



The Daily Star



Nat'l Poetry Festival begins today

By DU Correspondent
The 13th National Poetry Festival begins in the city today.

Renowned Poet Shamsur Rahman will inaugurate the two-day festival on the TSC road island of the Dhaka University.

The main stage of the festival has been erected at Hakim Chatter near the University Central Library.

A good number of poets from home and abroad are expected to participate in the festival, organised by Jatiya Kabita Parishad.

Meanwhile, on the occasion of Amar Ekushey, the National Museum will arrange a handwriting competition for the children at 10 am tomorrow.

State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs, Obaidul Kader will distribute prizes among the winners.

India, Pakistan sign bus service deal

ISLAMABAD, Feb 17: India and Pakistan today signed the formal agreement for launch of New Delhi-Lahore bus service that will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee when he travels on its maiden run to Lahore on February 20.

Indian High Commissioner to Islamabad G Parthasarthy and Pakistan's Secretary in the Ministry of Communications Dr M Akram Sheikh signed the agreement.

The 494 kilometre bus service, the first road transit facility for the travellers between the two countries, would operate four days a week. Buses will start from both New Delhi and Lahore on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays, the agreement said.

The agreement, which had been negotiated over the last few months, said the bus service was being launched after the governments of India and Pakistan agreed to explore possibility of expansion and promotion of vehicular traffic between the two countries on the basis of mutual advantage and reciprocity.

Vajpayee took the lead to start the bus service between the two countries by initiating the idea during a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif in New York in September last year.

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Prayer Timings

February 18

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:27	5:31
Zohr	12:15	1:15
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrib	6:00	6:03
Esha	7:15	7:20

Source: Islamic Foundation

Pak Military courts declared illegal

ISLAMABAD, Feb 17: The Supreme Court declared the newly established military courts illegal today, sparing 14 people from a death sentence handed down by these courts, reports AP.

"The establishment of military courts for the trial of civilians... are declared unconstitutional, without lawful authority and of no legal effect," said the judgement of the seven-member Supreme Court bench.

The government earlier said these courts were not meant to replace the civilian judicial system, but rather to supplement it.

Attorney General Chaudhury Farooq said the government will need time to study the Supreme Court ruling.

Pakistan's constitution does not allow a Supreme Court ruling to be appealed. However, Farooq said the government can ask the Supreme Court judges to

review their judgment.

"Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will meet his Cabinet, colleagues and party members before making a decision of whether to apply for a review," Farooq told The Associated Press.

The government established the courts in November in the violence-ravaged Sindh province to try to reduce a spiralling crime rate by implementing quick justice.

Cases before the military courts generally take less than two weeks to complete, compared to the months and sometimes years in the civilian judicial system.

Human rights groups, lawyers and opposition parties have assailed the army-run courts as unconstitutional.

The Supreme Court order demanded that all cases currently before the military courts be transferred to Pak-

istan's special anti-terrorist courts.

The Pakistan Army, however, said the courts will continue to operate until it receives an order from either the Supreme Court or the government to shut down.

"The military courts are still in progress... we are awaiting orders from the government or the Supreme Court," said Col Ashfaq Hussain, an army spokesman.

The Muttahida Qami Movement, a small ethnic party that dominates in southern Sindh province, accused the government of using these courts to target its party workers.

It was the MQM, which represents Urdu-speaking Muslims to Pakistan, who challenged the legality of the courts.

"It is good news," Ehsanullah Khan, an MQM legislator in the Sindh provincial Parliament. See Page 12 Col 4

Opposition decides to call 72-hr hartal Feb 23-25

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance has decided to call a 72-hour countrywide non-stop hartal during the February 23-25 municipal polls. The agenda for the strike is to press home the opposition's 4-point demand, which includes the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

"This will be the last hartal to realise the 4-point demand. If the government fails to meet the demands prior to the shut-downs, the opposition parties will obviously launch one-point out-governments movement immediately after the municipal polls," said a member of the liaison committee.

The liaison committee also decided that secretary-generals of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote would announce the hartal through separate press conferences in their respective party offices at 5 pm today.

"Though we didn't sit today, we discussed our plan by telephone and finalised the 72-hour strike beginning February 23. We have also prepared a joint declaration and statement of which will be read out tomorrow by the secretary-generals of the four parties at their respective press conferences tomorrow," said Kazi Firoz Rashid, JP president member and a party representative on the liaison committee.

He said the duration of the planned 72-hour hartal may be extended if the ruling party like in the previous hartals "tried to obstruct" the opposition programmes and "resorted to terrorist activities".

The four parties had earlier planned to enforce a 96-hour hartal to press home their 4-point demand, which includes the cancellation of municipal polls to be held under the current government.

See Page 12 Col 3

Khaleda asks govt to quit 'right now'

Khaleda Zia has asked the government to hand over power to a caretaker administration right now for holding Parliamentary election, due to its "failure" to protect the lives of political leaders, reports UNB.

"When the government has failed to ensure security of life of political leaders and workers, when law and order has broken down, terrorism, repression become order of the day, people's rights and country's sovereignty are at stake, the government has no right to cling to power any more," said the opposition leader, citing Tuesday's political killings.

Addressing a function at 29 Minto Road yesterday evening, marking the joining of some leaders of Jatiya Party to BNP, Khaleda demanded formation of a judicial inquiry committee with a sitting judge of the High Court to probe the killing of JSD leader Kazi Aref Ahmed and five others for exemplary punishment of those involved in the killings.

Several hundred JP workers and supporters from Munshiganj district, led by Abdul Qudus Dhiron and Abdus Salam Sarker, shifted their allegiance See Page 12 Col 5

Larma gets status of state minister

Chairman-designate of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Regional Council Jyotindriya Bodhipriya Larma, alias Shantu Larma has been elevated to the status of State Minister, reports UNB.

The government announcement came yesterday.

The order will come into effect the day Larma takes office as chairman of the Regional Council formed as per the CHT peace accord.

Injured Feni JCD worker dies in city hospital

FENI, Feb 17: Rezaul Karim Tuhin, who was beaten up during the opposition sponsored hartal on February 10, succumbed to his injuries at Shamanta Hospital in Dhaka early today, reports UNB.

Police and witnesses said, a group of anti-hartal activists forcibly picked up Tuhin, 18, an activist of JCD, from in front of BNP office at Pachagacha road and beat him up mercilessly.

The victim was sent to the capital on the same night in a critical condition for treatment. He breathed his last at 5 am in the hospital today.



JSD leaders carry the coffin after the body of their assassinated comrade was flown in to Dhaka from Kushtia by an airforce helicopter. The picture shows senior Cabinet ministers and Awami League leaders accompany the body being taken to his residence from the Tejgaon airport.

Who killed Kazi Aref?

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Feb 17: The killing of five JSD leaders at Kushtia yesterday by gunmen has raised many questions in the minds of the people here.

One big question is: Why didn't the JSD leaders seek police help for the meeting where the killing took place?

The party leaders here said they sought deployment of police at the meeting venue but that there was nobody around.

Then, why was Kazi Aref Ahmed interested in holding public meetings?

Yesterday was the second consecutive day that the late leader addressed a rally in Kushtia.

Sources said Kazi Aref came to attend the 8th death anniversary of valiant freedom fighter and former upazila chairman Marfat Ali on February 17.

While campaigning for parliament election on this day in 1991, Marfat Ali was killed by his rival activists in what was widely believed to be an intra-party conflict.

Since the killing, the party has been divided in two or several splinter groups, according See Page 12 Col 7

Condition of 3 critical, 2 arrested

From Our Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Feb 17: Post-mortem examinations of all the five bodies of JSD leaders were performed in Kushtia General Hospital this morning.

After autopsy, the body of Kazi Aref, a top leader of the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) was flown to Dhaka.

Kazi Aref and four other leaders of the party were killed when gunmen sprayed bullets on the podium of a public meeting at the Kalidaspur Primary School ground under Daulatpur thana yesterday afternoon.

A pall of gloom hung over the town as people thronged the Kushtia General Hospital to pay last tributes to the slain leaders. Namaj-e-janaza for the remaining four was held at central Eidgah Maidan and the bodies were sent to their respective villages for burial.

The body of Advocate Yukuk Ali, general secretary of JSD district unit, was taken to Kushtia Bar Association office premises where the lawyers showed their last respects to their colleague.

Local leaders of all political parties have condemned the killing and demanded punishment to those responsible.

The injured are now undergoing treatment at Kushtia General Hospital and Daulatpur See Page 12 Col 4



A grieving Roushan Jahan Sathi, wife of the slain freedom fighter, hugs their only daughter as relatives wait after the arrival of the body of Kazi Aref at their residence yesterday.

Thousands mourn, pay last respects

Thousands of mourners thronged Central Shaheed Minar to pay last respect to leading freedom fighter and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal leader Kazi Aref Ahmed as his body lay in state at the memorial in the late afternoon of the spring, reports UNB.

From schoolboys and girls to Prime Minister's cabinet members, leaders of opposition political parties, socio-cultural organisations, student and professional bodies and many freedom fighters were among the motley crowd to have a last glimpse of the slain leader.

In a long queue they proceeded in slow steps, offered petals and wreaths to their uncompromising leader and stood in solemn silence in front of the body draped in red green National Flag and party and black flags.

A heart-rending scene was created at the helipad as Aref's beloved daughter Juli, son Arup and brother Kazi Masud Ahmed and others present there broke into tears when the coffin was See Page 12 Col 1

Later in a silent foot procession, slain Aref's party comrades carried the body to Central Eidgah where his namaj-e-janaza was held. His body was kept in BIRDEM Hospital mortuary for burial at Mirpur Freedom Fighters Graveyard on Friday.

His body was flown in here by a Bangladesh Airforce helicopter from his home district Kushtia where he, along with four party colleagues, was gunned down at a rally at Kalidaspur School in Daulatpur

Contempt petition Court to pass 'later' its order on PM's statement

By SC Correspondent

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday decided to pass later its order on the signed statement of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on the contempt petition filed against her.

"The order is reserved, it will be passed later," the court said. Attorney General Mahmudul Islam yesterday submitted the PM's signed statement in the Appellate Division.

On February 3, 1999 the Appellate Division wanted to have the statement on the marked portion of the news items published in the Daily Sangram and Dainik Dinkal regarding granting of bails by the HC.

"Thank you Mr President of the Bar for performing a public duty and thank you Mr Attorney General for complying with See Page 12 Col 2

Debate on law and order demanded

By Staff Correspondent

The Opposition in parliament yesterday demanded a general debate on law and order in the country before further deterioration of the situation.

The brutal killing of Kazi Aref Ahmed and his party colleagues in broad daylight clearly indicates the level of deterioration of law and order. It's time to make united efforts to combat political violence," said Chief Whip of the Opposition Khandaker Delwar Hossain.

Expressing dissatisfaction over the government's indifference towards the opposition request for a general discussion on law and order, Delwar said: "We really need to have a threadbare discussion on the law and order, so that we can work out strategies to contain the situation unitedly. In case of our failure, people would not forgive us."

In response, Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak took the floor to express solidarity with the views of the opposition Chief Whip. "You have come up with a genuine issue. We have to See Page 12 Col 4

'Killing does not reflect law & order situation'

Home Minister Major (ret'd) Rafiqul Islam has said the killing of Kazi Aref Ahmed did not manifest that the country's overall law and order situation was in bad shape, reports UNB.

"Some scattered areas of Kushtia have been violence-prone for last 40 to 50 years," he told a questioner when asked if he felt insecure as a politician after the gruesome murders.

The minister went to the Abhay Das Lane residence in Tikatuly of the capital yesterday to console the octogenarian mother of Kazi Aref and other family members.

Amidst an allegation that Kazi Aref had sought security but was not given, Rafiq said everything would be investigated to find out if there was any negligence on the part of See Page 12 Col 7



NOTICE

This is for information of valued plot allotment recipients of the areas under Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakha particularly of the areas of Uttara, Gulshan, Banani and Baridhara that at the time of construction of building plot allotment recipients have built and many of them are building the ramp for entering into the buildings from the road in front of the plot in such a way that it is outside the plot allotted and it is beyond the layout design approved for building. To reduce the width of roads and cause inconvenience for movement of vehicles and people by construction of such ramp is totally contrary to the rules for construction of buildings and illegal.

Under these circumstances, the valued plot allotment recipients are asked to remove the ramp constructed earlier or now under construction by dismantling at their own initiatives immediately (within one month). Otherwise legal action including cancellation of approved design of the building as per Building Construction Law (1987 amended) will be taken by accusing them of violating the terms and conditions of lease agreement.

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Barricade protesting road accident

By Staff Correspondent

An aged man was crushed under the wheels of a running truck just 150 yards away from his home at Abdullapur crossing on Dhaka-Mymensingh highway yesterday morning.

Relatives and neighbours of the victim, Zamir Ali, 72, immediately rushed to the spot at southern end of the Tongi Bridge and put up a barricade on the highway for around one hour. The barricade created a traffic jam on the highway causing sufferings to the passengers on way to the northern districts from the capital.

Witnesses said the truck coming from Dhaka hit Zamir Ali first as he tried to cross the road from western side of the highway. Ali fell on the road and the truck ran over him.

His relatives alleged that although they had got hold of the truck and its driver, the on-duty traffic policeman allowed

the truck to proceed towards Tongi.

They also alleged that they had requested a police sergeant who was moving around the area by a motor cycle to follow the truck but he did not.

The angry mob laid siege to a makeshift police camp just on the other side of the road. The mob held the traffic police hostage for around an hour. Additional police force from the nearby Uttara Thana rushed to the spot and rescued the constable.

The body of the Zamir Ali, son of late Makbar Ali, was first kept at a nearby office of a political party. A tense situation was prevailing in the area.

When asked about the allegation of saving the driver by on duty traffic policeman, a sergeant who was monitoring the situation, said that he was See Page 12 Col 1