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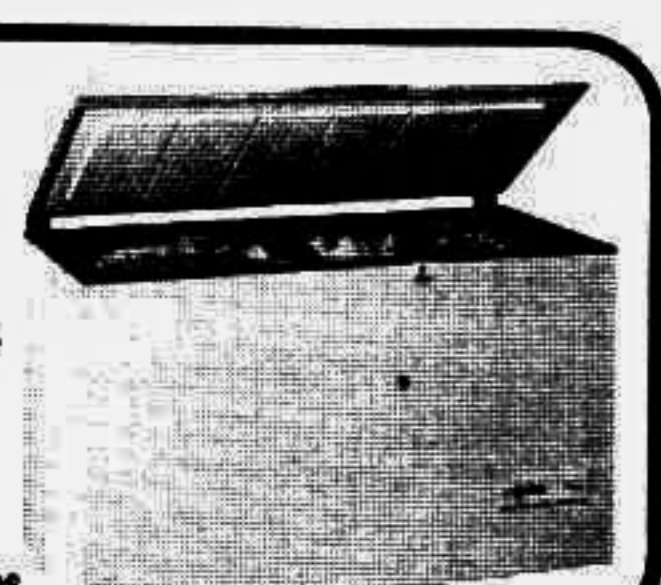
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This hartal is aimed at snatching voting rights: PM

KHULNA, Feb 22: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today warned the people would not tolerate the hartal being forced upon them in a bid to snatch their franchise and make public life a misery, reports UNB.

"This hartal is against the democracy and a conspiracy to snatch people's right to vote," she said and assured all possible measures for free and fair voting in the local elections beginning tomorrow amidst opposition boycott.

Addressing a huge public meeting at the local Circuit House ground in the afternoon, the Prime Minister said the opposition was issuing threats of movement to snatch the voting rights, which she said the people did not respond to.

She said the Paurasava poll is a nonparty local body election, and the people would not allow anyone to foil their voting right.

The BNP-led opposition is playing a trick saying that they are boycotting the elections while their people are taking part in it in a massive way," she told the crowd.

Many partymen of BNP, Jatiya Party and Jammat are contesting the elections in different Paurasavas, she said, citing reports.

She said opposition leader Begun Khaleda Zia, general Ershad and Golam Azam banded in a trio to snatch people's

rights. Referring to the development of Khulna division and the southern parts of the country, she said the government has taken all possible steps for the overall development of the region.

She said work of Khulna Khan Jahan Ali Airport is going on, while the government is trying to develop this region as an industrial belt and established an EPZ at Mongla.

The Prime Minister said Rupsha Bridge will also be constructed soon.

Steps have been taken for the development of Khulna University, Khulna Medical College Hospital, and other educational institutions of the region. Necessary steps have also been taken for the development of Khulna City Corporation, she added.

Referring to power crisis, the Prime Minister said already a 110-megawatt plant had been set up in Khulna in private sector while work was on for installing a 60-mw one in the public sector.

Another 110-mw plant will also be set by the government here, she announced.

Sheikh Hasina introduced the City Corporation Mayor, candidate of her party SMA Rab in the meeting and urged the people to vote for him in coming election for development and peace.



Former Dhaka mayor Mirza Abbas (left), among others in a BNP torch procession yesterday evening, tries to fire up his partymen ahead of hartals beginning today.

Khulna region Take stern steps to eliminate terrorism: PM

KHULNA, Feb 22: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today directed the authorities concerned to take stern action against terrorists irrespective of their political identity, reports UNB.

Addressing a law and order coordination meeting at the local circuit house, Hasina said the terrorists are a liability for a party and warned: "Whoever engages in crime will be dealt with a strong hand."

Assuring all possible logistic support for the police forces of Khulna region, she said the government would set up more camps and provide additional Ansars in aid of police to eliminate terrorism from the region.

The police officials at the meeting said they need 365 police camps to "totally eliminate terrorism" from the region. Now there are 104 police camps in the Khulna division.

Referring to the dastardly killing of JSD leader Kazi Aref Ahmed, the Prime Minister wondered how the terrorists could gun down a political leader by climbing up on the dais.

The law enforcers should have been present at the political meeting and taken measures to protect them, she added.

Hasina also asked the police forces and the administration to take "foolproof" measures for ensuring a peaceful, free and fair municipal election.

DU student

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when she returned to the hall at about 10:30 pm, she was so disappointed that did not even talk to her roommates.

At around 12 midnight, she went to the rooftop of the five-storey dormitory while most of the resident students were watching the live telecast of the Amar Ekushey February programmes.

At about 3 am, the on-duty guard heard a sound of falling and soon after he discovered Shahana lying unconsciously on the ground. The guard immediately informed the hall authorities who rushed Shahana to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. The doctors, however, declared her dead.

The body was handed over to her family members on Sunday after post-mortem. She was laid to rest at her village home in Munsirganj yesterday.

A unnatural death case was filed with Dhamond police in this connection.

Vow to resist polls

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Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote -- yesterday decided for a 66-hour hartal, burying their differences on the duration of the shutdown. Earlier, BNP had said the hartal would be for 60 hours while its partners opted for 72 hours.

At a meeting yesterday, the liaison committee also discussed preparations for the three-day hartal and took "serious note" of the ruling party's plan to take to the streets during the opposition programme. "The government will be held responsible for any loss of life or damage to property," the meeting resolved.

It also alleged indiscriminate arrests of opposition workers on the eve of the hartal and blamed the government for "opting for the path of repression" instead of accepting the "people's demands".

The added meeting also added transport-carrying halibound people to the list of vehicles conventionally kept out of the hartal purview. Vehicles of press, hospitals, fire brigade, and utility agencies are usually exempted. Besides, food and medicine shops are also spared.

Widespread violence is feared as the ruling and opposition parties have planned street protests during the three-day hartal to resist voting. Besides, the authorities have also stepped up security to ensure that the polls are held smoothly.

In pre-hartal clashes between the ruling and opposition parties, dozens of people were hurt and several vehicles were set on fire in the city yesterday.

In a pre-hartal drive, police arrested at least 50 opposition workers, including a ward commissioner of BNP, MA Qayyum, from different areas in the city. Fears of arrests also forced many others to go into hiding, opposition sources said.

In the capital alone, the government has planned to deploy nearly 6,000 policemen and BDR personnel during the hartal. Security has been stepped up in other parts of the country where army jawans will back up police-BDR-Ansar forces in polling areas.

Pabna College

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Police said April, involved in a number of criminal cases, was not student of the college. After his arrest, his followers marched to the residence of the Principal, chanting slogans of Chhatra League and Joy Bangla and launched the attack by stones and missiles. They damaged a microbus in front of the house.

A unnatural death case was filed with Dhamond police in this connection.

Beggars bear the brunt too

From Nurul Alam

CHITTAGONG, Feb 22: "I will go to my village home early tomorrow morning as I won't get any money or alms here due to closure of office during the long-drawn hartal beginning tomorrow," said a 43-year-old beggar Abdul Kasem sitting at the entrance of CGO building at Agrabad commercial area at 3 pm today.

Kasem, hailing from Dolghat village under Patiya thana, said he earns about Tk 30 to 40 each day by begging to people who come at this government office.

"I will be really difficult for me during hartal as I would be deprived of begging here," he said that he had resorted to begging four years ago due to blindness in one of his eyes and other physical disability.

Another beggar Rokeya Begum, 25, with her two and half years old son at Badamtoli crossing near traffic signal, a vantage point to seek money from the inmates of passing vehicles, echoed the same sentiment: "Hartal will force me to stay home, depriving me of an earning of Tk 20-30 per day."

"Most of the beggars here have to face same lot during the hartal," added Rokeya.

Siraj Uddin, 45, found begging at Dewanhat crossing in the city, said that he would stay inside his slum near by during the three-day hartal.

"I don't get money during hartal as movement of people at this busy place comes almost to a halt," People belonging to the middle class income group mostly give us money in normal days."

Siraj added, "I like this begging now that I don't get employment anywhere."

WTO

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ers of facing and surviving from the natural disasters.

"Bangladesh, despite all these natural disasters, made impressive performance during the last few years. All these were possible due to the huge liberalisation programme," he said. "Around 27 per cent of merchandise produced in Bangladesh are getting access in other countries while the world's average is 25 per cent."

He also said that the exports figures of Bangladesh showed impressive results. "I see impressive results in Bangladesh in the last few years from 1993 to 1997. It is remarkable to achieve a six per cent export rate in 1998 from 4.5 per cent in 1993. I must admit that a country having a growth rate of six per cent is moving fast. In the last few years our exports to Europe and US have increased. The roads you have chosen is taking you towards progress."

The road, he said, was of liberalisation and globalisation. "All these were possible due to WTO. WTO is vital for a country like Bangladesh. Here we have a global system. When tariff is reduced in a European country it becomes applicable to all other countries. Industrial tariff has decreased substantially over the last few years. This was the result of liberalisation and globalisation."

He also said that globalisation was no more mere trade liberalisation and capital movement. Rather it is about more and more public awareness. The world is knowing what is happening in the field of development or politics.

Addressing the function as special guest, the commerce and industries minister said he was grateful to the USA and Europe for providing quota and GSP facilities respectively for the garments. "But we want to get access to other markets."

Seeking more foreign direct investments in the LDCs, Tofail said that LDCs were getting only one per cent of the global FDI.

UNB adds:

Earlier, welcoming the WTO director general, FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo said the provision for global coherence should ensure that poor countries are not marginalised in the process of liberalisation and globalisation.

"The Uruguay Round Agreements should be implemented in a manner that should contribute to the integration of developing countries in the global economy," he said.

Mintoo added: "the developing countries need assistance in seizing the opportunities offered by the liberalisation and globalisation. Implementation must take into account the development dimension of the poor countries."

Shazneen's father

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adjoining the cross-examination till March 9, which is the date for hearing on framing charges against the accused in the rape case in the Special Court for Women and Children Repression. The court, however, rejected the plea.

Following is a brief account of the answers given by Latifur Rahman during the cross-examination by the defence lawyer yesterday.

Driver Sadek usually drives my motor vehicle. Sadek sometimes drove cars used by my family members, including Shazneen. Sadek's father was also my driver.

It is not true that I had influenced police to make Sadek a false witness in the charge sheet of this case as he is one of my old staff.

Witness Ratan is an electrician at my residence. He was appointed by contractor Hasan. Ratan has been working at my residence for the last one and a half years.

It is not true that I had used my influence to make Ratan a witness in this case and that he does not know anything about the killing.

Witness Hawa has been serving as a maid at my residence for the last four or five years. The primary job of Hawa was to take care of my daughter Shazneen. Hawa used to sleep at night in Shazneen's room.

It is not true that Hawa does not know anything about the incident and that I had used my influence to make her a false witness of this case.

Poet Talim Hossain dead

Poet Talim Hossain died of old age complications in the city yesterday. He was 80, reports UNB.

He left behind his wife, three daughters and two sons. His daughters -- Shabnam Mushtari, Parveen Mushtari and Yasmin Mushtari -- are noted singers of the country.

The poet was laid to rest at Banani graveyard.

Born in 1918 at a Zamindar family in Naogaon, Talim Hossain was a leading poet since 30s and associated with journalism for quite sometime.

He was the editor of the *Mah Nao and Purbachal*, and acting editor of monthly *Mohammad*.

He has a number of publications, including books of poems -- *Dishari*, *Shahen*, *Islami Kabita* and *Nuher Jahaj*.

Talim Hossain received the Bangla Academy Award (1965), Sitara-e-Imtiaz (1970), Ekushey Padak (1982), Bangla Sahitya Puraskar (1992) and Nazrul Academy Puraskar, Churulia, West Bengal (1993).

He was the founder general secretary of the Nazrul Academy in Dhaka.

D-8 summit

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of ministers (foreign ministers) meeting on February 27.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the conference at the Sheraton Hotel on March 1.

D-8 was launched by the heads of government and state in Istanbul in June in 1997.

The State Minister for Foreign Affairs, Abul Hasan Chowdhury, acting foreign secretary Moinuddin Ahmed, D-8 commissioner from Bangladesh and additional foreign secretary Dr Toufik Ali and senior officials of a number of ministries including Finance, Health, Commerce and Agriculture attended the meeting.

Bangladesh ambassador to Indonesia and Bangladesh High Commissioner to Malaysia were also present.

Meghnaghat

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ties to reassess the lowest bidder in the light of the clarification. It argued that if VAT was added to CWHEC's bid, then Hyundai would become the lowest bidder.

To resolve the matter in a transparent manner, the energy ministry took up the matter and directed the project consultant, Mott Ewbank Preece, to review the financial proposals of the bidders, discuss with them and give its opinion.

In the first week of this month, the consultant told the ministry that CWHEC's bid should include VAT along with other taxes.

The ministry, however, ignored this. And bidders alleged lack of transparency in the decision-making process, sources pointed out.

However, even if the land development contract is finalised before March, it will not be possible to complete the work before the rainy season. Consequently, bidders cannot start work on installing a power plant within the scheduled time.

This is the second time PDB is conducting tender procedure for selection of Meghnaghat power plant land developer. Meghnaghat project is the biggest of its kind in the country and involves investment by the private sector and the Asian Development Bank. PDB is providing land for the project and it will have 10 per cent ownership.

The first bid was cancelled due to "lack of participation".

Witness Iqbal Hossain is my younger sister's husband.

He is an engineer. Iqbal was not present at the party that night as he was not invited. He had visited me before I left Dhaka for Shwong and also came to my residence along with his wife that night soon after the murder.

It is not true that I have used my influence to make driver Delwar a false witness in the case and that he does not know anything about the incident.

Witness Anisuzzaman Khan is my close friend. He retired when he was an additional secretary. He is probably a director of GEC company.

Witness Ahmed Shafi Chowdhury is one of my intimate friends. He was also an invited guest. He is owner of tea garden.

Witness Obaidur Rahman Khan is my friend. He is the elder son of former prime minister Ataur Rahman Khan. He was also an invited guest.

Witness Enam Ahmed Chowdhury is one of my senior friends and he was an invited guest.

Witness Atiqur Rahman Masum is the finance director of my company and he is my cousin. He was not present in the party.

The name of my son Arshad Walid Rahman Reaz's wife is Mona. Yes, she was a model before. I do not know whether she continues to be a model now.

Reaz works in my company.

I know witness Altaf Hossain very well. He is the general manager of my company. Besides, he also looks after the legal and corporate side of the company.

It is not true that I did not tell police that Altaf gave me some information about the murder. On May 2, 1998 I had informed police about this.

Witness Almas Zakiuddin is a family friend. She was not present in the party that night.

I know witness Abed Azad. He is a school student and was a friend of my daughter.

I know witness Sakeeb Mubin Chowdhury. He was also a friend of my daughter.

It is not true that I had influenced the investigating officer of the case to make the staff of my Transcom Group of Companies and my friends witnesses in this case and that they do not know anything about the murder.

The judge AK Roy fixed February 28 for further cross-examination of the informant.

3 new addl judges appointed in HC

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday appointed three additional judges in the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, reports UNB.

They are Gaura Gopal Shaha, Ali Asgar Khan and Aowad Ali.

The appointment is effective from February 24, said an official handout.

separate the rest of Peelkhana Lake from the construction site. Once completed, in about two years, the entrance to the complex would be separated from the BDR main gates.

Commenting on the venture, Muntazim Mahmud, a professor of history at Dhaka University, said that different government organisations were occupying public land in the city to go into lucrative businesses.

"This land (Peelkhana) and the Cantonment belong to the people of Dhaka and these should be handed back to the people," said Mamun. He added that Peelkhana should be turned into a green space so that the city dwellers can breathe fresh air.

Mamun also pointed out that a recent directive from the prime minister says no one is supposed to fill up a lake. Moreover, such security installation should be based outside the city, he said.

BDR headquarters, occupying more than 200 acres of land, is adjacent to Road No 2 of Dhanmandi in the city.

Source: Election Commission

Schedule

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Shibchar, Damudya, Bhedarganj.

Sylhet Division: Nabiganj, Chittagong Division: Chandra, Chhengerchar, Matlab, Ramganj.

February 25
Rajshahi Division: Pirganj, Shetabganj, Parbatipur, Syedpur, Haragachh, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Panchbibi, Sherpur, Naogaon, Rohonpur, Charghat, Gurudashpur, Ullapara, Pabna.

Barisal Division: Barguna, Perojpur, Bakerganj, Nalchhiti, Dhaka Division: Tangail, Mymensingh, Durgapur, Bhairab, Nalitabari, Narsingdi, Faridpur, Madaripur, Tungipara, Kotlipara.

Sylhet Division: Chhatak, Madhabpur, Srimgangal, Kulara.

Chittagong Division: Daudkandi, Hajiganj, Kochua, Raipur, Noakhali, Chakhal, Patia, Khagrachhari & Rangamati.

Source: Election Commission

CEC: Help hold polls

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The Election Commission will be compelled to take legal action if there is any lapses.

"It is the expectation of the people that the district administration, police and election officials will maintain neutrality to make the elections free and fair," he said.

Referring to the last elections conducted by the Election Commission, Abu Hena said the EC was neutral and transparent in holding the parliamentary polls in June, 1996, union council elections in December, 1997 and different by-elections to Parliament.

"We have made our best efforts to hold all these elections fair within limitations by keeping ourselves accountable and transparent to our conscience," he said adding, "it is better to leave the people to judge the fairness of the elections."

The CEC said although municipal polls are non-party elections, the Election Commission made all efforts to exchange opinion with major political parties to make it free and fair in a peaceful environment.

The EC Secretariat tried to discuss the election schedule with the main political parties.

Saudi Crown Prince to visit Bangladesh

Saudi Crown Prince and Deputy Prime Minister Prince Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud will visit Bangladesh, it was officially announced in the city yesterday, reports BBS.

The date of the proposed visit would be determined on a mutually agreed date.

Saudi ambassador to Bangladesh Abdullah Omar Bang said this when he called on Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad at the latter's office yesterday afternoon.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina earlier invited the Crown Prince.

Polls today

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of even licensed firearms in and around the polling stations.

The Election Commission has identified 1095 polling centres, out of the 2080, vulnerable to unrest. Thirty-four law enforcement personnel, including 24 with firearms, will be deployed at each of the trouble-prone centres. Twenty-eight personnel, including 18 with firearms, will be at the other centres.

The EC has found 28 districts out of the 56 witnessing municipal elections this time, trouble-prone. Of the 28 districts, 10 are under Rajshahi Division, seven under Khulna Division, six under Dhaka, two each under Sylhet and Barisal and one under Chittagong Division. These districts are believed to have been dominated by the opposition parties and will have a company of soldiers stationed at their head quarters.

More than 30 thousand people including 56 Returning Officers, 136 Assistant Returning Officers, 2080 Presiding Officers, 9381 Assistant Presiding Officers and 18,762 Polling Officers have been appointed to conduct the elections.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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