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Kazi Aref, 5 others gunned down

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Feb 16: Kazi Aref Ahmed, a top leader of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), and five others were killed when gunmen sprayed bullets on the podium of a public meeting he was addressing at a bordering township this afternoon.

At least 20 others were injured when gunmen pumped at least 60 rounds at about 5:30 pm at the Kalidaspur Primary School ground at Daulatpur, some 45 kilometres from Kushtia town, police and witnesses said.

Kazi Aref, 57, a valiant freedom fighter and founding-member of the JSD, was addressing the rally when about 20 gunmen opened fire. A student leader in the sixties, he was a presidium member of the party till his death. He also headed the party for some time before the recent merger with another faction.

Hit by bullets in head and chest, Aref died on the podium where 10 others, all leaders of the JSD, were also present.

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Killing condemned

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia and leaders of different political parties yesterday condemned the killings of valiant freedom fighter and JSD leader Kazi Aref Ahmed and five of his party colleagues.

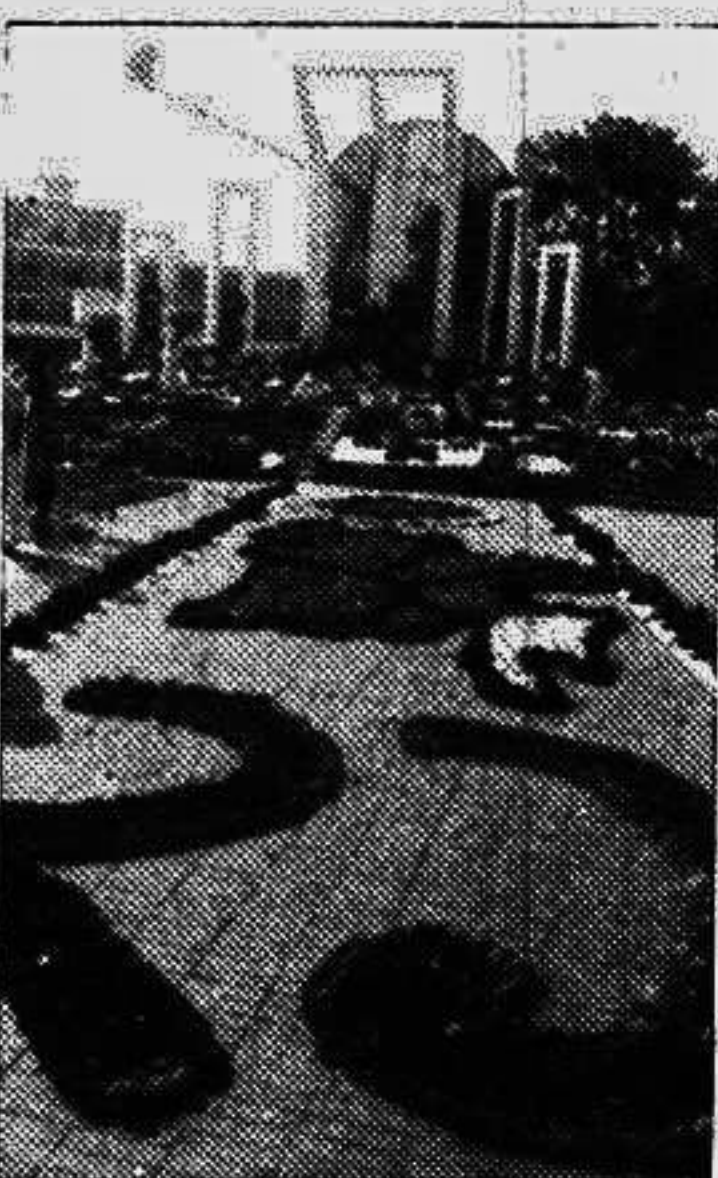
They also demanded immediate arrest and trial of the killers.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has condemned the killing of Kazi Aref Ahmed and directed the authorities concerned to find out the killers and take proper legal action.

In a condolence message See Page 12 Col 6



Kazi Aref Ahmed (left): Grief-stricken son and daughter of the slain leader. — Star photo



Shilpakala takes up two-day programme

By DU Correspondent

Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy has taken up a two-day programme to observe the Amar Ekushey.

The programme, beginning on February 20, includes discussion, recitation and cultural function.

Meanwhile, 232 more new books were introduced at the Ekushey Book Fair. Books worth Tk 8.37 lakh were sold till yesterday, the 17th day of the month-long fair.

A discussion meeting on "Bangali Literature: Achievement of 20th Century" was held at the Bangla Academy premises yesterday with Prof Mamanat Uddin in the chair.

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Tofail Stance on Kafco Makes Dhaka Stand Taller

Column: The Outside Story

by Sabir Mustafa

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Focus

American capitalism

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Prayer Timings

February 17

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:25	5:29
Zohr	12:15	1:15
Asr	4:10	4:20
Maghrib	5:58	6:02
Esha	7:10	7:20

Source: Islamic Foundation

Three big names reject talks with Petrobangla

By Sharier Khan

Negotiations for the second round of bidding for gas blocks have become uncertain once again as three out of four oil companies invited for talks with Petrobangla have postponed their appointments, sources said.

Sources told The Daily Star that three companies — Enron, Pangaea and Shell — responded negatively to the government's re-opening of negotiations for the five blocks that are to be awarded.

The government had invited all these companies for negotiations back in December and all of them had regretted the invitations on the basis of prior engagements.

Sources said that the falling oil prices in the international market had taken their toll on all the oil companies. "That is why, all the oil companies are willing to delay the second round bidding process," said an oil company representative.

Earlier this month, Petrobangla had invited the US company Enron for a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) discussion on blocks 3 and 6. The discussion was supposed to have started from today.

But Enron regretted Petrobangla's proposal and said that it would sit with Petrobangla later. Sources say that Enron's financial status is presently very weak.

US company Pangaea was invited for talks on block 8 which would have commenced on February 26.

Petrobangla also regretted Pangaea's offer saying that it would be able to resume block negotiations from mid-March.

Pangaea, a small oil company, further said that it was preoccupied with an exploration activity in Peru right now.

British-Dutch oil giant Shell Oil, which was invited for negotiations over block 5 from February 28, said that it would resume negotiations only after the government awarded it block 10 along with block 5.

However, the government did not respond to Shell's plea. Shell was offered blocks 10 and 5 in the early part of negotiations in October '97 but was later awarded with block 5 only.

Recent financial reports on Shell Oil show that its profit had fallen by 95 per cent from

that of the previous year.

US company Unocal, which was invited for negotiations on block 7 from February 23, is the only company, which might attend the Petrobangla meeting as per schedule.

Meanwhile, sources said that despite a world-wide plunge in oil prices that has forced many giant oil companies to merge, sell out or go bankrupt or smaller, there is still a move in the government to promote small Irish companies.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has condemned the killing of Kazi Aref Ahmed and directed the authorities concerned to find out the killers and take proper legal action.

The government's inclination towards Tullow has contributed to the delay in the second round of bidding. The government had tried to find "financially strong" companies to partner Tullow in the two blocks, which were originally reserved for exploration by BAPX. This deferred negotiations and discouraged big names like Chevron-Texaco and Mobil-Petronas from sticking to the bidding process.

Tullow had offered to drill 10 exploratory wells in each of the two blocks at a cost of 58 million US dollars each.

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Time for CBA election at AJM extended

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Feb 16: The Collective Bargaining Agent (CBA) election of Adamjee Jute Mills (AJM) will not be held tomorrow.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court today extended the time for holding the election by two weeks.

Justice Latifur Rahman of the Supreme Court passed the order upon an application filed by the government against yesterday's High Court order that had rejected the application for extension of time to hold election of the CBA of AJM which was scheduled for February 17.

Security was reinforced at Adamjee Jute Mills deploying DDR as tensions mounted there following today's Supreme Court order.

Just after the court order, at least 10 received minor injuries as ruling party-backed CBA and Jatiya Party supported union clashed with broken bottles, bricks and sticks at Shapla Square area inside the mill premises.

To avert possible troubles three platoons of paramilitary BDR personnel and huge armed police were deployed in the mill area shortly after the court order.

See Page 12 Col 2

Opposition announces hartal programme tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

The central liaison committee of BNP-led opposition parties has decided to announce the hartal programmes during the ensuing municipal polls from simultaneous press conferences in the city tomorrow (Thursday).

The opposition parties which earlier planned to enforce a 96-hour hartal beginning February 22, are now considering a 72-hour one starting from February 23. The municipal elections will take place on February 23-25.

"We will finalise in tomorrow's (Wednesday's) meeting whether the hartal would be a 96-hour or 72-hour one. Prior to finalising the next course of action, we have decided to discuss afresh with our respective party's policy makers about the duration," said a member of the liaison committee after yesterday's meeting.

Held at the Minto Road official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, the meeting was chaired by BNP leader M Shamsul Islam MP.

Sources at the meeting said BNP preferred to call a 72-hour

hartal only during the polls dates while Jatiya Party insisted on enforcing a 96-hour hartal. But another member of the liaison committee said that it was almost finalised that the duration of the hartals would be 72 hours.

The committee members, representing BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote at yesterday's meeting, however, decided that there would be provision for extension of the 72-hour hartal should the ruling party, like in the previous hartals, try to obstruct the strike or if any major untoward incident took place.

Talking to newsmen, Shamsul Islam said decision about the duration of hartal is yet to be finalised.

Replying to a question, Islam said there is no relation between the planned hartal programmes and the High Court's suo moto rule.

"We're yet to take final decision about the duration of hartals. We will sit again tomorrow (Wednesday)," said assistant

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Hearing of contempt petition against PM today

By SC Correspondent

The hearing on the contempt petition filed against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina by Supreme Court Bar Association President Habibur Islam Bhuiyan will be held today in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

Earlier, on February 3, 1999 the Appellate Division asked the Attorney General for filing the PM's signed statement on the marked portion of the news items published in the Daily Sangram and The Dinkal within February 17, 1999.

The Appellate Division also fixed the date for hearing the contempt petition today.

It was alleged in the petition that the PM, by her statements made at a press conference after her return from India, committed Contempt of Court.

Ties to grow, Abdullah tells Hasina

AMMAN, Feb 16: The new King of Jordan Abdullah Bin El-Hussein today gave an audience to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who came here to console the death of King Hussein and felicitate the new monarch, reports BSS.

King Abdullah, while welcoming the Bangladesh Prime Minister at the Raghadan Palace said, he feels honoured as Sheikh Hasina came here to console him at the time of his grief.

The King said, his father left many unfinished tasks, which he hopes to accomplish in cooperation with the friendly countries, including Bangladesh.

The King expressed the hope that the bilateral relations between the two countries would be further strengthened in the days to come. "I have already directed my cabinet colleagues to identify sectors where cooperation could be made with Bangladesh," he said.

Sheikh Hasina said, King Hussein was not only a popular leader of Jordan, but the entire

See Page 12 Col 8

Tenth JBCCEC meet in city concludes

16-pt agreed minutes signed

A joint committee of private sector apex bodies of Bangladesh and Japan has agreed to press both the governments to improve policies and regulatory regimes, and ease the remaining physical and environmental bottlenecks faced by the

Japanese investors in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

At the end of its day-long 10th meeting in the city yesterday, the Japan-Bangladesh Joint Committee for Commercial and Economic Cooperation (JBCCEC) came up with a 16-

point agreed minutes giving special focus on development of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).

Newly-elected chairman of the JBCCEC Abdul Awal Minto, who is also the president of FBCCI, and committee co-chairman Uzuhiro Uwatoko signed the agreed minutes at Sonargaon Hotel in the evening.

The next meeting of the JBCCEC will be held in Japan in 2000.

The JBCCEC, a joint forum of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Japan Chamber of Commerce, reassured mutual cooperation to improve Tokyo-Dhaka trade relations in the private sector with joint efforts aiming at simplifying the procedures of investment, banking, imports and exports.

See Page 12 Col 7

Shazneen murder Cross-examination deferred due to Hasan's absence

By Staff Correspondent

Defence lawyers could not cross-examine Latifur Rahman, father of murdered teenager Shazneen, yesterday as a key accused in the case was not produced before the Metropolitan Sessions Judge Court.

It was for the second time in the last two weeks that the absence of Contractor Hasan disrupted the normal proceedings of the two cases in different courts.

The six accused in the Shazneen rape case were not produced before the Special Court of Woman and Children Repression due to the reported illness of Hasan on February 3.

See Page 12 Col 1

Larma leaves for Calcutta today

By Special Correspondent

Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity Chairman Jyotirindriyo Bodhipriyo Larma alias Santu Larma leaves for Calcutta today for medical check-up, sources close to him said yesterday.

Larma had been staying in the city since February 6. He had a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on February 8. They discussed the implementation of the CHT peace treaty.

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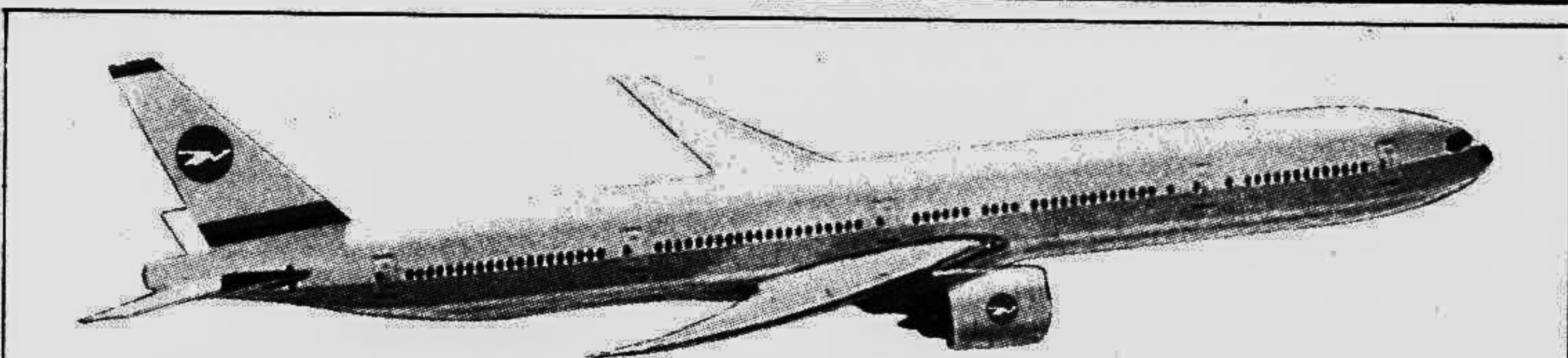
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