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Shahjahan, Morshed new IEB leaders

By Staff Correspondent

Dr Engr Muhammad Shahjahan and Engr Khan Monjur Morshed have been elected President and honorary General Secretary respectively of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) for the year 2000-2001 according to unofficial results.

Gulam Mohiuddin have been elected Vice-President (Academic), Md Nurul Huda Vice-President (Administration and Finance) and MAK Azad Vice-President (EPSSW).

Md Monowar Hossain Chowdhury and Md Rabiul Alam have been elected President and Honorary Secretary General respectively for IEB, Dhaka Centre.

The IEB's biennial election held on Thursday. Some 7,800 voters cast their votes in the election.

Meanwhile, a group of newly elected office-bearers of Institution of Engineers Bangladesh (IEB) yesterday met BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia at her 29 Minto Road official residence.

The delegation led by Association of Engineers' Bangladesh (AEB) President Engineer L K Siddique and secretary general F M Atiqur Rahman apprised Khaleda Zia of their victory in the IEB polls.

Khaleda Zia congratulated the newly elected office bearers and said this election will inspire the nationalist and patriotic people of the country to carry forward the current movement.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Tariqul Islam, Ashraf Hossain, Haris Chowdhury, Amanullah Aman MP, Zahiruddin Swapan were present on the occasion.

Followers of Charmonai pir postpone march toward Dewanbagh

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 24: Followers of Charmonai pir here today decided to postpone their procession toward Dewanbagh for three months after a meeting with the local administration, reports UNB.

The administration assured them that the government would fulfil their five-point demand in phases within three months.

Local DC Abdur Rahman presided over the meeting at his office. Divisional Commissioner Mohammad Nizamuddin, Dhaka Range DIG Matru Rahman, president of Narayananganj Chamber of Commerce A K M Selim Osman, district Awami League president Prof Nazma Rahman and president of Unislamic Activities Resistance Committee Moulana Abdul Awal were present.

Meanwhile, eight magistrates were given the charge of eight vulnerable points as tension gripped the town after Charmonai and Dewanbagh 'pirs' called for gatherings at the same place next Monday.

Four platoons of BDR and huge number of policemen brought from different parts of the district were deployed in the town and its adjoining areas to avert any unwanted incident.

But agitated followers of Charmonai pir gathered on DIT premises after Juma prayers ignoring presence of law enforcers. They demonstrated and chanted slogans against Dewanbagh pir who allegedly gave some contradictory statements on Allah and His Rasul.

KCC commissioner arrested

From Staff Correspondent
KHULNA, Dec 24: Mohammad Hossain Mukta, KCC commissioner elected from Ward No. 31 was arrested by police this evening from his residence at Labonchora.

Expelled from Awami League last year, Mukta allegedly obstructed arrest of some terrorists from Labonchora this morning.

Police said he was giving shelter to the alleged terrorists for which they could not be arrested. Mukta also attacked police with the help of his armed cadres, it was alleged.

Meanwhile, supporters of the ward commissioner went on rampage for about an hour at different places of the city protesting the arrest.

They exploded cocktails and chased the pedestrians with arms.

Shopkeepers at Picture Palace Square, Dakbonglow Square, Sir Iqbal Road and K D Ghose Road downed their shutters in panic.

Mukta is an accused in several criminal cases, police said.



Two members of the Christian community decorate X-mas tree at a city hotel yesterday. —AFP photo

PM launches social security scheme for distressed women

TUNGIPARA (Gopalganj), Dec 24: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today launched a new social security scheme for the upkeep of widows and wives abandoned by husbands, reports UNB.

"Even if the distressed women have little earnings, they will get importance in the family and not feel neglected," she said at the launch of the programme here.

The prime minister said her government was trying its best to improve the lot of the down-trodden as well as for women's empowerment and this new programme is a headway to that end.

"I know the suffering of widows and forsaken women after talking to them during visit to different parts of the country," she said.

Under the new subsistence-allowance scheme, 2.65 lakh women of 40,311 wards, five from each, across the country will be given Tk 100 every month. Once enlisted for the allowance, each of the helpless women will get it during the rest of her lifetime.

Initially, the government has allocated Tk 25 crore for the new programme which will take retrospective effect from September.

The prime minister formally launched the programme today by handing over Tk 400 each to 245 widows and distressed women of Gopalganj district along with arrears.

One of the recipients, Rekha Rani Mondal, addressed the function acclaiming it as a

unique and rare example of welfare for the widows and distressed women of society.

"In the past none had thought of our welfare. It is prime minister Sheikh Hasina who has some feelings for us. Today I am so happy," a delighted Rekha told the gathering.

Hasina said her government also had introduced the old-age pension before, which is now helping some 431,100 people for sustenance.

The government is spending Tk 50 crore annually to implement the superannuation programme.

She hoped that the allowance would help the recipients bring about change in their socioeconomic conditions by adopting small-scale income-generation works, including poultry farming and cultivation of vegetables.

"At every Eid our government helps distressed women with lump sum," she told the function, adding that this year also her government would distribute money among the poor women instead of spending those in the name of Ifar party.

From the venue, Hasina went to her ancestral home and placed wreaths at the mazar of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She offered *fateha* there and special *munaajat* praying for eternal peace of the departed soul and seeking divine blessing for the peace and progress of the nation.

2 more activists of 'Jihadi' group held in Jhalakati

JHALAKATI, Dec 24: Two more activists of 'Jihadi' group of so-called 'Santitas Nirmul Committee' were arrested from village Baurkati in Uzipur thana Thursday night, reports UNB.

The arrested were identified as Mozahar Ali, 50, and Miraz, 27.

Police said they raided the village and nabbed the two with a hand mike and some documents relating to Jihadi Group.

Earlier on the day, police arrested 17 activists of Jihadi Group.

Convention

From page 1

A brief scuffle between the participants and the vandals ensued. The vandals fled away. Some of the participants, enraged due to police inaction, swooped on the policemen, injuring four of them, and ransacked a few vehicles passing through the Maulana Bhashani Road in front of the IEB.

Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells and arrested four of the participants.

The convention began again after a short while.

After about 20 minutes, gunmen from adjacent Suhrawardy Uddyan Park attacked the venue, firing shots from sawn-off rifles, shot guns and pistols and blasting crackers.

The panicked participants ran for life, some taking shelter inside the IEB complex and some others hiding themselves wherever possible. Some including this correspondent fled on the ground to escape gun shots.

Kader Siddique who was then speaking attempted to restore order. But random gunshots compelled him to leave the venue in a hurry, taking Dr. Kamal Hossain and some other leaders along with him at about 11:40 am.

It was then free for the armed goons who 'conquered' the venue and foiled the convention.

They ransacked the podium, smashed portraits of Moulana Bhashani and Shamsul Haq founder president and secretary of the then Awami League and took away the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, hung in the background of the podium.

They also damaged vehicles parked inside the IEB premises and then left the venue after about 20 minutes' operation.

Police deployed there earlier to maintain order played the role of mute spectators.

Some of the participants claimed that the attackers were led by BCL Dhaka University President Sajjad Hussain. The BCL leaders when contacted later, denied the charge and said it was done followers of Siddique.

About 30 people were injured while fleeing the venue during the second attack. Some of them were injured with broken glass of vehicles spread over the Moulana Bhashani Sarak and others with bomb splinters.

After the second attack, Siddique went to the Jatiya Press Club with leaders including Dr. Kamal Hossain and some of his followers and announced the name of his political party - Krishak Samik Janata League -- at about 12:40 pm in presence of a small gathering.

Addressing the gathering and later talking to newsmen Siddique blamed the government for foiling the convention.

Dr. Kamal said the Awami League government has no right to continue in power anymore after such brazen display of muscle by activists of its students' wing. Both Siddique and Dr. Kamal vowed to wage a movement against taking the people with them.

When Siddique came to the convention venue again after the Juma prayer and started addressing a small gathering, unidentified gunmen fired gunshots and exploded bombs on Moulana Bhashani Sarak at about 2:15 pm. He left the venue hurriedly.

This was the third phase of attack on the convention. The gunmen came in a vehicle without a number plate and sped away firing shots and exploding bombs. Witnesses said police was then standing nearby but did not take any action against the gunmen.

Earlier, the convention began at 10 am with hoisting of National Flag and the flag of the new party, and recitations from the Holy Quran and the Geeta.

Dr. Kamal Hossain was the chief guest and Language Movement veteran Abdul Matin was the special guest at the inaugural session.

Two representatives from BNP - Haris Chowdhury and Zahiruddin Swapan attended the convention. Zafferullah Chowdhury of Gono Shasthya Kendra and Enayeturrah Khan, Editor of Holiday were also present on the occasion.

The Second Secretary of Russian embassy here was also present.

The second session of the convention which was scheduled to be held close-door at the IEB auditorium, was not held.

The scheduled close-door session will now be held in the open," Siddique announced when he again came at the venue after the Juma prayers.

Indian plane hijacked

From page 1

Sikhs. Pakistani officials, anxious to avoid any accusation of connections with militants, stressed they had been forced to allow the plane to land at Lahore as it was running out of fuel.

The pilot of the hijacked aircraft informed us the plane had almost exhausted its fuel," Pakistani foreign office spokesman Tariq Altaf told state television.

The official Associated Press of Pakistan also reported that the hijackers told the control tower they had killed four people.

"In a radio communication to the control tower, they said they had already killed four persons on board," the news agency said.

Several foreign nationals, including eight Nepalese, four Swiss, four Spaniards, one Canadian, one Belgian and one Japanese man, as well as 150 Indians, were on board, the passenger manifest showed.

No names were immediately released. Four of the passengers were children.

A senior Pakistani security official told AFP the hijackers had demanded food and fuel at Lahore. The hijackers were also asking for medical aid, according to Indian Civil Aviation Secretary Gupta.

"We cannot stop these things (medical assistance, water). They are being granted," he said.

Pakistan's top military spokesman, Brigadier Rashid Qureshi, earlier said the hijackers intentions were not yet known.

"They have not really given us their intentions yet," he said. Indian air traffic control sources said the plane was hijacked by at least five men after taking off at 5:00 p.m. (1130 GMT) from Kathmandu's Tribhuvan International Airport.

Officials said the hijackers took control the moment the plane entered Indian airspace and neared the northern city of Lucknow at around 5:50 p.m. (1220 GMT). The Indian air force immediately scrambled fighter jets.

Civil aviation officials initially received a radio message from the seized plane saying the hijackers wanted it flown to Lahore.

Pakistan denied landing permission and the plane, which was running low on fuel, touched down at Amritsar at 7:05 p.m. (1335 GMT).

The refuelling started when the hijackers threatened to start killing passengers and even warned they would blow up the plane if anything else but oil tankers came anywhere near," an Indian air traffic control source said.

A Pakistani aviation official said: "The hijackers are fully kited with weapons and it seems they took advantage of lax security at Kathmandu airport to sneak in the arsenal. So far no militant group has claimed responsibility."

AP adds: Bursts of gunfire continued throughout the night after soldiers rampaged through the capital in a revolt apparently sparked by grievances over pay and living conditions.

As darkness fell Thursday, gunfire echoed near the national television and radio stations, which went off the air without explanation in the afternoon. Soldiers, some in uniform and others in T-shirts and caps, surrounded both centers.

Soldiers blocked off major roads leading from Abidjan. At least one tank was seen, and the thud of explosions could be heard from the suburbs.

Ivory Coast, a country of 19 million people, has long been considered a model of West African stability. But political and social turmoil has risen steadily ahead of presidential elections scheduled for October next year.

Key installations at Chittagong Y2K compliant

An audit and review team of Y2K Emergency Centre expressed general satisfaction over the preparations of some important installations at Chittagong to face the apprehended millennium bug, reports UNB.

These included Chittagong Port, Bangladesh Shipping Corporation and its ship Banglar Kollol; Eastern Refinery, Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Factory, WASA, Razon Power Station, some high-tech establishments of Bangladesh Navy, an artillery centre of Bangladesh Army, Chittagong Customs and M A Hannan International Airport.

During its visit to Chittagong the team, led by national Y2K coordinator and Bangladesh Computer Council executive director Dr Abdus Sobhan, had meetings with senior officials of the installations about their contingency plans.

The team hoped the Chittagong Port, Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Factory, Chittagong WASA and movement of BSC's ships will not be affected by the computer glitch.

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"As of now, President Henri Konan Bedie is no longer the president of the republic," the general told journalists as he taped a message to the nation at the radio headquarters in the economic capital.

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Khaleda condemns attack on convention

BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia condemned the armed attack that foiled Kader Siddique's convention to launch a new political party in the city yesterday.

Reiterating her demand for resignation of the government, she said fresh general elections can ensure restoration of the democracy in the country.

Besides, four other left leaning political parties through separate press statements yesterday also condemned the armed attack.

Gano Forum, Workers' Party, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and Ganotantrik Majdoor Party blamed the government for the attack.

Bethlehem crowded

BETHLEHEM, West Bank, Dec 24: On the eve of the last Christmas of the millennium, the town of Jesus's birth was thronged with pilgrims and tourists on Friday amid a heavy Palestinian security presence, reports AFP.

Hundreds of pilgrims -- Russians, Americans, Italians, Koreans and Africans, many of them elderly and in groups -- gathered early in Manger Square outside the sixth-century Church of the Nativity before stooping to enter the low doorway.

The square was filling fast hours ahead of the traditional midnight mass to be celebrated at the adjacent St Catherine's church by the head of the Roman Catholic church in the Holy Land in front of a host of religious and political dignitaries.

Khulna AL

From page 1

League challenged the expulsion order declaring it ultra vires of the party constitution as the charges lack specific evidence. They said Hafiz was "second to none" in the youth front of Awami League as long as dealing with the Opposition parties is concerned.

On the other hand, leaders of both district and city Awami League defended the expulsion as "proper and befitting" through several press statements and termed Hafiz a terrorist.

Meanwhile, sources at the KMP said both Haman Sharif and Hafizur Rahman have been identified as armed terrorists.

"We are looking for Hafiz on several counts," said a top official of KMP today. He said Hafiz has been absconding since the day of his expulsion.



A disappointed and dejected Kader Siddique leaving the venue of the convention yesterday. (Right) Angry followers of Siddique chase and beat up police for having played the role of 'silent spectators' during the armed attack on the venue of the convention. — Star photo

Shikdar's men kidnap, torture witness

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, Dec 24: A witness in a murder case against notorious terrorist Ershad Shikdar was kidnapped and tortured by the armed cadres of Shikdar, police said.

Severely stabbed, Golam Mostafa, 45, a businessman, is now being treated at the Khulna Medical College Hospital.

Police yesterday rescued him from a house in Jorhagate area. Mostafa, kidnapped from ghat area, was beaten up by iron rods and then stabbed several times by Shikdar's men, police said.

The kidnappers, however, managed to escape, police added.

A case has been lodged with Sonadanga thana in this connection.

Meanwhile, sources informed, necessary arrangements are yet to be made for setting up a special court here for trying cases against Ershad Shikdar and his accomplices.

The judge of the court is also yet to be named, they said, adding the trial scheduled to start from the first week of January is likely to be delayed.

A KMP source said that a total of forty cases have so far been recorded against Shikdar with different police stations in the Khulna City and Rupsha thana of the district.

Most of these cases are ready for trial, the source said. But delay in beginning the trial may discourage the complainants and witnesses as most of them are 'feeling insecure with the

passage of time.' Meanwhile, Mokhesure Rahman and Sarwar Alam Sarker, posted to KMP recently as the Additional Police Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner respectively, are reportedly trying to cancel their transfer orders.

They are to replace A H M Nuruddin and Azad Chowdhury, the two alleged beneficiaries of Ershad Shikdar. The two new officers are yet to join KMP.

Services of 96 engrs: Ministry now in a fix

By Staff Correspondent

The Ministry of Establishment is now in a fix to determine the status of services of 96 Thana and Assistant District Engineers.

The Ministry of Establishment has transferred those engineers of different projects under Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) from the revenue sector to various development projects.

The engineers were earlier transferred to revenue projects from development project 5 to 14 years ago, according to sources.

The Ministry of Establishment in a recent letter has asked the authorities concerned to explain how the 96 engineers were transferred to revenue sector from development projects and why they had been transferred again to development projects.

According to sources, the complexity arose when the 96 engineers prayed to the Ministry of Establishment to make their service permanent. But now they are no longer under the Ministry of Establishment at all!

Changes in Congress Working Committee

Sonia's bid to infuse dynamism

From Pallab Bhattacharya

NEW DELHI, Dec 24: Less than a month after an introspection committee submitted its report on the worst electoral defeat of India's main opposition Congress, the party chief Sonia Gandhi yesterday effected key organisational changes seeking to infuse dynamism in the party and consolidate her hold on it further.

Most of the changes in the Congress Working Committee, highest policy-making forum of the party, and the party secretariat, announced just an hour before Sonia Gandhi hosted a grand litar party, were along expected lines.

The changes not only signal changing power equations in the party but also Sonia's message that she wants to work with a team she trusts.

Veteran party leaders K Natwar Singh, a former minister of state for External Affairs, N D Tiwari and Motilal Vora have been included in the working committee.

Among the special invitees to the committee meetings, senior party leader and former spokesman V N Gadgil has been dropped apparently because of his recent suggestion to Sonia Gandhi that Congress reviews its policies on secularism and socialism in the light of its poor showing in recent parliamentary elections.

Senior Congress leaders P M Sayeed, Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha, Bhajan Lal and Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir join the Working Committee as invitees.

While Bhajan Lal's inclusion is seen as a move to unite Congress factions in northern state of Hariyana ahead of assembly elections early next year, Jamir comes in keeping in mind the party interests in the north eastern state Congress sources said.

Significant changes have been made in the set-up of All India Congress Committee (AICC) also as Sonia Gandhi dropped three party General

Secretaries Pranab Mukherjee, Madhavrao Scindia and R K Dhawan, a Gandhi family loyalist since long.

Their places have gone to Motilal Vora, Mohsina Kidwai, Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha (upper house of parliament) and Prabha Rao, a senior leader from Maharashtra state.

Scindia and Mukherjee had expressed their desire to be relieved of responsibilities of party general secretaries in view of their 'heavy' responsibilities in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha respectively.

Scindia is Congress Deputy Leader in Lok Sabha and Mukherjee is party Deputy Chief Whip in Rajya Sabha.

Interestingly, two younger leaders Rajesh Pilot and Kamal Nath, who were tipped to become general secretaries, have been ignored. Both had recently called for a 'generational change' in Congress leadership in the wake of Congress electoral debacle.

Coup in Ivory Coast

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