



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 Hikim Chattar 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 Parisad.

Meanwhile, on the occasion of Amar Ekushey, the National Museum will arrange a hand-writing 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 launching New Delhi-Lahore bus service that would 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 Partha Sarathy 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, 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

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 Chaudhry Farooq said the government will need time to study the Supreme Court ruling.

Pakistan's constitution does not allow a Supreme Court order 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-wracked Sindh province to try to reduce a spiraling 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 Pakistani 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 Muttaheda 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.

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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 Tejgaon airport.

—Star photo

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 nationwide 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 shutdowns, the opposition parties will obviously launch one-point oust-government 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 secretaries-general of the four parties at their respective press conferences tomorrow," said Kazi Firoz Rashid, JP presidium 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 programme 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 cur-

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Khaleda asks govt to quit 'right now'

From Our Correspondent

Khaleda Zia has asked the government to hand over power to a caretaker administration right now for holding Parliament 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 to BNP.

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

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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 Doulatpur

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Thanha Tues afternoon. Aref's political and personal friend, Abdur Razzak, the Water Resources Minister, JSD general secretary Hasanul Haq Inu, party leader Mainuddin Khan Badal and wife of the deceased Rawshan Jahan Sathi accompanied the body from Kushtia.



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

—Star photo

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, 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.

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 BIRDDEM Hospital mortuary for burial at Mirpur Free Model 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.

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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

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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

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'Killing does not reflect law & order situation'

Home Minister Major (retired) 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 Abboy Das Lane residence in Titakuly 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

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Another round of taka devaluation soon?

By M Shamsur Rahman

to witness further erosion in the coming days," a local market analyst said.

Analysts are attributing the high demand for the dollar to sluggish exports and a drop in inward remittances. "The demand is expected to boost further in the coming weeks due to higher import payments," said one analyst.

Market experts are now saying that the Bangladesh Bank should pump dollar into the market through Sonali Bank to meet the dollar crisis as the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) does in such cases.

"There are increased payments for grain imports, mostly from India, causing the dollar crunch," said Ershad Hossain, head of treasury at American Express Bank in Dhaka.

"Forward purchase by importer to hedge against import payment is also a factor causing the sudden demand," he said.

Another forex market expert said frequent hartals were also causing the dollar crisis. The foreign currencies are converted into taka before utilisation in Bangladesh and it requires some time for the conversion. Hartals halted work in banks, leading to delay in conversion.

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.

On the interbank market,

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Injured Feni JCD worker dies in city hospital