



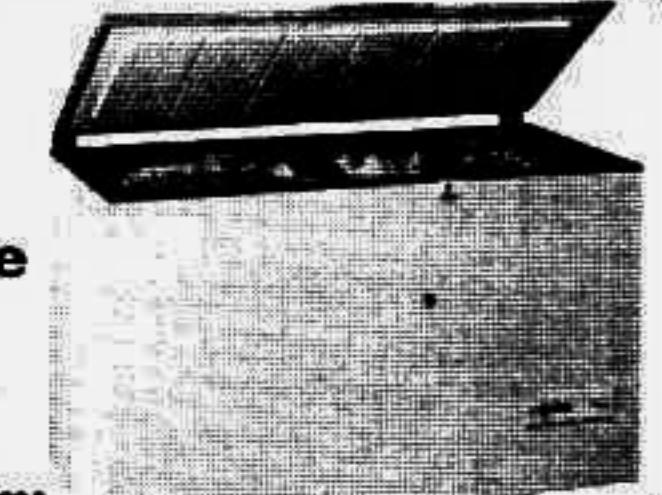
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This hartal is aimed at snatching voting rights: PM

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 fray.

"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, reporting.

She said opposition leader Begum 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.

Steps have been taken for the development of Khulna University, Khulna Medical College Hospital, and other educational institution 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.

CEC: Help hold polls

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The Election Commission will be compelled to take legal action if there are 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 CEC 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 BSS.

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

Saudi ambassador to Bangladesh Abdullah Omar Barry 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 1995 polling centres, out of the 2080, vulnerable to unrest. Thirty-four law-enforcing 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, 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.

Top BNP leaders asked to keep in touch with Khaleda

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia has asked the party's front ranking leaders to keep in touch with her during 3-day hartal to discuss the latest political situation.

Talking to UNB after emerging from an informal meeting with Khaleda at her official residence last night Barrister Maudud Ahmed said, "dynamics of politics will decide the course of the movement."

Replies to a question he said there is no cut off date for launching one-point 'oust government movement'. It will depend on the political situation of a given time.

When asked if they are planning hartal in March as well, Maudud said, "We will take into consideration the D-8 summit in Dhaka and SSC examination in chalkout our political programme."

Expressing his personal view, Maudud said BNP does not like politics of hartal, but as it has become a practice in the country, political parties are compelled to go for hartal.

He said the BNP Standing Committee would sit soon after the three-day hartal to discuss the next course of action in a bid to gear up the anti-government movement.

BNP secretary general was among others at the informal meeting.

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

— Star photo

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, reported 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 programme.

At about 3 am, the on-duty guard heard a sound of falling and soon after he discovered Shabana lying unconsciously on the ground. The guard immediately informed the hall authorities who rushed Shabana 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 Munshiganj yesterday.

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

Vow to resist polls

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In this backdrop, the opposition parties have planned to involve a larger number of workers to enforce the shutdown. In the capital, they have selected some core areas to picket during the hartal, opposition sources said. Those include: Jatrabari, Nayabazar, Purana Paiton, Motijheel, Topkhana Road, Bijujo Nagar, Maghbazar, Farmgate and Mohakhali.

Meanwhile, the city unit of ruling Awami League has decided to bring out anti-hartal processions in the city on the hartal days. "The party will come in aid of the shopkeepers and transport workers and campaign to create public awareness against destructive programmes like hartal," he said.

"Around 27 per cent of merchandise produced in Bangladesh are getting access in other countries while the world's coverage is 25 per cent."

He also said that the exports figures of Bangladesh showed impressive performance during the last few years. All these was possible due to the huge liberalisation programme," he said.

"Bangladesh, despite all these natural disasters, made impressive performance during the last few years. All these was 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 coverage is 25 per cent."

He also said that the exports figures of Bangladesh showed 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 your 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 was 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 not 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."

He said that he had resorted 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 some lot during the hartal," added Rokeya.

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

In a pre-hartal drive, police arrested at least 50 opposition workers including a ward commissioner of BNP, MA Qayum, 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.

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India, Pakistan vow to reduce

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he told reporters at New Delhi International Airport.

The joint statement committed both governments to stop interfering and intervening from each other's affairs.

Whatever happens in Pakistan we blame India and whatever happens in India they blame Pakistan ... there is a need to get out of this," Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told reporters at a joint press conference at the end of the talks.

Vajpayee said India did not develop nuclear weapons and "did not have nuclear devices to attack others, just to protect ourselves."

The demonstrations that marred Saturday's meetings were absent Sunday after police in Lahore took a heavy-handed approach, arresting hundreds of Islamic activists and deploying thousands of police and paramilitary rangers around the city.

Vajpayee called for a new era in relations between Pakistan and India.

While calling for global disarmament, he said the issue of what weapons to deploy and how many should be discussed between India and Pakistan.

Vajpayee's visit to Pakistan has been hailed by both countries as a historic occasion — one they are hopeful will move their often shaky relations

and not world powers.

"We should only spend as much money on nuclear weapons as is necessary ... this should be decided between India and Pakistan."

To this end, Vajpayee said that the two governments should "exchange this information and we should not let other countries tell us."

Reuter adds: Indian President K R Narayanan said today that India and Pakistan will work on significant measures to promote peace following an ice-breaking agreement at the week.