

Only 3 foreign heads of state now to attend D-8 summit

By Staff Correspondent

Only three foreign heads of state or government are now likely to attend the eight-nation D-8 Summit in Dhaka, beginning on March one, diplomatic sources said yesterday.

They are Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, Turkish President Suleyman Demirel and Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the sources told The Daily Star. All the three leaders had earlier visited Bangladesh.

President of Indonesia B J Habibie has communicated that he would not be in a position to attend the Dhaka Summit. The Indonesian delegation would be led by its Minister for People's Welfare and Poverty Eradication.

Iranian President Khatami has also conveyed his inability to attend. His country's delegation would be headed by First Vice President Dr. Habibie.

President of Egypt Hosni Mubarak has also conveyed his inability to be in Dhaka for the summit.

See Page 12 Col 8

Meeting of D-8 officials begins tomorrow

A high-level meeting chaired by the Prime Minister in the capital yesterday discussed preparations and programmes of the D-8 Summit in Dhaka, reports UNB.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will open the two-day summit at Hotel Sheraton on March 1. It will adopt Dhaka Declaration on the concluding day.

The D-8 was floated in Istanbul in 1997 to enhance economic cooperation among eight developing Muslim countries.

Senior officials of the member countries will start arriving in the capital today for a two-day commissioners' (officials) meeting beginning tomorrow (February 25).

It will be followed by the Council of Ministers' (Foreign Ministers) meeting on February 27.

Indonesian President, Malaysian Prime Minister, Turkish President, First Vice President, will be present.

See Page 12 Col 6

Chamber chiefs sweat over renewed strikes

By Staff Correspondent

Business leaders, worried about the country's unstable political environment, have said once again that hartals are highly undesirable for an economy that has already been crippled by a bout of prolonged flood and political unrest.

Speaking to The Daily Star in the wake of the three-day shutdown from yesterday, they warned that their woes would be compounded by the new spate of strikes.

Chamber leaders insisted that nothing rivalled hartals power in destroying the economy. "It hurts all and benefits no one," said FBCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo.

They renewed their plea that the politicians try to devise an alternative form of protest.

Meanwhile, chamber leaders will continue their efforts in bringing President Shahabuddin Ahmed into efforts to calm the political nerve. "He has as much power as we do," he said.

See Page 12 Col 8

Announcement

We regret to announce publication of a 12-page issue of The Daily Star instead of usual 16 pages till Thursday due to unavoidable reasons. We shall revert to our usual format from Friday.

— Editor

Inside Today

Article

Politics of Polls Testing Public Patience

Column: The Outside Story by Sabir Mustafa Page 4

Focus

Privatisation in Bangladesh: Some critical questions Page 5

Prayer Timings

February 24

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:29	5:34
Zohr	12:15	1:15
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrib	6:00	6:03
Esha	7:25	7:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

First day of municipal polls Voting in 18 out of 930 centres postponed

Defying boycott and hartal called by the BNP-led opposition, election in 54 municipalities across the country was held yesterday, the first day of a three-day voting fray, reports UNB.

However, the Election Commission had to postpone polling in 18 out of 930 centres following clashes between supporters of rival candidates and snatching of ballot boxes.

Among the troubled centres 12 are in Sherpur, three in Kushtia, and one each in Matlab of Chandpur, Sirajganj and Jessore.

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena told reporters that yesterday's voting was by and large peaceful. Quoting field reports he appreciated turnout as good and satisfactory. "Voters' participation was spontaneous and female voter turnout quite good."

UNB district correspondents reported that election was held amidst mirth and enthusiasm, barring a few incidents of violence.

At least 50 people were injured in election related clashes during voting in Sirajganj Pourashava.

Police lobbed tear gas canisters, fired bullets and charged baton to disperse the warring groups who fought a pitched battle exploding bombs. Authorities also suspended voting in one centre.

Of the injured, 26 people were hospitalised while the rest were given first aid.

Police said supporters of two commissioners locked in a clash over casting of fake votes at Ranigram Government Primary School, exploding a series of bombs at about 12 noon. Nine bundles of ballot papers were snatched during the clash that

left 26 people injured.

Police fired five tear gas shells and five rounds of bullet to disperse the rioting groups. Authorities later suspended voting in the centre.

At about 11 am, supporters of the two commissioner candidates landed in a clash, also over casting fake votes at Beparipara Primary School centre. Five houses were ransacked during the clash, leaving 25 people injured.

Police also lobbed tear gas canisters and fired shots to control the situation.

In Sherpur, another 50 people were injured including police and two commissioner candidates, in a massive poll violence.

Authorities had to postpone voting in 12 out of 23 polling centres amid the troubles which police quelled by clubbing and

See Page 12 Col 1



Voters standing in long queues to cast vote at a polling centre in Munshiganj Municipality yesterday (top) and another polling centre in the same municipality at 10 in the morning.

—Star photo

Negotiations hold the key

The visiting Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) has prescribed bilateral and regional negotiations for lowering Bangladesh's trade imbalance with its neighbouring countries, reports APB.

"This is the way of solving problems... that's the game," Renato Ruggiero said at a press conference at Sheraton Hotel yesterday evening when asked about the WTO's role in narrowing the huge trade gap between Bangladesh and India.

In this context, he referred other smaller countries in other parts of the world which faced similar problems of trade imbalance with their bigger neighbours and said they usually resolved those through negotiations.

Commerce Secretary Syed Alamgir Faruq Chowdhury, who was present at the press conference, hastened to say that Bangladesh was already negotiating with India for narrowing

WTO chief on trade gap

the trade gap. He said that many a non-tariff barriers were being lowered by India.

On zero-tariff access into the markets of the industrialised nations, Ruggiero reiterated his support for the plea and said, "LDCs deserve the access... I don't see any resistance against the idea of allowing zero-tariff access for them."

He pointed out that British Prime Minister Tony Blair and other western leaders supported the idea.

Ruggiero said that the issue made some progress both politically and economically and hoped that the matter would get a concrete shape during the next WTO ministerial meeting to be held

in US later this year.

He said WTO should not be seen as a 'rich man's club', but it would definitely serve the interest of the LDCs.

On the restriction of subsidy for agriculture, the WTO chief executive said that this would be a main issue in the next multilateral negotiations and hoped that the developed nations would abolish subsidy for their agriculture.

In this context, he said that there were huge potentials in Bangladesh's agriculture. "I share the idea that you have to do more in your agriculture."

About setting up an office of the WTO in Dhaka, Ruggiero said the organisations has an ambitious plan to have its office in every member country. "But we don't have enough resources at the moment."

He, however, said a WTO reference centre would be set up in Dhaka to keep Bangladesh and

See Page 12 Col 3

Election results

Following are the names of unofficially elected chairmen of different pourasavas, according to the Election Commission Secretariat, reports UNB.

Gouripur (Mymensingh) — M Abdul Ali (3,864 votes); Bajitpur (Kishoreganj) — Mesbahuddin (5,202 votes); Faridpur (Pabna) — Mohammad Abul Hossain (2,899 votes); Mohanganj (Netrakona) — Latifur Rahman Ratan (4,421 votes); Nilphamari — Dewan Kamal Ahmed (7,178 votes); Gobindaganj (Gaibandha) — M Ataur Rahman Sarkar (3,215 votes); Bogra — M Rezaul Karim Montu (13,006 votes); Pangsha (Rajbari) — Mohammad Wazed Ali (5,529); Moulvibazar — Mahmudur Rahman (6,950 votes); Patharghata (Barguna) — Mallick Mohammad Ayub (3,454 votes); Joypurhat (Joypurhat) — K Walur Jaman Alam (8,813 votes); Alamdanga (Chuadanga) — Hasan Kadir Gannu Miah (5,770 votes); Natore (Natore) — Advocate Kamrul Islam (11,911 votes); Kahirhat (Noakhali) — Haji Mohammad Idris Miah (3,021 votes); Barura (Comilla) — Mobarak Hossain Mir (5,016 votes); Jamalpur —

See Page 12 Col 2

Polls held by and large peacefully, says CEC

By Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena has said the first day of the three-day municipal election was by and large peaceful.

"The field-level reports I have received so far show that the election has been held almost in a peaceful atmosphere," the CEC told newsmen at his office yesterday evening. "Compared to the recent media reports of tension among the people, the elections were by and large peaceful."

Quoting reports the Election Commission received until 6:00 pm yesterday, the CEC said that voting was postponed at 17 polling centres, out of a total of 930 centres, due to untoward incidents. Abu Hena found the situation rather 'inspiring'.

Asked to comment on the killing of a person in a clash over the elections, the CEC quoting John Donne said: "Every man's death diminishes me..."

Election in 30 municipalities today

By Staff Correspondent

On the second day of the three-day local government polls today, elections are scheduled to be held in 30 municipalities under six administrative divisions of the country.

In Dhaka Division, elections will be held in 11 municipalities. They are Gopalganj, Bhuaipur, Muktagachha, Trishal, Bhaluka, Netrakona, Kishoreganj, Rajbari, Shibchar, Daudyada and Bhederaganj.

In Rajshahi Division, elections will be held in seven municipalities. They are Birampur, Fulbari, Lalmonirhat, Sherpur, Shajapur, Chatmohor and Ishardi.

In Khulna Division, polling will take place in five municipalities. They are Mirpur, Bheramara, Jhenidaha, Nawapara and Satkhira.

In Barisal Division, elections will be held in three municipalities.

See Page 12 Col 3

Army man shot dead in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Feb 23: An army jawan was shot dead by unidentified assailants in the city's Hamjarbagh area under Panchajanya thana early this morning, police said.

Naik Badrul Islam, 30, came under attack at 4:30 am while he was returning to Chittagong Cantonment from his village home at Trishal in Mymensingh after enjoying a 15-day leave, police said.

Police recovered the body from a bridge at Hamjarbagh at 7 am.

Police said the killing of army man was not related with hartal though the incident took place an hour before beginning of the 66-hour countrywide hartal.

Police suspected that he might have been killed by alleged muggers.

Police started investigation into the incident, but none was arrested till filing of this report tonight.



A pedestrian, injured in a bomb attack during yesterday's hartal, being taken to hospital. —Star photo

Sniper attacks mark first day of hartal in city Cracker blasts kill two, hurt scores

By Staff Correspondent

Bomb attacks by snipers characterised the hartal violence in the capital where at least 30 people and five policemen were injured. A government official, Mashfiqur Rahman, on a rickshaw at Shahbagh, was among the bomb victims.

Bombs were hurled on processions, streets, buses and other vehicles in the city.

Besides, pro-hartal activists also clashed with police in front of the BNP central office at Naya Paltan and some other places in the city, leaving dozens others hurt.

At least 50 people were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital alone. Most of them had received bomb in-

juries in different parts of the city. Police detained nearly 200 people in hartal-related incidents in the capital. The arrested include Jagga leader Shafiqul Alam Prodhan at Bijoy Nagar.

The 66-hour shutdown, being enforced by the BNP-led opposition alliance, disrupted normal public life in the city and elsewhere in the country.

The opposition parties are enforcing the hartal to resist the on-going municipal elections accusing Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena of being partisan.

Presence of the pro- and anti-hartal forces in the city has led to a state of lawlessness.

See Page 12 Col 7

Voter turnout below 10pc, claims BNP

By Staff Correspondent

Opposition parties boycotting the municipal elections yesterday claimed that less than 10 per cent of voters turned out at polling centres to cast vote on the first day of the three-day polls.

"The first day's polling clearly proved that the municipal polls was farcical and people completely rejected the election," BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said and urged the government to immediately cancel the polls and fulfil the opposition's four-point demand to hold a free and fair election.

"There is still time to cancel the farcical polls. If the government fails to fulfil our demands, we will have no other alternative but to launch a one-

point oust-government movement after the polls."

He was addressing a press conference at the official residence of the Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, BNP city unit convenor Sadek Hossain Khoka MP. Jatiya Party Presidium member Kazi Firoz Rashid, Jamaat-e-Islami Assistant General Secretary Mohammad Kamaruzzaman and Islami Oikya Jote leader ARM Abdul Matin also spoke at the press conference.

Elections were held in 54 municipalities on the first day of the polling.

Justifying his claim, Mannan Bhuiyan said the four parties represent about 75 per cent of the total voters and majority

See Page 12 Col 1

Cancel polls, demands Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

Opposition leader and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday claimed that people rejected the "farcical" municipal polls and observed hartal to resist the government's "conspiracy to implement its blueprint."

She demanded of the government to immediately cancel the first day's polls and postpone the next two days' elections, and announce a fresh schedule after fulfilling the four-point opposition demand.

In a statement, the Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad claimed that the government used the entire state machinery to hold the polls, boycotted by all opposition parties. "This will not bring any good result for the country, the people and democracy," she said.

See Page 12 Col 3

Revised terms for Beximco loans High Court puts central bank order on hold

By M Shamsur Rahman

The High Court on Monday stayed a central bank order which allowed Beximco Group's benami (fictitious) loans from IFIC Bank to be rescheduled in December last year. The court issued a rule nisi on Bangladesh Bank to explain why they had given the order.

The court also asked Beximco Investment Company, which defaulted in loan repayments, and IFIC Bank to explain their position.

The rescheduling was allowed in December last year after new central bank governor Dr Faruquddin Ahmed gave a personal hearing to Sohail and Salman Rahman, chairman and vice-chairman of IFIC Bank Ltd. They hold similar positions in Beximco Group.

The central bank had earlier refused to entertain the same Beximco plea several times.

Under the arrangements agreed in December, a simple interest rate was allowed in place of a compound interest against consolidated loans of Beximco taken under fictitious accounts.

The court granted the stay on the Bangladesh Bank's order after a shareholder of the bank had petitioned to say that the central bank directive would affect the profitability of the bank.

In a writ petition, the shareholder argued that the central bank order of applying a simple interest in place of compound interest "is tantamount to

See Page 12 Col 6

Bomb injured young man dies at DMCH

By Staff Correspondent

A young man, who sustained critical bomb injuries Monday afternoon, succumbed to his injuries at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the early hours of yesterday.

The dead was identified as Ismail Hossain, 25, son of Muktar Ali, a resident of Block-B in Mirpur, Section No 12, police and hospital sources said.

According to police, Ismail along with his accomplices was making bombs on the roof top of a building at Road No 23 at around 5 pm on Monday. He was critically injured when a bomb exploded.

Ismail was immediately rushed to DMCH where he succumbed to his injuries at about 4 am yesterday.

The body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy. A case was lodged with Pallabi thana.

Tortured maid rescued from city house

By Staff Correspondent

An eleven-year-old maid, allegedly tortured and critically injured by a housewife, was rescued by police from a house at Siddheshwari in the city yesterday.

The maid, Farida, daughter of one Nurul Mia of Mymensingh, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, our DMCH correspondent reported. She was allegedly tortured with hot kitchen utensil that resulted in critical burn injuries in different parts of her body. She had been working at the house for about one year.

See Page 12 Col 6

Unauthorised clinics mushrooming, no watchdog

By Naimul Haq

There is no one to keep eye on the activities of the unregistered private clinics in the country. The health directorate, law-enforcing agency or Bangladesh Private Clinic Owners Association disowns any responsibility for keeping track on the illegal activities carried out by the clinics.

The Daily Star, in an investigation, asked the government officials concerned who is then responsible for cracking down on the unauthorised health care

services. The Health Directorate, the state body responsible for giving license to private clinics, pointed their finger at the law-enforcing agency for checking such unauthorised affairs while the police pointed out that unless they were informed of the illegal activity they could not take action.

Hundreds of unauthorised private clinics have been established in the country. The majority of these are located in the

city yet the responsible authorities fail to take action against the unlicensed business.

The in-charge Hospital Director Dr Amiya Bhushan when contacted said, "Since we do not have any list of the unregistered clinics we are not aware of existence of any unregistered private clinics in the country."

Asked if the unauthorised health care services were any concern to the health directorate, Dr Bhushan said, "We have nothing to do with the

unauthorised part of health care activities. We deal with those specified in the regulation (he was referring to registered clinics)."

He added, "Police can trace out the unregistered clinics. They have the authority to shut down any illegal business carried out by the private clinics."

When contacted the DMP Police Commissioner Shamsuddin Ahmed said, "No official correspondence about the issue was made with us from the of-

fice of the Health Directorate. Unless we are informed about the problem we can not take action against the lawbreakers."

He added, "It is responsibility of the Health Directorate to identify the clinics and send list to us so we can take action and stop the ill practice."

Regarding the problem the general secretary of Bangladesh Private Clinic Owners Association (BPCOA) Dr Md Moniruzzaman Bhuiyan said, "We met Health Ministry officials sev-

eral times to discuss the problem of existence of unauthorised private clinics and we agree there should be an end to this problem. In fact, we informed the government that the existence of the unauthorised clinics was hurting registered clinic owners in many ways. Government's response was that they needed police support to stop such illegal practice by the clinics."

Dr Bhuiyan added, "To solve the problem, we need a law to regulate the private clinics."

See Page 12 Col 4