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Centenary celebration of Edward College begins

PABNA, Mar 6: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today inaugurated the five-day centenary celebration of Pabna Edward College, report agencies.

Addressing the function, the Prime Minister said that her government would not tolerate terrorism on the campus.

She said terrorists belong to no particular party. A terrorist is always a terrorist. So, they should not be given shelter in any circumstances.

The Prime Minister asked the college authorities to take steps for ensuring congenial academic atmosphere on the campus.

Gopal Chandra Lahiri, an eminent social worker of Pabna, established the college in 1898. Initially it started functioning in a small building and later shifted to the present site.

The Prime Minister announced that a science and technology university would be set up on the Edward College premises.

She assured the teachers and students of introducing more honours and masters courses in the college and construction of dormitories for teachers and female students.



Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) brought out a procession in the city yesterday marking its 50th founding anniversary. —Star photo

From Page 1

Sheikh Hamad has been heavily involved in day-to-day running of the country. The Cabinet met within hours of Sheikh Isa's death and recognized Sheikh Hamad as Emir. Hamad, a graduate of the Sandhurst Military Academy in Britain, has been commander in chief of the Bahraini defense forces.

Cohen and his entourage originally had intended to cancel a short hop to Saudi Arabia, but later said the trip would go ahead as planned later today.

Bahrain is home to the biggest US naval base in the region. Sheikh Isa offered facilities to the US Navy, discreetly at first because of likely popular resentment against a foreign military presence, then openly during and after the 1990-91 Gulf crisis.

He also allowed use of Bahraini airfields by British and American warplanes. After the Gulf War, he traveled to Washington to sign a security pact with the United States.

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Earlier, the United States took the final step needed to sell advanced air-to-air missiles to Bahrain, Defense Secretary William Cohen said.

Under the agreement, Bahrain will buy Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles, or AMRAAMs, built by Raytheon and Hughes.

The number of missiles to be sold was not disclosed but is likely to be modest. The 3.6-meter-long missiles carry a price tag of \$86,000 each, but in past arms sales to Bahrain, the United States has sold surplus weapons at reduced prices.

Emir dead

From Page 1

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'People have defied call for polls boycott' Opposition should better come to JS, settle demands: PM

PABNA, Mar 6: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today said the opposition political parties should now raise and settle their demands in Parliament as 'their boycott of the municipal election proved a total failure,' report agencies.

"Your movement to resist the polls has failed. Instead of agitating on the streets, better come to Parliament to discuss and resolve issues," she told the opposition while addressing a huge public meeting at the local Police Parade ground in the afternoon.

This was the first public meeting of the Prime Minister after the Pabna-2 by-election, which triggered the opposition demand for resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner and subsequent boycott of the municipal elections.

"They (opposition) had called for boycotting the Pura polls, but some 80-85 per cent people cast their votes in the election," she said.

The Prime Minister alleged that the opposition did not want development of the Pura areas. "That's why they called for shunning the Pura areas polls. But people defied their call."

Sheikh Hasina pointed out that many local level opposition leaders had defied their party directives and joined polls. Some 20-22 candidates belonging to BNP, five of Jatiya Party, three of Jamaat and one each of Workers' Party and JSD who contested in the election had successfully returned.

"What will be their (opposition) reply to the people now?" she asked.

In a rebuttal to the opposition leader's allegation that they were not allowed to speak in the Jatiya Sangsad, the Prime Minister said how could she take the floor when she did not come to the House.

She mentioned that the 7th Jatiya Sangsad sat for 224 days during which the leader of Opposition remained absent for some 200 days. "Please join us in the House and speak as much as you want," Hasina said.

Earlier, Begum Zia never attended any meeting of the Parliamentary Advisory Committee.

The Prime Minister also blamed the previous BNP regime for having denied the opposition any coverage in the state radio and television when they had been in power.

But the electronic media these days have been broadcasting all the proceedings of the Jatiya Sangsad, including the speeches of the opposition MPs, she claimed.

She condemned recent attacks on the residence of the Chief Election Commissioner and blamed the opposition BNP for assaulting some poor rickshawpullers during their recent hartals.

Hasina listed various development and welfare programme taken up by her government across the country, including Pabna district.

At the public meeting, she also announced that a private Medical College would be set up in the district and plans were underway to build railways between Pabna and Nagarbari.

Earlier, President of Pabna Chamber of Commerce and Industry M A Kasir presented a crest of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, made of 20 tolas of gold, to the Prime Minister.

1666 expelled on second day of SSC exams

Some 1,666 SSC examinees were expelled from different centres of the country for adopting unfair means on the second day of the examination yesterday, reports UNB.

Officials said 745 candidates were expelled from Dhaka Board, 201 from Jessore Board and 563 from Rajshahi Board. 58 from Comilla district and 99 in Chittagong district.

Full figure of expulsions from Chittagong and Comilla Board was not available.

In Dhaka Board, 31 examinees were expelled from Narayanganj, one from a centre in Dhaka city, 60 in Munshinganj, 27 in Manikganj, 149 in Fagail, 105 in Mymensingh, 78 in Jamalpur, 21 in Kishoreganj, 90 in Netrokona, 29 in Faridpur, 26 in Rajbari, 59 in Shariatpur and 69 in Narsingdi.

More women MPs in JS

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Speakers felt that women, in order to be heard by the policy makers, should speak out in one voice. But such unity, they admitted, is a far cry in the present day reality.

They called for coordination among all the major actors dealing with women's issues. The unanimous opinion was that much is going on in an uncoordinated and disjointed manner and that this reduces the impact and durability of the various endeavours.

However, it was identified that some progress in women's development had taken place over the last eight years, especially in the last two years.

The participants acknowledged that the government had initiated a National Women Development Policy, which they viewed as a positive step towards development of women. They commended the creation of a National Action Plan to implement the recommendation of the Beijing conference on women.

The speakers praised the government effort to enroll more girls in schools and also appreciated government attempts to improve reproductive health care for mothers.

Dr Najma Chowdhury, former advisor to the caretaker government and Professor of Political Science at Dhaka University said, "The concept of gender equality has not yet been put into the mainstream of government policy. It shows we have not yet taken the issues of gender equality seriously."

Women lawmakers are not given much chance to discuss any issue, including those involving gender, in the parliament, she said.

She said that the development projects taken up by the government had very little impact due to lack of proper planning and monitoring.

Acknowledging unsatisfactory role of women members in the Parliament Tasmina Hossain, MP and Editor of Aanyana, a Bengali news magazine dealing with women's affairs said, "I admit that we don't think about the issue seriously in the parliament. We don't take them seriously."

Women MPs are not given much chance to discuss any issue, including gender issues in the parliament, she said.

She also spoke of insignificant number of women representatives in Parliament.

Responding to some queries, Rabeya Bhuiyan, MP, said, "The Constitution itself is biased on the gender issue. The male domination in the Parliament is a barrier to any progress on the women issue. There are only 37 women members."

A Hye, a former secretary said, "Women's power in every sphere of life is denied. To establish their rights, a social campaign should be mounted for awareness in the male dominated society."

He said that law alone is not sufficient to address the problems related to women's issues.

Chairperson of Jatiya Mohila Sangstha, Ivy Rahman, said there is currently no mechanism or structure in the country to create awareness among the women. They are not even getting the opportunity of general education and training.

Referring to City Corporation, she said that women commissioners are not involved in various activities. Citing an example, she said an under-nutrition male commissioner is the chairman of the education committee while a woman commissioner with a masters degree is a mere member.

She stressed the need for accountability and transparency of the line ministries in monitoring the programmes directed at ensuring overall development and equality of women.

Ivy Rahman observed that it would not be possible to bring equality for women if religion based politics had been abolished. She said distorted interpretation of religion was used to suppress women's rights.

She demanded the provision to elect women representatives in parliament from all the 64 districts.

Replying to a question from members, she said though there is mention of equal share of property for women in the Awami League manifesto, but it is not implemented yet. She hoped that the government would implement it as soon as possible.

Professor M S Akbar, Chairman of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, said: "The government lacks clear instruction on policy. The well-educated women are frequently being surpassed and suppressed by the less educated male counterpart."

He hoped that adequate power would be given to the parliamentary standing committees to implement the decisions they take. At the moment, it is lacking.

Nilufar Begum, Director General of Women's Affairs Division, in her speech said, "One cannot expect the ministry to resolve all the problems. We are trying our best ... the existing problems cannot be changed overnight."

She said: "currently the directorate has some 30 women development projects. We also have another project, involving Tk 90 crore, to improve facilities of offices in 42 thanas."

Rasheda K Choudhury, Director CAMPE in her speech said, "there is no coordination among the NGOs, private sector and the government agencies. Even the agencies working within the government lack any coordination."

She also said that there is no mechanism of "learning from our experiences". Many projects have been implemented but they are never evaluated.

She added that surveys reveal women's participation in various development activities has substantially increased but regretted that support facilities for women is very poor.

Rokia Rahman in her speech said, "compared to the early 1970s women are playing major roles in the social development. Instead of focussing on micro-credit policy we should now concentrate on encouraging small and medium enterprises by women."

Shaheen Anam, Project Director of PLAU said, "the women and children's affairs ministry should be playing the leadership role on policy formulation and advocacy."

She said the ministry of women's affairs has set up a policy leadership and advocacy unit, which can be used as a forum for dialogue between the civil society and the government. Regular dialogue will greatly assist in mainstreaming of gender issues in government policies and plans.

Sarwari Rahman, former women and children's affairs minister, said because of male dominance, women's rights in most cases are ignored despite the fact that women constitute about half of the total population.

The level of female participation is still low in various development activities. "We need to bring an increasing number of women in the decision making process at higher levels", she added.

She also said men need to change their attitude towards women. "Men need to respect women as their partners."

Women activist and eminent writer Maleka Begum in her speech said the latest change in the Union Council structure has brought status for the women folk in the society. The role of women has increased manifold as the people are now directly electing them and their constituency is bigger than that of a male ward commissioner.

Speaking on equality of women, she said that in spite of government instruction and policy to this effect, the equality is still far from reality.

Maleka Begum said the equality of women could not be ensured without effective role of political parties.

Deputy Executive Director of BRAC Salahuddin Ahmed said that electing only three out of nine Union Council members was not enough.

"How is it possible for three women to influence nine male members to take any decision?" he asked.

"Though we are at the doorstep of a new century, women are still isolated from free flow of information." On the discrimination against women, Salahuddin said the problem is not only in the rural or illiterate section, but also still exists in the educated section of society.

President of CEDAW and Women for Women, Salma Khan, said both the government and NGOs are approaching the gender issue on the basis of "need and welfare" rather than on the basis of rights.

She alleged that the concerned ministry was not taking sufficient and effective measures to ensure equality in society.

The National Women Development Policy was announced by the Prime Minister on March 8, 1997. Salma Khan said. Though the policy was announced two years ago, yet till today ignorance about the issue still persists, she said.

She said the women affairs ministry in Bangladesh is always busy undertaking projects whereas the same ministry in many countries, including the Philippines and Indonesia, overseas and monitors the women related activities and programmes. She suggested that the ministry should only work as a watchdog body.

Zakia Chowdhury, secretary to the Prime Minister, said the National Women Development Policy announced by the Prime Minister two years back is being gradually implemented and that the government is committed to moving forward on the gender issue as quickly as possible. "The government is working on it and there is reason to be frustrated."

She stressed the need for a new way of thinking because the women are not getting the adequate opportunity to work even after being elected to union council and other bodies. "The male members of our society still do not want to change their old way of thinking," she observed.

Dr AKM Masud, a division chief at Planning Commission, said it is not possible to create awareness among women and ensure gender equality without proper and mass education for women.

Advocate Elina Khan said the female community is being deprived in every aspect due to the lack of a support structure for them to move forward. The women workers are not getting equal wage. On the legal side, she said there is no female judge in the High Court.

On safe custody, Elina said that all other ministries work in sending them into safe custody. She demanded amendment to the black laws related to the safe custody.

Mahila Parishad leader Rakhi Das Purakayastha said that the female community wants to see the ministry of women affairs playing a more pivotal role within the government. She said the women affairs ministry should ensure that all other ministries work towards gender equality.

She demanded the increase in women representation quota in Parliament from the present 30 to 64 in order for them to represent each district.

Rakhi Das said everybody rushes with relief and rescue operation during natural disasters, but none so expedient and decisive during social disasters like rape of women. She demanded that distortion of religion should have to be banned through passage of necessary law.

She added that though the NGOs are playing a vital role in creating awareness among women and fighting for their equality, there remains discrimination between male and female workers within NGOs.

Shireen Haq of Naripakkha underscored the need for increasing the number of women employees everywhere, especially in the administration.

She laid stress on the surety of punishment rather than on severity to halt repression and assault on women. Death penalty now cannot be accepted in any civilised society, she said.

She demanded abolition of all black laws related to women and called for the formulation of positive laws.

Executive Director of Nari Uddog Kendra, Masuda Shefali, observed that the new provision in the union council has again failed to bring about a major change. She said physical and sexual oppression is being ignored widely in the country. Existing laws must be implemented without making new laws.

Nargis Jahan of Proshika laid stress on mutual respect between men and women and said that this should start from home. She said it is not possible to ensure gender equality without gender-sensitive upbringing and education.

She said there was class factor in gender discrimination. Rich women do not suffer the same oppression and indignity as poor women do.

The full text of the deliberations at yesterday's roundtable will be published next week.

Police-people ratio 1:1300

The police-people ratio is 1:1300 in Bangladesh as against around 1:500 in neighbouring countries, reports UNB.

Informing this to newsmen, Inspector General of Police AYBI Siddiqui has said, only 25 policemen are engaged in each thana of the country having a population of several lakhs.

The burden of the police comes down significantly in developed countries as most people there abide by law. In our country police get tired in making people follow rules of law by using force, he said.

The IGP noted with regret that even people of the high society do not bother rule of law. The situation is reflected on the street every day. Police are to deploy to control traffic on the streets.

He said the police were so much preoccupied in maintaining peace in a situation of political unrest — hartal and demonstration.

PM unveils sculpture on DU campus today

By DU Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will unveil a sculpture 'Swadhinatar Sangram' (struggle for freedom) at Fuller Road intersection on the Dhaka University campus at 10 am today.

Classes of the university will remain suspended from 10 am to 12 noon today to facilitate the teachers to attend the function.

The PM will again visit the DU campus on March 16 to inaugurate 'Bangabandhu chair' in the Department of History. On that day, Zebunessa and Kazi Mahbub Ullah 'Public Welfare Trust' will hand over a cheque for Tk 20 lakh to the university authorities for the establishment of 'Bangabandhu Chair'. DU officials said.

JP rebels

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Hossain and Sheikh Shahidul Islam.

Sardar Anjad and Sheikh Shahidul Islam have been fired from the party by its Chairman Hossain Mohammad Ershad, a press release issued by Prof Humayun Kabir Hiru said yesterday.

Mizanur Rahman Choudhury and Monirul Huq Choudhury, two JP stalwarts, have already been expelled along with three JP MPs — Mrs Tasmina Hossain, Sharfuddin Ahmed Jahan and Golan Faruq Ovi.

The three MPs were among 11 others who defied Ershad and joined the inaugural session of Parliament in January.

But some of the MPs are wavering. One of them, Nur Mohammad Mondol of Rangpur, earlier expressed his solidarity with Ershad, who recently toured his power base in the northern region, warning the defectors.

Earlier, JP Secretary General Najibur Rahman Manju warned the rebels that they would face expulsion if they join forces led by Anwar Hossain Manju.

The schism in JP is taking its final shape since expulsion of Manju and General Ershad joining hands with his arch foe, BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia, in a broad opposition coalition comprising BNP, JP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikyo Jote.

ADAB, Islamic Oikya Parishad postpone confes at Faridpur

FARIDPUR, Mar 6: The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) and Islamic Oikya Parishad today agreed to postpone their planned conferences here on Monday, reports UNB.

Both the parties agreed to postpone their programmes for the sake of the ongoing SSC examinations and to avert any untoward incident, sources said.

An agreement was reached between the leaders of both the parties at a meeting held at the DC's office this morning.

Kazi Shirajul Islam MP, Advocate Mosharraf Hossain MP, Awami League leaders Imamuddin Ahmed and SM Nurun Nabi also attended the meeting. Police Super of the district was present.

SNS threatens

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with sabotage.

The proposed law will be placed in the parliament for its passage.

"It will be a black law that will be used to fulfil political motives instead of protecting rights of women and children, if passed with the clauses for prevention of terrorist activities," the SNS statement said.

Various women rights organisations including the SNS have been waging movement for the last one year demanding exclusion of the clauses from the proposed law the statement said and urged the government to enact the law incorporating their suggestions to make it effective.

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well as other political issues."

About the Upazila election, the ruling party leader said the last date for completion of Upazila polls is set on July 30.

"We have communicated this to the Election Commission. It now depends on the Commission to finalise the schedule. We are ready for it," he said.

Flat owners

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the main gates of the housing compound at about 10 pm.

The attackers were hired terrorists and employees of Major (retd) Monzur Kader, owner of Prominent Housing, and they conducted the attack under the instruction of Monzur Kader, the press release claimed.

According to a FIR filed with Mohammodpur Thana, the attackers were chanting slogans in the name of Monzur Kader while attacking.

They started assaulting the apartment owners, who were then attending the meeting, indiscriminately and physically tortured a number of women at that time, the FIR said.

The armed goons threatened the flat owners' lives, saying "We will finish the flat owners one after another, under the instructions of Monzur Kader," the FIR reported.

The miscreants damaged the windows and doors of the office room of the flat owners' welfare society and also damaged a number of motor cars.

Monjur Kader was not available for making any comment last night.

Meeting on Kafco

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and other effects due to mechanical defaults with the plants.

Kafco failed to meet repayment obligations to its various lenders on February 1, including over US\$ 9 million due to Eximbank. The company has also defaulted its payments against gas bills, amounting to US\$ 13 million in principal amount till February 27, due to state-owned Bakhrabad Gas Systems Ltd.

"If there is obstacle to be authorised by the government of Bangladesh, please explain to us what you are talking to the government of Bangladesh that is one of the shareholders of Kafco," said Eximbank, which declined an invitation to attend the meeting to represent the lenders.

"And if the commercial settlement should be difficult to be executed, you have to show us another possible solution. Our only and greatest concern is what you are doing to cure this default," Eximbank said in his letter dated March 4, the last working day before today's meeting. The letter arrived when the Kafco chairman and industries secretary K M Ejazul Huq was in Japan to attend a seminar in Kyoto.

Eximbank has only reinforced the threat coming from the Japanese aid agency, Overseas Economic Co-operation Fund (OECF).

A junior OECF official had earlier written to the industries minister to lobby for the commercial settlement, implying the government's approval of the deal was linked to continued Japanese assistance for Bangladesh.

Eximbank has also written to the Ministry of Finance, reminding it of government obligations as guarantor of the Kafco loans.

A senior finance ministry official said Eximbank has made it clear that the threat is aimed to bring more pressure in favour of the commercial settlement on behalf of Marubeni and Chiyoda. The Japanese bank marked its letters to the two companies, which the official described as unusual. "How could they be so blatant?" the official asked.

Implications of the plant acceptance are far reaching, one of them being the two off-take agreements. If plant acceptance is given now, says a Kafco insider, then the two off-take agreements for the sale of Kafco's products (ammonia and urea) which have been operating since the plant started production, would be given a new lease of seven years of life.

This is a consequence of a ruling in an arbitration last year on the urea agreement which, like the ammonia agreement, provides for Kafco to sell its products exclusively through an overseas company, former managing director Manucher Towhidi said in his letters to top government functionaries including the ministers of industries and finance.

The two off-take deals also prevent Kafco from selling its products even to Bangladesh during emergency, without permission from its off-takers. This year, the government has bought over 100,000 tonnes of urea from Kafco and wants 25,000 tonnes more.

Last week, the company engaged the government and BCIC, which runs the state-owned urea-producing factories, by requiring it to float a tender to fix the price for Kafco urea at the insistence of urea off-taker Transammonia, which also charges a commission on sales to Bangladesh.

After the angry government response, the Kafco managing director wrote again to BCIC on the same day, on February 28, offering a fixed price instead.

Meanwhile, a nine-member committee headed by Finance Minister S A M S Kibria is looking into various aspects of the new crisis in the crisis-ridden company, especially its poor financial health and its implications on the government of Bangladesh.

Okland's move

From Page 1

fourths of its two blocks to Tullow. Nearly 98 per cent of these two blocks are off-shore areas located in Cox's Bazar-Teknaf region.

Earlier in mid-January, Okland was secretly given a three-year extension of its PSC for these two blocks.

The government had signed PSC with Rexwood-Okland joint venture in January 17, 1997. At that time, Rexwood-Okland got the two blocks without submitting several documents, the sources claimed. Later, the joint venture merged into Okland. But again, this was not officially informed to Petrobangla.

Due to financial constraints, Okland started conducting seismic survey in the two blocks slowly. Its PSC had the most flexible terms compared to all other PSCs signed by Bangladesh with foreign oil companies.

It completed seismic survey in both the blocks in mid-'98. Now it has almost completed interpretation of the seismic data.

Earlier in mid-'97, Tullow had publicised in the London Stock Exchange that it already got two blocks in Bangladesh. But it was not clear then which were the blocks.

Later, it became known that Tullow's employees were working with Okland. However, Okland never admitted selling out its concerns in Bangladesh to Tullow.

But in mid-'98, when a newspaper reported that Tullow had taken over Okland, Tullow's chief in a rejoinder said from Ireland that the company had only a technical cooperation agreement with Okland.

"Even if there is a technical cooperation agreement, Okland should have first informed Petrobangla about Tullow's involvement as per PSC terms," said a source. "But Okland did not bother to inform Petrobangla."

Quoting banking circles, a Petrobangla source said that Tullow has been financing Okland's operations in Bangladesh for more than a year now.

But local employees of Okland were not aware of Tullow's financial involvement because the matter was kept secret, the source added.

A Petrobangla Director and some other officials are backing Tullow and Okland. "Okland was given special favours in the past and nobody ever raised questions," an official claimed.

The sources said that Tullow was one of the main reasons for the delay in taking decisions on the Second Round Block Bidding. The government had repeatedly tried to get Tullow a "big partner" in blocks 9 and 11 and the whole bidding process was delayed because of that, the sources said.

Dry spell

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go up to 7,000 feet, there are chances that the grip of dry weather would be loosened", he said.

He said the normal weather pattern would be restored if this happens.

The trouble in the weather was noticed when the westerly low pressure that brings rain in the old during the winter did not come up to Bangladesh.

The pressure simply went towards the Himalays from central and north-western India.

Sources in the agriculture ministry said they are monitoring the situation. There was a high level meeting on March 1 to review the situation.

The long-range weather forecast issued on March 3 noted that there would be one or two norwesters at the end of the month.

The day temperature would rise gradually and there would be a touch of cold at night in the northern region, the forecast said.

March 7

From Page 1

istan into a bloody war on the night of March 25, 1971 as the army launched history's bloodiest and barbaric crackdown on innocent civilians.

The long cherished independence was achieved on December 16, 1971 at the cost of supreme sacrifice of millions of people.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed in a message on the occasion said that Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, through his historic March 7 speech imbued the nation with the spirit of independence.

"We earned our victory through limitless sacrifices and dedication of hundreds of thousands of lives."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a message said that the historic speech of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a milestone towards achieving independence.