



Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal brought out a procession in the city yesterday demanding free, fair and meaningful elections. —Star photo

Bethlehem confce Support sought for rebuilding Palestine

Speaker Humayun Rasheed Choudhury has said that the United Nations, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and other NGOs and world bodies should give whole-hearted support and cooperation in rebuilding Palestine and restoring its old glory, reports BSS.

The Speaker said this in his 'key-note paper in the "Bethlehem 2000 International Conference" in Rome on Friday. The conference was jointly organised by the UN committee on the "exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the IPU."

Choudhury said the UN General Assembly and the IPU have extended full support to the "Project Bethlehem 2000" launched by the Palestinian Authority.

He said the parliaments represent the voice of people and, therefore, the voice of reason. He also spoke highly on the importance of Palestine, and Bethlehem, which is a historic and holy place being the birth place of Jesus Christ.

Earlier, Humayun Rasheed Choudhury called on Speaker of the upper house of the Italian Parliament Nicola Mancino and the Speaker of the lower house of Italian parliament, Luciano Violante and exchanged views with them on matters of bilateral interest and co-operation between the parliaments of the two countries.

3 killed in road accidents

Three people died in separate road accidents in Dhaka and Mymensingh yesterday, reports APB.

One of them died in the city's Mohakhali area when a speeding autorickshaw hit him in the afternoon.

The man, aged about 70, could not be identified.

In another accident, two women were killed on Mymensingh-Dhaka highway when a truck hit the rickshaw in which they were travelling in the afternoon.

The dead were identified as Halima Khatun, 60, and Jamila Khatun, 50.

Witnesses said the women were killed on the spot when a Dhaka-bound truck rammed the rickshaw at Maskanda in the town.

Halima Khatun was the wife of former president of the district's Bus-Truck Owners' Association late Alhaj Abdul Karim.

Teenage girl beaten to death in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Feb 20: A teenage girl of village Erandah in Royaganj thana was beaten to death on Thursday by her fiancé when she put pressure on him to marry, reports UNB.

According to police, the victim, Mahmuda Khatun, 15, daughter of Abdul Aziz developed a love affair with her cousin Jahangir who promised to marry her.

But at one stage Mahmuda became pregnant and she started pressing him to marry her as per his promise. But Jahangir was paying no heed to her request.

Later Mahmuda went to the elderly people of the village to take necessary action against the recalcitrant cousin.

At this, he became furious and beat Mahmuda to death. Police recovered the body and sent it to Sirajganj hospital morgue for autopsy.

Obituary

Shahjahan Kabir, assistant director of Bangladesh Bank, died of a heart attack at his residence in the city Friday. He was 52, reports BSS.

Kabir has left behind his wife, three daughters, one son, and a host of relatives to mourn his death.

His kulkhwani will be held at his Muga residence today after Asr prayers.

Begum Shamsunnahar, wife of late Haji Mohammed Shamsul Alam died on Thursday following a heart attack at National Cardio Institute and Hospital, Dhaka. She was 68. She left behind her six children, relatives and admirers to mourn her death, says a press release.

Her namaz-e-janaza will be held at ICCDRB (beside Operation Research Project Building-ORP), Mohakhali today after Asr prayers. Her body will be taken to her village home at Mariganagar, Rangunia, Chittagong where she will be buried at the family graveyard tomorrow after second namaz-e-janaza following Asr prayers.

All relatives, friends and admirers are requested to attend the namaz-e-janaza and pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Libyan president says

Arrest of Ocalan won't dent Kurdish fight for independence

CAIRO, Feb 20: Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi on Saturday said Turkey is deceiving itself if it thinks it can stifle the Kurdish struggle for independence by arresting guerrilla leader Abdullah Ocalan, reports AP.

"Don't fool yourselves, be conceited or rejoice, because this would indicate that you are completely ignorant of your country's history," Gaddafi was quoted as saying by Egypt's Middle East News Agency.

Just as the Turkey's Ottoman empire was "not able to put an end to Arab nationalism" by killing Arab revolutionaries, the modern Turkish rulers will not be able to throttle Kurdish aspirations, Gaddafi was quoted as saying in a speech.

MENA said the speech was directed at Turkey and the countries that helped it in arresting Ocalan. MENA did not say where Gaddafi delivered the speech.

Gaddafi said he doesn't know Ocalan and that Libya has "no connection at all with his party," MENA reported.

Ocalan, leader of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, was seized Monday in Kenya and flown to Turkey to stand trial on terrorism charges that carry a possible death penalty. Gaddafi lashed out at the countries that participated in this "criminal operation."

Britta Boehler, a Dutch-based attorney representing Ocalan, has accused the United States, Kenya and Greece of being involved in his arrest.

While all three countries deny the charges, Greek Foreign Minister Theodoros Pangalos and two other Greek Cabinet members resigned last week amid the political fallout of the country's failure to protect Ocalan.

In offering encouragement to the Kurds, Gaddafi said every time "the enemy makes their blood flow, it fuels the flames of Kurdish revolution." Their struggle would "continue until complete independence," he said.

One killed in Habiganj clash

HABIGANJ, Feb 20: A villager was killed and 15 were injured in a clash between two rival groups over irrigation at Rasulpur in Ajmiriganj thana of the district today, reports UNB.

The dead was identified as Abdul Khaleque, 34.

Witnesses said the clash erupted at about 10 am when the supporters of local UP chairman Nurul Huq Bhuiyan prevented the men of former UP chairman Habibur Rahman from using an irrigation project.

Both the groups used lethal weapons during the clash that lasted for about an hour. Khaleque was hit by a sharp weapon and died instantly.

The injured were admitted to Ajmiriganj Thana Health Complex.

Body recovered

By Staff Correspondent

Police recovered the body of a young man from inside a manhole at city's Purana Palton area in the evening yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Liton Patwari alias Ismail, 20, son of Bacchu Mia, a resident of City's West Agargaon area.

Police suspected Liton was strangled to death.

Motijheel police have arrested five persons as suspects in this connection.

The arrested were identified as Mozammel, Uzzal, Mosarrat, Shahin and Bakir.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

Death anniversary of Shamsuzzoha observed

NARAYANGANJ, Feb 20: The 12th death anniversary of A K M Shamsuzzoha, former Member of Parliament of Awami League, was observed here today, reports BSS.

The members of Narayanganj district unit and city unit of Bangladesh Awami League, Jubo League, Chhatra League and Krishak-League offered fatiha at Masdar graveyard of the late leader in the morning.

Deities were fed at Shaheed Muktioddah Hall at Chashara in the noon.

A milad mahfil was held at Chashara Mosque in the afternoon which was followed by a munajat for the peace of the departed soul.

A K M Shamim Osman MP who is the youngest son of the late leader S M Akram MP and Emdadul Haque Bhuiya MP were among those present on the occasion.

First class first

By DU Correspondent

Swadhin Sen stood first class first in the Masters examination (Thesis group) held in 1998 from the Department of Archaeology of Jahangirnagar University securing the highest marks (71.8%) in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

He also obtained first position in BA (Hons) examination of 1993 (held in 1996) and was awarded with University Grants Commission (UGC) scholarship.

The title of his thesis paper was "Pottery making tradition at Kugulpur, Dharrak: An Ethnoarchaeological Study."

His mother Shibani Sen is a school teacher and his father Sudhir Sen is a journalist at Barisal.

Rushdie's worries far from over

TEHRAN, Feb 20: An Iranian religious leader threatened author Salman Rushdie today and insisted that the *fatwa* ordering his death for blasphemy from the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini remained valid, reports AFP.

Ayatollah Ahmad Janati, addressing a Friday prayer gathering at Tehran University, said that Muslims "will never allow Salman Rushdie to live in security and safety."

"He is condemned to eternal detention and Muslims will not allow him to live safely for a moment, notably if he appears in public," the conservative cleric said.

Janati also reiterated that the *fatwa*, or death sentence, issued against Rushdie by the late leader of the Islamic revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini "remains valid no matter what anyone says."

Khomeini condemned the Indian-born Rushdie to death in February 1988 for allegedly committing blasphemy against Islam in his book "Satanic Verses".

Iranian culture and Islamic Guidance Minister Ayatollah Mohajernani reiterated this week that while the *fatwa* condemning Rushdie to death cannot be withdrawn, the government will not seek to carry it out.

US, France concerned over Russia's N-weapons

WASHINGTON, Feb 20: US President Bill Clinton and French President Jacques Chirac on Friday discussed concerns about Russia's control of its nuclear weapons and Middle East peace, reports AFP.

Clinton, speaking at a joint White House news conference with Chirac, offered no details of their talks but said Washington and Paris were committed to assisting Moscow with both its economic and arms problems.

We discussed the continuing challenge of promoting economic recovery in Russia and working with Russia to prevent its weapons of mass destruction from falling into the hands of outlaw nations and terrorists, Clinton said.

He added that he and Chirac had also agreed to continue cooperation in the quest for peace in the Middle East and the need to thwart Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's desire for nuclear arms.

"We will continue our cooperation on securing peace in the Middle East," Clinton said.

17 killed in faction fight in South Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Feb 20: At least 17 people were killed in a faction fight near the rural centre of Mount Ayliff in South Africa's eastern cape province, police told AFP today.

SABC radio news reported that 39 people had been arrested after the incident Friday night, but police in Mount Ayliff could not confirm this as the investigating officers were still at the scene.

Many of those arrested came from other provinces, according to the radio report.

No further details were immediately available, police said.

Fighting between different clans occurs regularly in the still traditional northern part of the province, formerly the Transkei homeland.

DAB condemns killing of six JSD leaders

By Staff Correspondent

Doctors' Association of Bangladesh (DAB) yesterday condemned the killing of six JSD leaders, including veteran freedom fighter Kazi Aref Ahmed, and expressed grave concern over the deterioration of law and order situation in the country.

It also demanded exemplary punishment to the killers.

"The incidents of repression of female students, killing and social injustice have increased alarmingly in recent times," DAB said in a statement yesterday.

"The government has totally failed to ensure social security of the people," it added.

Dohar thana now a municipality

The government yesterday announced Dohar thana as a new municipality in the country, an official handout said, reports BSS.

LGRO and Cooperatives Minister Zillur Rahman at a public meeting held at the Joypara school premises at Dohar yesterday disclosed the government decision.

He said the new municipality, covering the areas of three Union Parishads of the thana, will start functioning very soon. The UPs are Joypara, Sutarpura and Raipara.

Presided over by Dohar thana Awami League president Syed Ali Mian, the meeting was also addressed by Ivy Rahman, President of Mohila Awami League, Abdul Mannan Khan, Office Secretary of Awami League, Hashem Ali, Vice President, Dhaka District Awami League and Benzir Ahmed, General Secretary of Dhaka District Awami League.

DUVC accords reception to ICBA organisers

Vice-Chancellor of the Dhaka University Prof AK Azad Chowdhury yesterday accorded a reception at his official residence to the participants and organisers of the Third International Congress on Bengal Art (ICBA), reports UNB.

The congress was organised by the International Centre for Study of Bengal Art (ICSBA) on February 16-20 in Rajshahi, Bogra and Dhaka.

The participants of the congress include artists from Germany, France, the Netherlands, USA, UK, India and host Bangladesh.

They exchanged views with DU VC on various issues of art and culture. Prof Chowdhury thanked the guests for their visit to and interest about Dhaka University, said a DU press release.

BCSIR team leaves for Delhi today

A two-member delegation led by BCSIR Chairman Prof MD Moshuzaman leaves for New Delhi today to have a discussion about mutual cooperation on science and technology between the Indian CSIR and BCSIR, says a press release.

Omar Farooq, Director, Planning and Development, BCSIR, is the other member of the team.

They are expected to sign a bilateral working programme between Indian CSIR and BCSIR in the field of research. This working programme will be in force under the agreement of Science & Technology signed between Bangladesh and India on February 10 this year.

10 injured in Magura clash

MAGURA, Feb 20: A fierce clash between two rival groups left at least 10 people injured at Sangda Laxmipur village in sadar thana of the district today, reports UNB.

Three of them, Mannan, 38, Wahab, 50, and Shakhawat, 30, were admitted to the local hospital. Later, Wahab was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital as his condition deteriorated.

Local people said the incident took place at around 1 pm when the two groups, one led by Murad and the other by Abdur Razzak, came clashed over past enmity.

Four people were arrested and two cases filed with the police in this connection.

Meanwhile, police in special drives on Friday night arrested 24 people from different parts of the district.

Of them, 18 were arrested from Sadar thana and four from Sreepur thana. They were all sent to jail.

Bandits kill 12 in Kenya

NAIROBI, Feb 20: Heavily armed bandits killed at least 12 people, including seven police officers, in an ambush attack on a bus in northeastern Kenya, newspapers reported Saturday, reports AP.

The attack happened Friday outside Garissa, about 210 miles northeast of Nairobi, where thieves sprayed the bus with gunfire during a holdup, the East African Standard reported. At least 20 people were wounded, some seriously.

The officers were killed when the bandits also attacked a vehicle the police were escorting behind the bus, local police chief Maurice Makhanu told the Daily Nation.

He said the thieves shot out the tires of the bus and engaged in a gun battle with the arriving police. The bandits robbed the bus passengers before fleeing into the thick brush.

Resist hartal callers: Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked the people to resist the "mischievous forces" creating political unrest and disturbing public peace by calling hartals, reports UNB.

"Once you were united for your rights to ballot and bread, stand united the same way again to frustrate all evil designs," she told a public meeting at the city's Basabo Maidan amid tight security in the afternoon.

The Prime Minister made the appeal three days ahead of the mainline opposition's planned 60-hour hartal to thwart the municipal elections set for February 23-25.

"Why this hartal? What the people would get out of it other than misery?" Hasina asked her political opponents.

Referring to the opposition's boycott of municipal polls, she said that people in general were taking part in the non-party local body elections rejecting the call of boycott.

Moreover, she added, a substantial number of BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat candidates are in the race for Chairman and Commissioner posts defying the call of boycott by their leaders.

"Are they really boycotting the polls or bluffing the people and joking with them?" asked the Prime Minister, mentioning that 62 candidates of BNP, 37 of Jatiya Party and three of Jamaat-e-Islami are contesting for the posts of Chairman and many for Commissioners.

She named the BNP senior leaders of Panchagarh, Barguna, Bagerhat and Noakhali districts, who are contesting for the municipal chairman posts.

About the opposition's four-point demand that envisaged the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, Hasina said her government

has nothing to do with it since the CEC is a constitutional post and restructuring of the Election Commission is the jurisdiction of the Commission itself.

About the third demand for voter identity cards, she said the government has approved a project to issue identity cards for multiple purposes so that the people could use the same beyond voting purpose.

On the fourth demand for the release of opposition activists, she said people would not allow the release of those who were arrested on specific charges of terrorism, killing, snatching, rape and abduction.

Hasina alleged that Begum Zia's BNP and General Ershad's Jatiya Party, which were ousted from power in 1996 and 1990 in people's movement on charge of vote theft, are engaged in a conspiracy to deprive people from exercising their ballot, a right earned through a costly struggle.

The Prime Minister said both Begum Zia and Ershad lacked trust and confidence in people and ballot. Any election during their rule was a nightmare to the people as their rights were stolen away by those regimes, she alleged.

"We fought a long struggle to restore the right of ballot for the people to decide who will be in power, who will be out of it," she told the cheering crowd.

Hasina accused BNP and Jatiya Party of trying to create political unrest and hatching conspiracy, seeing that they have no chance of returning to power with people's mandate.

Questioning the opposition's sincerity, she said if hartal has been called to resist the municipal elections, then why it has been called in Dhaka where there is no such election.

"This hartal is not against

election, its objective is to protect the self-confessed killers of Bangabandhu, who are facing death sentence following a court judgement," Hasina said, mentioning the "opposition-sponsored chaotic situation" a day before the judgement was delivered.

She sought the people's blessings and said, "Insha Allah, the court's verdict will be executed."

Ridiculing the recent Khajed-Ershad camaraderie, the Prime Minister said people are surprised to see the alliance after Begum Zia, at a public meeting at Gulistan, openly charged Ershad as the killer of her husband Ziaur Rahman.

She asked, "Why Begum Zia didn't hold the trial of the killing of Ziaur Rahman while in power for five years? How could she shake hand with the 'killer of her husband' and sign a written document to launch movement against the people? Did BNP workers ever think of why Zia's killers were not put on the dock?"

Hasina said her party wants stability, peace and development. "Awami League has trust in the strength of the people who also have faith in Awami League."

Criticising Begum Zia's remarks that Awami League would not get back power in 50 years, the Prime Minister said Awami League was never put out of power by ballot. Awami League was unseated by staging massacre, but BNP and JP were overthrown in mass movement for committing fraud on people's vote, she alleged.

She said, "We are elected through people's ballot and we are in power to serve the people."

Referring to last year's terrible flood, Hasina said she and her Awami League stood by the people in their hours of distress

and saved people by taking prompt and effective steps.

About the predicted death of two crore people due to flood, she said the government proved it untrue by supplying relief and food to the remote areas.

Yellow Panel sweeps RUTA polls

RAJSHAHI, Feb 20: Yellow Panel, supported by Awami League and left political parties swept the Rajshahi University Teachers' Association election today, reports UNB.

They bagged 14 out of the total 15 posts, including that of the President, Vice President and General Secretary while BNP and Jamaat supported White panel got only a member post.

Prof. M Abdur Rahman of Economics Department was elected President while Dr M Kalequzzaman of Zoology Department and Prof M Jalaluddin of Social Works Department were elected as Vice-President and General Secretary respectively.

Other office-bearers are Treasurer Sanjib Kumar Shaha (Marketing) and Joint Secretary Prof Munsir Manjurul Haq (Islamic History).

The Members are Dr A H N Jahadul Karim (Anthropology), Dr Kamrul Hasan Majumder (Geology and Mine Studies), S M Zahid Hossain (Fine Arts), Dr M Ganjer Ali (Computer Science), Farve Islam Bhuiyan (Pharmacy), Dr M A Gafur (Chemistry), Dr M Lalla (Social Science), Dr Mohammad Abdul Jalil (Folklore) and Dr M Mozaffar Hossain (Applied Physics and Electronics).

The only member elected from White panel is Rafiqul Islam.

Arafat, Mubarak discuss ME peace

CAIRO, Feb 20: Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held talks Saturday on the Middle East peace process that has stalled on the question of Israeli troops withdrawal from West Bank, reports AP.

Arafat later left for Gaza Strip. Neither he nor Mubarak spoke with reporters, and details of their talks were not immediately known.

The peace process has stalled over difficulties in implementing the US-brokered Wye agreement, in which Israel pledged to a 13 per cent further troop withdrawal from the West Bank.

Israel has failed to do so, citing Palestinian failure to crack down on Muslim militants.

Arafat arrived in Cairo late Friday from Vatican City where he met with Pope John Paul II and renewed his invitation for the pontiff to visit Bethlehem in the year 2000.

Arafat was in Rome to attend a UN-sponsored conference on the Bethlehem 2000 project, an ambitious plan to upgrade the holy city and jump-start tourism in Palestinian territories.

Iran refuses visa to Carter's son

TEHRAN, Feb 20: Iran has refused a visa to the son of former US President Jimmy Carter who ordered the severing of diplomatic ties with Iran in 1979, the official Islamic Republic News Agency reported Saturday, reports AP.

James E. "Chip" Carter III was to lead a group of Americans to Iran in May. Carter was quoted by an Iranian newspaper, Sobh-e-Emrouz, as saying that the delegation does not represent the government and has a "tourist agenda."

About 25 former Peace Corps volunteers who served in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s were expected to participate in the trip to Iran.

IRNA did not say whether they had been granted visas.

The news agency, however, quoted an unnamed source as saying that Carter was refused a visa in view of his "past record," it did not elaborate.

Carter is vice president of the International Development with The Friendship Force, a nonprofit group based in Atlanta, he was not immediately available for comment.

President Carter was in office when the Islamic Revolution ousted the US-backed shah's government in Iran and took power in 1979. In November that year, Iranian militants stormed the US Embassy in Tehran and took 52 Americans hostage.

Malaysia's treatment of jailed opposition leader criticised

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 20: The world organisation of parliaments has expressed shocked at Malaysia's treatment of an opposition leader, describing his conditions in jail as "inhuman," reports AP.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, an association of 136 parliaments from around the world, urged Malaysia's King to grant Lim Guan Eng a full pardon from his 36-month jail term, according to an IPU statement obtained Saturday.

"Lim's conditions of imprisonment... do not meet relevant international standards and amount to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment," said the statement, published after the IPU convened earlier this month.

Lim, deputy secretary general of the opposition Democratic Action Party, was convicted last year of sedition and printing false reports in a Democratic pamphlet distributed in 1995 entitled, "The True Story."

In it, the 36-year-old politician criticised the government's decision not to press statutory rape charges against another parliamentarian.

The pamphlet questioned

why the alleged victim, a 15-year-old girl, was detained for more than two years, while the parliamentarian, a powerful member of Mahathir's governing party, was not.

Since he became the first sitting Malaysian lawmaker to be sentenced to prison in August, when he lost an appeal against his sentence, Lim's case has raised concerns about political intolerance in Malaysia.

The IPU led by a three-member team which came to Kuala Lumpur last November, has campaigned for Malaysia's constitutional monarch to grant the jailed parliamentarian a full pardon.

A 10-page IPU report published by the team also urged the government to allow Lim, a member of Parliament for 12 years, to attend parliament sessions.

"As long as the request for pardon has not been rejected, Lim Guan Eng continues to be a member of the House of Representatives," the report said.

It described Lim's conditions in prison as grim.