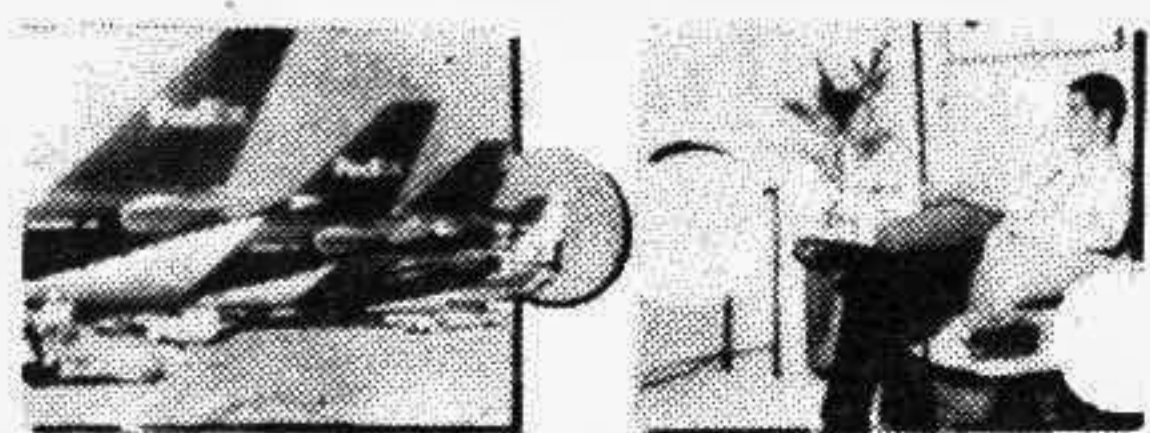


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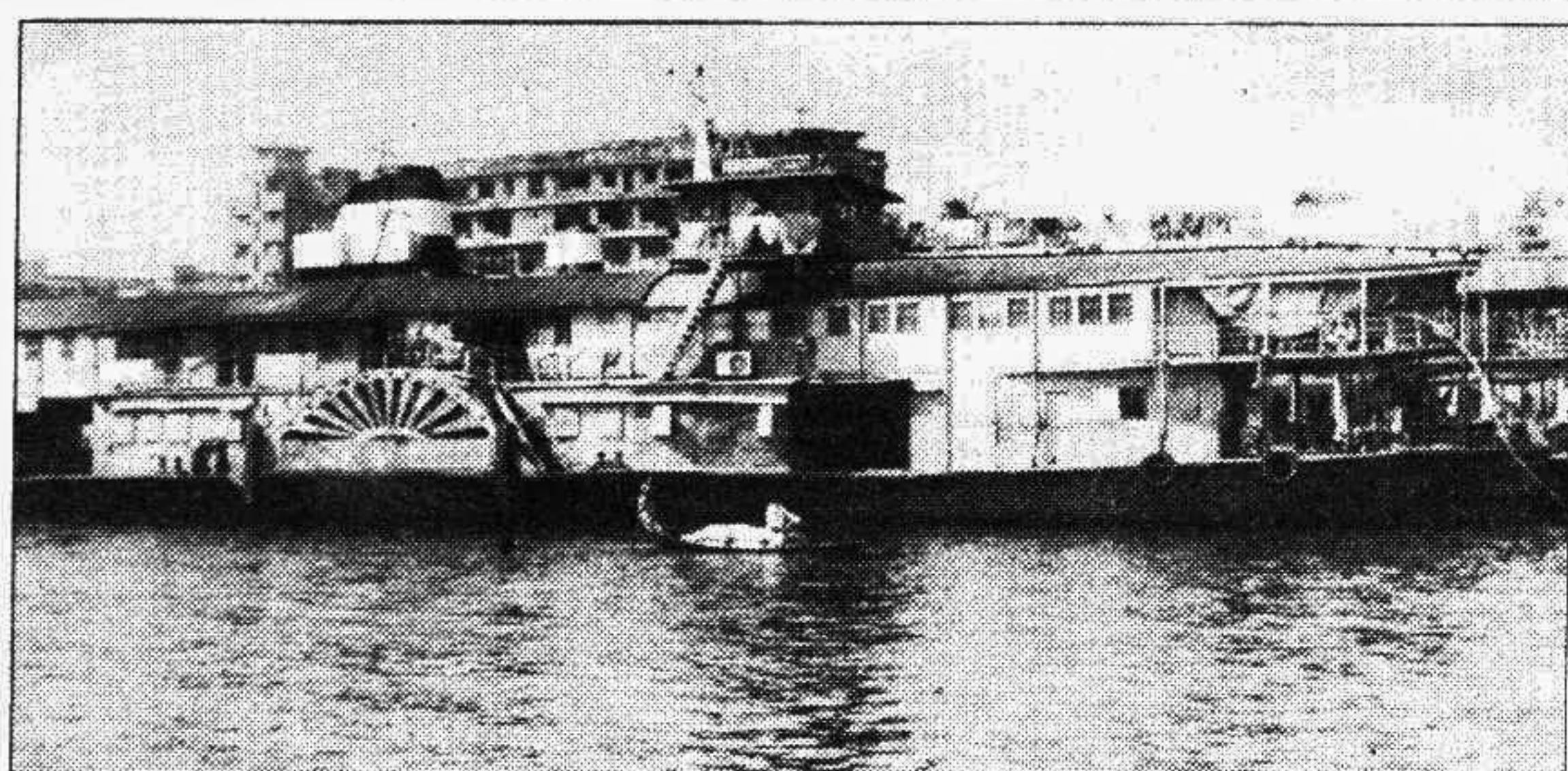
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The BIWTC steamers, one of the grand sites on the river ways, are crumbling rapidly. The authorities, however, are more interested in fixing them with air conditioners rather than carrying out the more urgent repairs. — Star photo

Cold air in wet steamers

By Morshed Ali Khan

Most of the paddle steamers recently renovated by Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation are crumbling. Yet the authorities have embarked upon an ambitious project to install air-conditioners in the first class saloons.

BIWTC officials admitted to the poor condition of the steamers but failed to account for the prioritisation of installing air conditioners over fixing roof leaks, engine failures and weak vessel structures. They also declined to comment on the cost of the air-conditioning project.

When approached about the issue, general manager Nurul Alam angrily replied, "I do not know anything about it. You better contact NK Poddar, Deputy General Manager of the Ship Repairing Services in

Narayanganj." Subsequently NK Poddar denied any knowledge and referred this correspondent back to the general manager.

Helpful officials on one of the four paddle steamers, however, were eager to give a guided tour of the crumbling roofs, railings, diesel engine and furniture that were all installed only three years ago at 'huge expense' in a project funded by the Belgian government. The officials, who shall remain anonymous at their own request, complained that the head office is ignoring urgent and essential renovations, while funding projects that could be postponed.

They said that while the private sector is doing booming business, the BIWTC in spite of

having its own dockyards, engineers, technocrats and bureaucrats is incurring massive losses. The officials blamed the business and volunteered to tell tales of corruption involving 'crores of taka'. They further added that the corporation is surviving on the revenue from ferry services, since its passenger and cargo sections are both immensely unprofitable.

BIWTC chairman M Shahidul Islam Chowdhury, on being queried about the air-conditioning project, said that he could not immediately recall how much the endeavour was costing. He was, however, aware of the leaking corrugated tin roofs and promised to "repair the roofs before the start of the rainy season."

Conspiracy to foil polls will be resisted: PM

THAKURGAON, Feb 14: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today called upon the people to remain alert so that their rights to franchise were not taken away by vested quarters, report agencies.

"Voting right is your powerful asset and you must remain alert so that your right is protected at any cost," she said while addressing a farmers' rally at Kochubari in Sadar thana here this afternoon.

Referring to the current agitations over the municipal elections, the Prime Minister said "we will not allow any quarter to conspire against the people, we will resist any such move," she said.

Sheikh Hasina reminded the audience that right to franchise was a powerful means to elect their representatives. She pointed out that the opposition parties have been trying to snatch this right. She said the right to vote and elections are inalienable rights which none can deny. She said, however such rights do not appeal to those who come to power through killings, coups and conspiracies.

Amidst applause, she announced that a by-pass road would be constructed in Thakurgaon district so that the town was not disturbed by heavy traffic.

The Prime Minister went to Kochubari to inaugurate the Uttar-Bangladesh Deep Tubewell Project, which will water vast croplands in Dinajpur, Thakurgaon and Panchagarh districts.

Under the project 1217 deep tubewells have been installed at a cost of Tk 18.33 crore for the irrigation of 56,000 hectares of land in North Bengal.

With the implementation of the irrigation project, additional 1.10 lakh tonnes of rice will be produced in the region.

besides wheat and other agricultural produce.

Switching on the pump at Kochubari, the Prime Minister went to the peasants' rally and addressed the huge gathering of marginal farmers, sharecroppers and people from all walks of life.

While addressing the gathering she urged the farmers to grow more food utilising this golden scope and turn every home into a farmhouse.

"Do not leave even an inch unutilised, grow something, food or fodder or vegetables — and it will give you additional calorie and cash," she said suggesting massive production in every corner of the country.

She assured the peasantry that necessary steps had been taken to ensure adequate fertiliser supply and form an Agricultural Credit Foundation to help boost cereal output. "It all is being done as the government's main target is to attain food autarky."

The government is distributing Tk 3270 crore as farm loan to help the flood affected farmers of the country and trying to set up Agriculture Bank in every union for the convenience of the poor farmers.

"You do your duties, pay the dues in time and maintain the tubewells," she told the farmers, assuring all possible help from the government.

Valentine's fever grips DU campus

By DU Correspondent
Youths and teenagers flocked to the Dhaka University campus to celebrate Valentine's Day.

Enthusiastic youth welcomed the day with their loved ones. Hundreds of couples crowded the campus all day and especially during the afternoon. Bishwa Bhalobasha Dibash Uddapan Parishad (BBUDUP) organised a cultural programme at Shapargata Sadhinata on the DU TSC road island in the afternoon.

Obaidul Kader, State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs inaugurated the programme, which was attended, among others, by Anisul Haq and Kudrat-E-Khuda.

The participants at the programme reminisced their bygone romantic days. WR Towhid and Shammi Akter Soma sang love songs while others recited poetry. A large audience enjoyed the function.

Besides, a section of male students under the banner Bhalobasha Kangal Samity (BKS) brought out a procession on the TSC area in the evening to mark the day. Their slogan was "let the love be universal".

Meanwhile, the Dhaka University Debating Society (DUDS) organised a mock debate on the TSC island to celebrate the day.

Khaleda warns municipal hopefuls of severe action

RAJSHAHI, Feb 14: Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia today warned the candidates for the upcoming municipal elections, set for February 23-25, of severe punishment on charge of collaboration with the government, reports UNB.

Addressing a big public meeting at Shaheb Bazar square in the afternoon Begum Zia also called upon the voters to boycott the election saying their verdict will not be reflected in the polls.

"No election under this government would be free and neutral. The Chief Election Commissioner has lost his credibility by serving the purpose of the ruling party," she told the audience.

Asking the candidates to abstain from farcical polls, Begum Zia cautioned that anyone found in the race would be given proper lesson.

Begum Zia urged the government officials to discharge their duty impartially. "We will stand by you if you come under repression or harassment. You will be absorbed in your job if they sack you."

The BNP chief urged the people to prepare for launching the one-point movement to dislodge the government if it failed to meet the four-point demand of the opposition.

The opposition leader said the ruling party MPs were in-

olved in the killing of leaders and workers of BNP and other opposition parties as they became unmoved failing to reintroduce one-party rule in the country.

She said the government also unleashed the terrorists and the police to harass the senior leaders and lawmakers of the opposition in a bid to stifling the voice.

Justifying hartal, Begum Zia said the shutdown has been enforced for ensuring people's right to vote and protecting the country's sovereignty and independence. "But Awami League, when it was in the opposition, had resorted to hartal without any genuine reason. Their hartal was intended to obstruct the government."

Tk 2 lakh looted in Chittagong

CHITTAGONG, Feb 14: Armed miscreants looted Tk 2 lakh from the counter of a transport company in the city's busy K C Dey Road area at 11 am today, report agencies.

Witnesses said five or six armed men forced into the ticket counter of S Alam coach service. The money in a bag, readied for depositing in the bank, was snatched by the gangsters at gun point.

In another incident, a group of terrorists snatched away Tk 84 thousand from the manager of a cinema hall at Agrabad where he was coming out of his office in the morning.

Separate cases were filed with respective thanas. No one was arrested till filing of this report at 9 pm.

Mizan Chy

From Page 1

which he led for six years taking all the risks on his life after the fall of the Ershad government.

Asked whether he and Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manzu are going to take identical stand in future, Chowdhury said, "Our activities are different, but the goal is same."

Chowdhury supported the forthcoming municipal elections and disagreed with the idea of mid-term national elections. "I don't see any plausible reason behind such demand."

About the shutdown planned by the opposition, he said hartal is against an individual (CEC), not against the government. "But you see, the Chief Election Commissioner is a Constitutional post. He can not be changed on whims and caprice of any body."

Asked if there is any possibility of reconciliation with Ershad as happened in the past, Chowdhury said reconciliation is part of a game. But when there is difference of attitude and aptitude, the question of reconciliation does not arise.

KAFCO

From Page 1

However, the second men of OECF, delegated by its Vice President, informed the minister that if the government accepted the settlement, they would move forward with the financial restructuring of KAFCO.

Besides, he assured, OECF will increase its support to the development efforts of Bangladesh in future as it contributed generously to the implementation of Bangladesh Bridge and other development projects.

Impeachment

From Page 1

years to gain information from Hubbell and Mrs McDougal, but they seem more unlikely than ever to cooperate.

Mrs McDougal served 18 months in prison rather than answer Starr's questions last time around. And Hubbell insists he has already supplied Starr with all the information on the Clintons that he possesses — and does not believe the Clintons did anything wrong.

On the Lewinsky front, the independent counsel is still delving into whether Clinton committed perjury when he denied making an unwanted sexual advance toward former White House volunteer Kathleen Willey.

Starr's office will put a former Willey friend, Julie Hatt Steele, on trial March 30 in Alexandria, Virginia, on charges of obstruction and lying.

Starr is also trying to wrap up work on two other areas: The probe of whether presidential aides lied about Mrs Clinton's role in the 1993 firings of the White House travel office. The first lady has denied under oath that she ordered the purge, but a memo that surfaced in the White House in 1996 says she was behind the dismissals.

The investigation into whether anyone lied in the White House's gathering of hundreds of FBI background files on appointees from prior administrations. The prosecutor says he has evidence the files were used for an improper purpose, but that there are unspecified "outstanding issues" regarding one person he refuses to identify.

ATN programme

From Page 1

channel failed to carry the programme on schedule as the Ministry of Information asked for a scrutiny of it, an unusual move for any TV programmes through foreign channels.

'Aei Samoy' is produced by 'Promotions', a house of print and visual communications, and planned by Mohammad Jahangir.

The first episode of 'Aei Samoy' dealt with political parties' views on the demand for holding of Upazila and Pourashava polls under a caretaker government. Participants in the programme included Chief Election Commissioner Md Abu Hena, Awami League General Secretary Zillur Rahman, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Jatiya Party Chairman H M Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General, Motiur Rahman Nizami and Gana Forum leader Dr Kamal Hossain.

Comm banks

From Page 1

Bank Tk 27 crore, United Commercial Bank Limited Tk 40.50 crore, Eastern Bank Tk 40.30 crore, National Credit and Commercial Bank Tk 21.09 crore, BASIC bank Tk 25.20 crore, Prime Bank Tk 22.12 crore, South East Bank Tk 17 crore, Dhaka Bank Tk 11.04 crore, City Bank Tk 11 crore and Social Investment Bank (SIBL) Tk 4 crore.

The total deposit with all banks in the country rose to Tk 58,071.66 crore at the end of last year from previous year's closing amount of Tk 51,057.01 crore.

Of the total deposit, the four nationalised banks had Tk 35,166.49 crore, 17 private banks Tk 15,659.26 crore, 13 foreign banks Tk 4,324.05 crore and five specialised banks Tk 2,921.86 crore.

The deposit with four banks including specialised Bangladesh Shilpa Bank (BSB) declined. It's deposit fell to Tk 99 crore from Tk 152 crore earlier.

The three other banks are local branches of foreign banks—National Bank of Pakistan had a fall of deposit by 49.78 per cent, City N A by 5.40 per cent and South Korean Hani Bank by 16 per cent.

Though most of the banks' deposits and deposit rose last year, their actual position was more or less "static" after deducting interest and adjusting with the annual inflation rate, according to a senior banker.

"The actual growth in deposit would not be much after deducting interest and adjusting with the inflation," he said. Every bank has to pay around 7 to 8 per cent interest on its deposit. The inflation rate also rose to around 8 per cent last year.

The banker added, "Thirteen per cent growth in deposit is good considering our poor economy. But for a rapid growth of the economy, at least 25 to 30 per cent growth in bank deposit is needed."

Govt, Opposition

From Page 1

per. "We'll consider a proposal for negotiation if comes from the presidential House... I don't believe that we've reached a point of no return. Chances are still there for a settlement if the government side means it."

Bhuiyan said, the opposition liaison committee will meet today for further discussion on the next course of action before the municipal polls.

"We're not ready to talk about politics with the business leaders," said Kazi Firoz Rashid, a JP presidium member in the opposition liaison committee. "Country's economy suffers more losses from bank loan defaults than it does from hartals."

As part of their anti-election campaign, four top opposition leaders — BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia, Jatiya Party chairman HM Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami ameer Golam Azam and IOJ chief Azizul Haq — addressed public rallies yesterday at Rajshahi, Sylhet, Chittagong and Khulna cities respectively.

Besides, the opposition parties are due to organise similar campaigns in the district towns as a precursor to the planned 96-hour shutdown, which will coincide with the election dates, opposition sources said.

The three-day strike planned to start from the day before the municipal polls.

Oil tanker owners' strike postponed

Bangladesh Oil Tanker Owners' Association has postponed its proposed strike, scheduled to begin today, reports BSS.

It was decided after the chairman of Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation assured the association to consider their demands.

Natya Mela

From Page 1

Book Fair drew a large number of visitors as it entered its second week yesterday. Yesterday was the Valentine's Day and scores of couples crowded the Academy premises to enjoy the evening.

Twenty-three new books were displayed on the digital screen at the fair yesterday. And the stalls that drew much attention of the visitors were Samoy Prokasan, Pathak Samabesh, Mawia Prokasan, Ananny, Agami Prokasan, BRAC Prokasan and Sandesh.

A discussion meeting on 'Usage of Bengali Language in the Court' was held in the evening with Gazul Haq in the chair. Dr Mizanur Rahman presented the keynote paper while Barrister K Z Alam, Barrister Rabeya Buiyan, Advocate Sahara Khatun and Advocate Sigma Huda took part in the discussion.

Today's topic of discussion is "Bangla Literature". Away at the Central Shaheed Minar, Sammilita Sangskritik Jote continued its Ekushey programmes. Dramas, poems and songs attracted a large number of crowd there.

BSP

From Page 1

tal.

Attack on newspaper offices and journalists started from the first day of the hartal and attackers hurled bombs at The Daily Star office and set ablaze an auto-rickshaw. Besides, an auto-rickshaw of the Independent was set afire and another of The Bangladesh Observer damaged and the journalists and newspaper employees in the vehicles were also assaulted. A photo-journalist of Bhorer Kagoj received bullet wound on the first day of the hartal.

Besides, a microbus of the Aijker Kagoj came under attack at Feni and the terrorists damaged the vehicles, assaulted a peon and snatched away money from him. A computer operator and the driver of the microbus were also beaten.

The journalists of different national dailies performing professional duties were assaulted in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The attack continued on the second day of the hartal when an auto-rickshaw of the Janakantha was damaged and reporter Swadesh Roy injured.

On the last day of the hartal, Dainik Sangram office came under attack and a journalist was wounded.

The meeting observed that continuation of such political uncertainty would badly affect the newspaper industry along with other industries, and called upon the government, law enforcing agencies, callers and opponents of hartal to refrain from such activities.

It was attended by Mizanur Rahman Mizan (Dainik Khabar), Enayetullah Khan (UNB), Mohammad Atiqullah Khan, Masud (Dainik Janakantha), Alhaj Liakat Ali (Dainik Purbanal), Mahfuz Anam (The Daily Star), Salman F Rahman (The Independent), Iqbal Ahmed (Dainik Mukhtakantha), Rahat Khan (Dainik Ittefaq), Matiuir Rahman Chowdhury (Dainik Manab Jamin), Altamas Kabir (Dainik Sangbad), Benazir Ahmed (Bhorer Kagoj), M Wahid Ullah (Dainik Azadi), Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury (The Bangladesh Observer), Khalid Hossain (Dainik Shyambazar) and Mushtaque Hossain (Weekly Khaborer Kagoj).

The AL general secretary urged the countrymen to resist BNP and its allies from creating unrest in the country.

Zillur blames Khaleda for Sajal's death

Awami League general secretary and LGRD Minister Zillur Rahman has protested the opposition leader's demand for arresting Alhaj Makkul Hossain MP in connection with the Sajal killing in the city during the 60-hour hartal, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday he called Begum Khaleda Zia's allegation "false, fabricated and motivated" and said it showed her "irresponsibility" bringing such allegation against an MP.

Zillur instead blamed Begum Zia for the death of Sajal and said: "She is responsible for all killings during the last hartal."

The AL general secretary urged the countrymen to resist BNP and its allies from creating unrest in the country.

Trial of Jail Killing Case resumes today

The trial of the Jail Killing Case resumes at 9.15 am today at the Metropolitan Sessions Court (MSC) here, reports BSS.

The Jail Killing Case came up for trial after 23 years following the brutal murder of four national leaders — former acting president Sayed Nazrul Islam, former prime ministers Tajuddin Ahmed and Mansur Ali and former minister A H M Quamaruzzaman — inside the Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.

In all 21 persons, including four former ministers have been charged by the police after a thorough investigation.

Of them, eight are now in custody while the rest 13 are absconding.

'91 gunshot at Hasina: Accused remanded

Staff Correspondent

Wahid-Uz-Zaman, who was arrested for his alleged involvement in attack in 1991 on the then opposition leader and now Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was placed on a three-day police remand yesterday.

Detective Branch of police arrested him on February 8 in connection with firing gunshots at Sheikh Hasina in the city's Kathalbag area.

Police yesterday produced Wahid before the CMM's Court and prayed for a seven-day remand for further interrogation. The court placed him on a three-day remand.

DB officials were interrogating Wahid at the DB office till the filing of this report last night.

USBBC

From Page 1

delegation to Bangladesh, the President appreciated his initiative and personal efforts to strengthen US-Bangladesh economic and trade ties through dialogues between the private sectors of the two countries.

Bangladesh attaches great importance to its relations with the US and looks forward to further strengthening trade and economic relationship not only in the public but also in the private sector in the years to come," the President told the delegation.

He hoped that US investment in Bangladesh would further increase and more and more US trade and business delegations visit Bangladesh in the future.

President Shahabuddin expects that the USBBC would play a catalytic role in further strengthening the political, economic and trade relations between the two countries.

Ambassador Frank Wisner thanked the President for receiving him and his colleagues.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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UK visa officers go 'faster, firmer'

From Page 1

potential applicant has the necessary papers in order and only then suggests that he or she proceed to deposit the required non-refundable visa fees and face the actual interview with a Visa Officer.

"We give lot of time to make the applicant explain his case and try to make him or her feel at ease. He could be provided even half an hour time or more to explain his case. If required interpreters are provided to assist the applicant in the conversation. We treat each case independently and never refuse a visa if the applicant has the necessary documents," the head of the Immigration Section said.

All those who are denied visas are given a written explanation.

The UK High Commission in Dhaka has 12 visa officers, two entry clearance managers and 39 support staff, many of whom

are Bangladesh citizens. The staff includes several who can converse in Bengali and Sylheti dialect. Incidentally, a great majority of the visa seekers, particularly among immigrants, are from the Sylhet region who have been settling in the London dock lands since the early 1930s.

Responding to a question, the Visa chief said there was no exact figure but the number of Bangladeshi settlers in the United Kingdom could be anything between 3,00,000 and half a million.

Waiting period for the applicants of settlement visas has now been considerably reduced and it is now possible for a spouse to have an interview completed within 28 weeks of application.

Some of the immigrant visa applicants however are subjected to DNA tests to confirm their biological parentage

where 'there is occasion for doubt', a visa officer said.

When the tests were started in 1991, 21 per cent of the applicants were found to have made wrong claims of parentage, while the number reduced to 10 per cent last year, the immigration officials said.

However, if the visas of those qualifying to migrate are rejected, they have the right to appeal and a two-tier adjudication is done, with a British attorney representing the applicant. In some cases, refusal decisions are reversed.

"We are human and it is possible to make mistakes. But we always reconsider a case if the applicant has been able to meet the criteria," said a visa officer.

The UK immigration officials showed the journalists samples of forged documents which included forged letters

from eminent persons, sponsors and a British MP, educational institutions and several tailored bank documents submitted by some applicants. Several fake travel documents, especially British passports, were also shown where applicants tried to substitute pictures or other pages of the passports.

The immigration officers said the British government intends to strengthen and modernise the immigration and asylum laws through a proposed bill.

The proposed bill, when passed, is likely to restore the right of appeal for all types of applicants whose visas have been refused. The proposed law intends to simplify the appeals system by introducing a single comprehensive right of appeal and enhancing the role of the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.