness and route permit labels from these offices.

"Vehicle owners presently pay road user tax/fees. The Security Printing Press which prints the labels using imported papers and inks realises the cost of production from the Government. Therefore, the Government decided to realise Tk 40.00 from the vehicle owners for each label to meet this cost.

The labels were designed by the experts of Security Printing Press with imported paper, ink and inbuilt security marks. It has been assured by them that forging of prototype labels locally will be difficult.

"One of the main objectives of displaying windshield labels is to avoid unnecessary harassment. The concerned authorities will make all efforts to achieve this objective."

BNP MP seeks protection of his dignity

BNP lawmaker Mohammad Mashur Rahman (Jhenaidah) yesterday urged the Deputy Speaker to take immediate steps to protect his dignity as a Member of Parliament, reports BSS.

Taking the Floor on point of privilege, the BNP lawmaker said that he was not involved in any doctory incident but police has charged sheeted him in a doctory case.

Taking Floor on point of order, Chief Whip Abdul Hasanatullah said knowing fully well that sub-judice matter is not placeable on the Floor, the opposition lawmaker has raised an issue which should be immediately expunged as Rule 270 of the Rules of Procedure says that "a member while speaking shall not refer to any matter which is sub-judice in a court of law in any part of Bangladesh."

Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid said all sub-judice issue would be automatically expunged from the day's proceedings.

Attempt on poet Mahtab Uddin remanded again

By Staff Correspondent

Mahtab Uddin, who was caught red-handed during an attempt on the life of poet Shamsur Rahman on January 18, was produced before the CMM's Court yesterday after a three-day remand.

Investigation officer sought fresh seven-day police remand for the arrested, but the court granted three-day police remand.

Fazle Hasan and Mahtab Uddin, both caught from near the poet's residence during the attempt, were placed on three-day remand on Sunday last. Both were charged with possessing illegal arms.

Police found a "pipe gun" in their possession.

The other accused, Hasan was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail on Wednesday following his confessional statement.

Erratum

Kazi Nuruzzaman was one of the participants in the Public Dialogue on "Political Protest: Search for Alternatives," organised by The Daily Star and Centre for Alternatives. But his name was inadvertently printed as Dr Golam Zaki in the photo caption published yesterday.



A seminar on "Conducting Fair Election" jointly organised by FEMA and MSS/SRG held at Russian Cultural Centre yesterday. From left are JSD leader Hasanul Haq Inu, BNP leader Nazmul Huda, Awami League leader Abdul Jalil, acting chairman of FEMA Abul Ahsan and secretary general Firoz M Hasan, JP leader Fazle Rabbi and Jamaat leader Kamruzzaman. Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon and CPB leader Hena Das were also present. — Star photo

Organized by: FEMA and MSS/SRG
Date: 4th February, 1999
Venue: Russian Cultural Center, Dhaka