The Daily Star

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The white dove, a universal symbol of peace, was among other displays in the Institute of Fine Arts rally of *Pahela Baishakh*. —Star Photo: **Amran Hossain**

Pahela Baishakh celebrated

The nation on Wednesday welcomed Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bengali New Year 1406 in a traditional festive mood, reports UNB.

The day's main celebration was centred at 'Ramna Batmul' in the capital, where the reputed cultural organisation 'Chhayanaut' welcomed the 'Pahela Baishakh' at dawn.

Hundreds of men, women and children, wearing traditional dresses — *'punjabi'* and *'saree'* — thronged the Batmul in the early morning.

Bangladesh Television telecast the celebration of the first day of Bangla year live from the lush green Ramna. The BTV also put up special programmes on the occasion.

The day was a public holiday.

On the eve of the day, President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia issued separate messages calling upon the people to engage in nation building activities.

The government as well as different socio-cultural organisations chalked out elaborate programmes to celebrate the day.

The programmes included cultural functions, processions, *Baishakhi melas*, discussions, boat race and competitions of traditional games across the country.

'Pahela Baishakh Udjapan Parishad 1406' brought out a colourful procession on the first day of *'Nababarsha'* (new year) with a call for resisting all sorts of misdeeds and uniting the people under a cultural bond.

The procession started from the Institute of Fine Arts premises at Dhaka University in the morning and ended at the same place after parading city thoroughfares.

The marchers, who danced and sang, carried a replica of a big black snake symbolising fundamentalism and communalism, and white pigeons illustrating peace. Covering their faces with different types of colourful masks, they also carried 10 big birds and 15 horses made of paper and board.

Thousands of people were seen moving across the city throughout the day, specially in and around Dhaka University campus, in a joyous mood to celebrate the 'Pahela Baishakh'.

On the first day of Bengali New Year, the business community opened *'halkhata'* (fresh book of accounts) and offered sweets to their permanent clientele and guests.

Banks suffer a drop in deposits

By Rafiq Hasan

Banks this year witnessed a 2.33 per cent decline in its deposits over the closing position of last year.

A Bangladesh bank quarterly evaluation noted that the total deposit in 39 banks operating in the country on March 11 this year declined to Tk 56,720.93 crore from last year's closing position of Tk 58,071.66 crore.

The amount excludes the inter bank items.

Bankers attributed the cause of decline in deposit to after affect of last year's devastating flood, huge borrowing by the government, higher rate of interest in saving certificates and a sluggish condition in the country's business arena.

They said that deposit declined because the banking sector was still feeling the adverse impact of last years devastating flood in the country. It was not felt immediately after the flood because most of the commercial banks were busy with the import business, mainly buying food grains from abroad. But now the export- import business has become very dull.

"The business and banking activities became dull after spending a huge amount of money for importing foodgrains following the two months long flood," said a high official of a private bank.

He said people are now very interested in buying different saving certificates issued by the government because of their higher interest than that of the commercial banks.

Most of the saving certificates offer 13 per cent interest while the commercial banks' interest on saving accounts vary from 7 to 8 per cent.

"This advantage prompted many people to buy saving certificates instead of keeping money in bank vaults " the official said.

The deposit in foreign banks, however, went up because of better customer service and quick execution of business activities, according to sources.

Many people including businessmen shifted their accounts to foreign banks from the NCBs and local private ones because of the better money transaction system in the foreign banks.

The BB's quarterly statement on banks account says that the deposit in 13 foreign banks operating in the country grew by an average of 2.54 per cent.

Deposit at those banks increased to Tk 4433.67 crore from Tk 4324.05 crore last year.

But the average deposit at nationalised commercial banks declined by 3.29 per cent and local commercial banks by 1.80 per cent compared to last year's closing position.

The deposit at NCBs declined to Tk 34007.97 crore from Tk 35166.49 crore last year. On the other hand the deposit at 17 private commercial bank dropped to Tk 15376.92 crore from Tk 15,659.29 crore last year.

Among the 13 foreign banks the highest growth (39.11 per cent) in deposit was recorded by Society General, a French concern, followed by National Bank of Pakistan and Hongkong Bank, which recorded 12 per cent growth.

The deposit at SG increased to Tk 44.35 crore from Tk 33.32 crore last year.

While deposit in Hanil bank of South Korea recorded highest percentage fall as its deposit declined to Tk 17.19 crore this year from Tk 25.34 crore last year. It is a 32 percent decrease.

Out of 17 local commercial banks, the highest growth in deposit of 24 per cent was recorded by Dutch-Bangla bank. It's deposit increased to Tk 205 crore from Tk 164.86 crore last year.

On the other hand, the highest 7 per cent decline in local commercial banks deposit was recorded by United Commercial Bank and National Credit and Commerce Bank.

Their deposits declined to Tk 1,039.89 crore and Tk 569.79 crore from Tk 1,126.89 crore and Tk 617.20 crore respectively.

Leaders of the business community at a discussion meeting at FBCCI auditorium on Monday said that a bearish trend is prevailing in the business arena because of fund crisis.

Mujibnagar Day tomorrow

The historic Mujibnagar Day will be observed tomorrow (April 17) marking the formation of provisional government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to conduct the country's Liberation War, reports UNB.

On this day in 1971, a cabinet of the provisional government was formed at Baidynathpur mango grove (Mujibnagar) in Meherpur district. The Mujibnagar government led the war to victory within nine months establishing Bangladesh as an independent nation.

Awami League President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will address a discussion meeting at Paltan Maidan on the day.

The ruling Awami League its front organisations and socio-cultural bodies have drawn up various programmes to observe the day.

Khaleda slams NAM Summit costs

By Staff Correspondent

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia yesterday said that Tk 100 crore to be spent for the NAM Summit scheduled for August 2001 in Dhaka would prove to be a huge burden on the people of Bangladesh.

However, she hoped that the summit would be held smoothly and would bring fruitful results for the people of the 113 NAM member countries.

The former prime minister told this when Delhi-based South African High Commissioner Jerry M Matsila, who was also in charge of Bangladesh affairs, paid her a farewell visit at her 29 Minto Road official residence in the evening.

MM Rezaul Karim, member of the BNP chairperson's advisory council, told newsmen that the outgoing South African High Commissioner informed during the meeting that about 20 million US dollars had been spent for the NAM Summit in Durban, South Africa. The expenditure is something a developing country would find difficult to bear, he said.

The envoy said that South African President Nelson Mandela in the last NAM Summit in Durban brought some changes in the NAM's concept and suggested that it put emphasis on development and poverty alleviation.

He said Mandela is not attending the forthcoming NAM Summit in Dhaka as he has decided to skip the presidential race to be held in next June.

Matsila, however, hoped that Mandela's suggestions on development and poverty alleviation would be given due importance in the forthcoming summit. He said Pretoria has requested Dhaka to focus on the issues since Bangladesh is the spokesperson of the LDCs.

Khaleda recalled that Bangladesh High Commission in South Africa was established in 1994 when she was in the office with the objective to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries. She hoped South Africa will similarly set up its mission in Dhaka soon.

BNP leaders Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, M M Rezaul Karim and Reaz Rahman were present on the occasion.

Mystery shrouds Sylvia's death

By Staff Correspondent

A gruesome commencement —Star Photo.

Mystery over the drowning of a teenage college girl at the city's Ramna Lake on Tuesday night.

The body of Tanjila Abedin Sylvia, 18, daughter of Jainal Abedin, project director, BCS Academy, was recovered by Ramna police on Wednesday morning. She was missing since Tuesday night.

According to the Ramna police, they recovered the body of an unidentified female aged 18 from the Ramna Lake yesterday morning.

family sources said they rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue after a news item was published in the national dailies. Then they identified her by looking at her dress. To get more confirmed they report the DB office at Minto Road and confirmed her.

According to the family, she was admitted to the Dhaka City College recently and schedule to join her class from yesterday.

Humayun Kabir, uncle of Sylvia, claimed that she went out from her residence at about 6 pm on Tuesday to meet her friend and she also telephoned her mother at about 8 pm and told her, she will come back within half an hour.

Next day the body of Sylvia was found floating on the water of the lake and people who went to celebrated Bengali new years informed the police.

Relatives of the victim received the body from the morgue and it was buried at Azimpur graveyard yesterday evening.

When contacted Ramna thana duty officer said a unnatural death case was lodged in this connection and the reason behind her death could not be ascertained.

The relatives of Sylvia are yet to file any case.

Humayun Kabir refuses to budge

By Staff Correspondent

CID interrogated DB Assistant Commissioner Humayun Kabir for the sixth time yesterday but he continued to refuse his involvement in the murder of Jalal Ahmed Shafi, sources in the CID said.

The decomposed body of Jalal Ahmed Shafi was found inside the rooftop water tank at the Minto Road DB office in the city on March 25.

Meanhwile, SI Shajahan, Habilder Belal and Constable Rob were placed on a three-day fresh remand by the CMM's Court yesterday.

Besdies, DB office canteen contractor Anwar Hossain was produced before the CMM's court on completion of ten days' police remand in three phases. The court sent him the Dhaka Central Jail.

CID so far arrested five persons, including four DB men, in connection with the murder of Shafi.

4 including CID man's brother nabbed

Death of Atique, the driver

By Staff Correspondent

Four persons have been arrested so far in connection with the killing of Atique, microbus driver of CID inspector Saiful Islam. The arrested include the younger brother of the CID inspector.

The body of Atique was recovered from the stairs of the building in which the inspector lives at Shyamoli in the city at about 8:30 pm Tuesday night.

The arrested are Biddyut, 22, brother of the inspector; Rahim, 19, son of a maid at the inspector's flat; Jahangir, 22, a friend of Rahim and Shamsuddin, 23, son of a former security guard at the house, police said.

They were produced before the CMM's court yesterday and were taken on a three-day remand.

Police interrogated Shamsuddin's sister Janu and maid Rahima soon after the incident.

Atique's body was handed over to his family after autopsy at Dhaka Medical College Hopsital. The autopsy report said Atique was strangulated to death. Besides, there were injury marks on his head and scratches in his throat, hospital sources said.

According to police, Atique had a love affair with Janu. Sensing Atique's affair with the maid, the inspector arranged her marriage with another person about six months ago.

But Janu continued to work as a maid at the flat. She continued her extra-marital relation with Atique who had been living with the inspector's family for about eight years.

Biddyut, a first year honours student of a city college who resided outside the flat, had also proposed Janu.

In the evening of Tuesday, Biddyut and Atique went to the rooftop and went back to the flat and then got outside. But Atique did not return and later his body was found on the stairs of the building.

Biddyut had a scuffle with Atique there and he might have strangulated the driver to death. Police were verifying whether any other person was involved in the murder.

Police were interrogating the four at Mohammadpur thana till last night. A murder case was filed with Mohammadpur thana Wednesday.

Anwar Ibrahim

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outside the courthouse. Numbering about 200, they defied police warnings against illegal gatherings in the capital.

The courthouse was surrounded by dozens of anti-riot police and paramilitary forces when Anwar arrived for the judgement in his five-month trial, the longest in Malaysian history.

Anwar, 51, repeatedly denied the charges against him and said Mahathir was behind a political conspiracy to crush the challenge to his 18-year leadership.

The new deputy prime minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, said today that police were instructed to act firmly against protesters who broke the law but not to be "violent".

"The supremacy of the law must be upheld," Abdullah was quoted as saying by the national Bernama news agency.

EC target

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cers or the thana nirbahi officers (TNOs) concerned.

"The said officials are supposed to take steps to correct the errors," he said.

The voter ID card project, taken up in May 1995, was supposed to be completed by June 1996. The authorities concerned started taking photographs of the voters ñ 5.62 crore at that time ñ in November 1995.

But with the change of government in June, 1996, the project was kept in abeyance for some five months. In the meantime, the government had conducted a probe into allegations of corruption in the project. Besides, a special audit by the Auditor General's office was also carried out. The investigations revealed no major deviation. Then the government re-approved the project.

"The project resumed after one and half a year's suspension due to various reasons including updating the voters list and the EC's occupation in conducting the Union Parishad polls between December 1997 and January 1998," said Pasha.

The ID cards will be used as supportive documents in 14 purposes including handing over assets, marriage registration, passports, driving licences and VGF cards.

Land dispute delays Meghna

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not start. Apparently, the Ministry, PDB and Petrobangla seem to be indifferent about this delay," one source said.

"After signing the contract, if AES fails to meet its deadline, it will be required to pay 45,000 dollars per day for delay in commissioning the plant. This means that PDB's delaying of the project would cost the government 45,000 dollars each day," he added.

Surprisingly, when the Meghnaghat first phase power plant agreement remains far from being signed, PDB has formally requested the Energy Ministry for the second time for permission to begin negotiations with Marubeni for "Meghnaghat Second Phase" without any tender bidding. In December last, the Cabinet Purchase Committee had turned down PDB's request for negotiating the second phase with Marubeni. Marubeni was the second lowest bidder in the first phase of the Meghnaghat tender.

The World Bank and the ADB have both warned against signing any contract which is not based on competitive bids. The donors have told the government that it would be a farce if the government awarded the second phase project to the runners up of the first phase tender bidding.

After two yeas of tendering and re-tendering, the Meghnaghat Site Development Contract was awarded to a Chinese firm, represented by a leading MP of the ruling party. The contract was signed on March 22. The contractor is required to hand over the developed land to PDB and AES in 120 days. But the court case may delay the project further.

If the land is not made available to AES before monsoon, sources believe that AES would not be able to maintain the current tariff. They also indicate that average construction prices have gone up by 15-20 per cent since the bidding time, July 1997.

BNP responds to pressure

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failure.

A series of hartals, coinciding with key dates of the municipal polls, on four demands including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) failed to secure support of the people and even the partymen at the municipal areas where the elections took place by and large peacefully.

Following the conclusion of the municipal polls, the BNP-led opposition parties demanded scrapping of the election results and threatened to launch a one-point movement — resignation of the government — in default.

Influenced by the extremists, Khaleda Zia had meantime issued a press statement on April 4 asking the government to step down immediately and announce fresh general elections.

This prompted suggestions from party strategists not to go for an oust-government agitation at the moment but to intensify the street protests on the pressing issues of public concern.

In their view, a one-point movement prior to the rainy reason, the HSC examinations and the upazila polls is unlikely to gain any momentum.

Consequently, they suggested that BNP should go for the upazila polls "for the sake of strengthening the party at the grassroots level" and continue street agitation concentrating on matters of public concerns until the elections.

"This phase of agitation will help us to go for a one-point movement in future when we can utilise our power base at the upazila level," said a BNP leader, who prefer the party's participation in the local polls. He, asking for anonymity, said that BNP was now in a position to bag around fifty per cent of the upazila seats.

However, Mannan Bhuiyan spoke briefly when asked on the upazila polls. "We don't see any scope as yet to contest the elections unless our demands are met," he told The Daily Star, without elaborating.

According to insiders, BNP is using the April 18 hartal it has called in league with other opposition parties to incense the political situation. But more hartals are unlikely now as the party believes people are unable to afford such programmes. Fresh hartals purely depend on government role in the April 18 hartal.

Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia is learnt to have instructed partymen at all levels to actively participate in all future agitation programmes and strengthen the party units from the capital down to the thana levels.

Accordingly, the BNP secretary general is now busy identifying weakness and removing disputes in the party. He has also directed the party chapters across the country to hold their long-pending conferences and gear up anti-government protests.

In a similar move, the party has planned to publish posters and booklets highlighting government's failures in different sectors. Besides, preparations are on to activate the party workers in the capital and assemble them urgently, if required for instant protest against the government.

AJM clash kills one

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Apr 15: One person was shot dead and 200 were injured as rival groups of workers at Adamjee Jute Mills fought fresh battle yesterday.

Prayer Timings

April 16		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-35
Jumma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-30	4-35
Maghrib	6-20	6-23
Esha	7-30	7-35

Source: Islamic Foundation

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