

What's on today

Roundtable: Dhaka MBA Association will hold a roundtable conference on "Management of Education in Bangladesh." Chief guest: A S H K Sadeque, Minister for Education, Venue: Hotel Purbani International. Time: 2.30 pm.

Dress exhibition: Exhibitions of ready-to-wear garments by Kay Kraft, Henry's Heritage and Daman are going on. Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 3.00 pm to 8.00 pm.

Jewellery exhibition: An exhibition of jewellery designed by Abrarur Rahman is going on. Venue: Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 3.00 pm to 8.00 pm.

..... and tomorrow

Dress exhibition: A 8-day dress exhibition by Munmun Collection will be inaugurated. Venue: Cafeteria of Alliance Francaise de Dhaka. Time: 3.00 pm to 8.00 pm.

Weather

Dry weather likely

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry over the country with partly cloudy sky over Chittagong division during the next 12 hours till 6 pm today, reports UNB.

Fog may occur along river basin of the country during the morning and night temperature may remain nearly unchanged across the country, according to Met Office.

The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 27.5 degree Celsius at Chittagong and the lowest 10.8 degree at Srimongal.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5:19 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:40 am.

Maximum and minimum temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius	Humidity in percentage
	Max	Min
Dhaka	25.4	13.9
Chittagong	27.5	16.8
Rajshahi	25.2	13.4
Rhulna	27.2	14.4
Barisal	26.4	13.7
Sylhet	25.8	15.0
Cox's Bazar	27.0	18.8

Bombs explode in front of Ctg Circuit House

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 25: Two bombs exploded in front of Chittagong Circuit House at Kazir Dewri tonight, but no casualty was reported, police said.

Police said some miscreants hurled bombs in front of the Circuit House at 8-30 pm in a bid to create panic.

Additional police force was deployed around the Circuit House after the incident.

However, none was arrested in this connection till filing of this report at 10-30 pm.

Attack on Siddique's convention nothing but an arranged game: BCL

Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday protested newspaper reports, which held BCL responsible for the attack on supporters of Kader Siddique in the convention of his new party on Friday, reports BSS.

BCL President Bahadur Bepari and General Secretary Ajoy Kar Khokon in a statement yesterday said that the attack on the "so-called" convention of Siddique was nothing but an arranged game.

Bird hunters

From page 1

The incident took place at village Char Simla village. The dead was identified as Saiful Islam (30) of Kherbandi village under Kaptai thana. The name of the Bangladeshi teacher is Askar Habib Chowdhury.

The bird hunters were travelling in a mechanised boat and were hunting guest birds in the Jamuna.

The villagers suspected them to be dacoits and asked them to stop. As the hunters did not respond, one of the villagers opened fire. The hunters retaliated, killing Saiful on the spot.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, by arresting eight of the villagers. A case has been filed with the Sadar thana.

Nasim visits Azmir Sharif

CALCUTTA, Dec 25: Home, Post and Telecommunications Minister Mohammad Nasim visited Azmir Sharif and offered munajat at the mazar of Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti. He also offered Jumma prayer there yesterday, reports BSS.

Earlier, Mohammad Nasim was taken to the holy mazar by a special aircraft of the Indian government.

Hasina attends children's function

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina attended a colourful children's function yesterday morning at her Ganobhaban residence, reports BSS.

The function, dedicated to the children of the next millennium, was participated by a good number of children including toddlers.

The prime minister also addressed them briefly.

Christmas Day celebrated

NARAYANGANJ, Dec 25: The Christian community today celebrated Christmas Day with due religious fervour and festivity, reports BSS.

To mark the occasion, the Christian devotees chalked out elaborate programmes that included decoration of Christmas trees, rendering carols and offering prayers at churches.

After special prayers, priests distributed the Holy Communion among the devotees.

We did it

From page 1

Some top BCL leaders when contacted denied this, but the activists and cadres confirmed that the 'operation' was done as per plan of their bosses. "Contradiction by top leaders is just a party strategy," one activist said.

At least 50 people including four journalists and four policemen were injured as the activists blasted crackers, fired shots and ransacked the podium making the participants flee the convention venue.

Kader Siddique Bir Uttam, expelled from Awami League for his tirade against the party chief, called the convention on the premises of the Engineers' Institution to launch a new party, Krishak Sramik Janata League.

DU authorities, when asked about alleged involvement of students in fanning Siddique's convention, said they did not receive any complaint in this regard.

Proctor Prof AKM Nurun Nabi rather asked why police did not take any action if students were found involved in violence.

Such activities by students definitely ruin the image of the university. The authorities can take action only if complaint is received from any quarter or the victims, he said.

IOJ hosts iftar for 4-party alliance

Islami Oikya Jote, a component of the 4-party opposition alliance, hosted an iftar party at Zafraan Restaurant in the city yesterday, reports UNB.

JP chairman HM Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Prof Golam Azam attended the party while BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia was represented by vice-chairman Shamsul Islam and joint secretary general Abdullah Al Noman.

The BNP chairperson could not attend the party as she was pre-occupied with OCB, Association of Overseas Correspondents in Bangladesh, IOJ assistant secretary general AMR Abdul Matin told reporters.

Though the IOJ chief Shaikhul Hadith Azizul Huq had arranged the iftar party he could not attend it due to his illness, said IOJ vice-president Moulana Mohiuddin Khan who represented the party chief.

Criticising reports in a section of the press about IOJ's stand in the current movement and absence of its chief, he said IOJ was very much in movement and would remain in all street agitation in the future.

After the iftar and Magreb prayers, the leaders of the alliance in a brief meeting protested and condemned killing of an opposition activist in Sylhet yesterday and demanded punishment of the killers.

Abdus Salam of BNP, Prof MA Matin and Kazi Firoz Rashid of JP, Moulana Matir Rahman Nizami, and Kader Molla of Jamaat and Fazlul Huq Amine and ARM Abdul Matin of IOJ, Shaiful Alam Prodhan of JAGPA, Sheikh Shawkat Hossain Nilu of PNP and Nurul Huq Majumdar of National Democratic Alliance were among others who attended the iftar party.

Plea to reinstate UCBL employees

By Staff Correspondent

The Pubali Bank Employees Union (CBA) has alleged that a large number of employees and officials of the United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) have been sacked on allegation of support for Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu, according to a press release.

The CBA release has condemned the Acting President Bakhtiar Rahman and Secretary General Abul Kashem for their alleged hand in the sacking and appealed to the authorities to reinstate the officials and employees.

Cold wave felt in Lalmonirhat

LALMONIRHAT, Dec 25: The district experienced a light cold wave for about half an hour yesterday, reports UNB.

The cold wave mostly swept through the outlying char areas from 5:10 am to 5:35 am creating panic among the distressed people.

Meanwhile, the district relief department has distributed 1,040 pieces of warm blankets and 3,000 metres of cloths in each thana.

However, a local source said the quantum of relief is quite inadequate to meet the demand.



Sylhet Bibhagiya Chhatra Sammilani brought out a procession in the city yesterday calling upon the authorities of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology to halt activities of extremists.

RU teachers hail decision of renaming halls

RAJSHAHI, Dec 25: Some

Rajshahi University teachers today hailed the decision of naming halls and academic buildings of Sylhet Science and Technology University after renowned persons like Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and Jahanara Imam, reports UNB.

A total of 251 teachers of Rajshahi University in a joint statement also condemned the alleged death threat to some SSTU teachers and bomb attacks on their residences by "anti-liberation and fundamentalist forces."

The signatories to the statement included former RU Vice Chancellor Prof Abdul Khaleq, Prof Shahidul Islam, Prof Abdur Rahman, Prof Moklesur Rahman, Dr ABM Zahurul Haq.

Tk 2.90cr Agar Forestation Project taken up in Sylhet

SYLHET, Dec 25: Govern-

ment has taken up an 'Agar Forestation Project' at a cost of Tk 2.90 crore in the region to produce 'Atar,' an essence widely used by Muslim throughout the world, reports UNB.

The project, first of its kind in the country, was initiated by Forest and Environment Ministry in 1998-99 fiscal year and is expected to be completed by 2004-2005 fiscal year.

Official sources said under the project, Agar gardens will be created on 800 hectares in hilly lands of Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Sylhet, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong districts.

Of the total land, 345 hectares will be brought under Sylhet, Moulvibazar and Habiganj districts and 200 hectares in Cox's Bazar and five hectares in northern Chittagong.



Islami Oikya Jote (IOJ) held an iftar party at a local hotel yesterday for leaders of the opposition four-party alliance.

44 arrested on various charges in Chittagong

CHITTAGONG, Dec 25: Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) arrested 44 miscreants and recovered arms and ammunition and stolen clothes from different parts of the city during the past 24 hours ending at 6 pm today, reports BSS.

On a secret tip, Double Mooring police raided Matabbar Bari at Mogbultooly and recovered two American made guns and 82 rounds of 303 rifle bullets and two cartridges from the house, Abdul Kader and Madu Sowdagar, suspected terrorists, fled from the house sensing the presence of police.

Double Mooring police also recovered one country-made gun and one cartridge and arrested Kamal Uddin, 25, in this connection from Agrabad area.

CMP detectives and port police recovered stolen clothes and other goods worth about Taka 400,000 from a shop at Zahur Hawker Market under Kotwali thana and arrested one SM Golam Kibri in this connection.

The clothes and some other valuable goods were stolen from a foreign company inside the Export Processing Zone last night.

Other police stations rounded up 42 others on various charges.

Sylhet violence: Hartal

From page 1

the town, officials said. Janaza of the deceased will be held at the Court Point tomorrow. Action Committee sources said.

The Action Committee at a brief rally at Court Point in the afternoon declared Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad 'persona non grata.'

The Action Committee is comprised of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat, IOJ, Khelafat Majlis and Jamiat.

The All Party Action Committee demanding withdrawal of names of different halls and buildings in the Shahjalal University of Science & Technology called the day long hartal in the district today while 'Muktijoddha-Janatar Mancha' backed by ruling Awami League and left parties called a Grand Rally in support of the names at the Registry Maidan (ground).

Foreign Minister Alhaj Abdus Samad Azad was present as chief guest at the rally of 'Muktijoddha Janatar Mancha' with district Muktijoddha Sangsad Commander Enam Ahmed Chowdhury in the chair. The rally at the Registry Maidan was addressed, among others, by Syeda Zubunnesa Haque MP, Shah Azizur Rahman MP, Workers Party Secretary General Rashed Khan Menon, JSD General Secretary Hasanul Haque Inu, Samyabadi Dal Secretary General Dilip Barua.



Children seen making fun with an elephant all day long at Hotel Sonargaon in the city yesterday as part of celebration of Holy Christmas there.

Commentary

From page 1

the right to form political parties are all being crumpled under the dictatorial desires of the ruling party which does not want to see any dissent to whatever they want to do.

What has happened at Kader Siddique's political convention is an example of abuse of political power of the most vile and fearful type. The right of a ruling party dissident to go his own way and form a political party was not only denied but was forcibly prevented by use of armed cadres and terror tactics that was reminiscent of the storm troopers of Hitler's Nazi Party of the early 1940's.

There is no doubt in any independent observer's mind that it was the Student League cadres who carried out the armed attack on Siddique's meeting. It occurred in three phases over a nearly three hour period. All the while police looked on as mute spectators and swung into action only when Siddique's men fell on the police in disgust for the latter's partisan role. What has the ruling Awami League revealed by its attack on Siddique's conference? In our view the following:

1. It will NOT allow democratic culture of forming dissent to flourish.

2. It will NOT shy away from breaking the law or taking the law into its own hands in order to punish anybody who dares to oppose it.

3. It harbours its own armed cadres and will resort to armed terrorism to destroy opposition.

4. It has no respect for the Constitutionally guaranteed freedoms, especially the right to form political parties.

The first is a question of mindset. Democracy is an idea that cannot be accepted in parts. There is nothing called my democracy and your democracy. It is either everybody's democracy or of nobody's.

Awami League seems to believe it is its democratic right to "force" somebody else to toe its line. The ruling Awami League's behaviour in the Tangail by-election clearly revealed the dangerous extent to which it was willing to go to keep Siddique from getting elected. And now the armed attack on his convention further reinforces the widespread belief that AL does not believe in opposition and permits it only so far it cannot help it. And where it can help it, it destroys it by force, as in Siddique's case.

The second and the third are questions of respect for law. Doesn't the AL leaders know that it is a violation of all the fundamental rules of the democratic game to physically attack an opponent? Don't they know that muscle power and the moral power of democracy are antithetical to one another in the most fundamental of ways? Therefore the propensity to opt for brute force to cow down an opponent can only mean that there exists a fundamental dis-

respect for law in the ruling party's attitude and its way of doing things. Then again when the PM repeatedly calls for the respect for law, and then reveals that her own party cadres carry guns and uses them to shoot political opponents in broad daylight. Then the question arises as to what sort of respect for law she talking about. Is it the law of the MIGHT against the law of the RIGHT that she wants us to respect?

Finally, we come to the most important question that we face today. Does our ruling party have any respect for the most fundamental legal framework of our country—namely the Constitution? If it does, then how could it let loose its armed gang against the peaceful convention of a dissident? Does the Constitution guarantee Kader Siddique the right to form a political party or not? If it does, as we all know, then by vandalising his convention the ruling party has revealed its inner disregard for the Constitution itself. And here lies, the most dangerous element in the ruling party's mindset. If it cares two hoots for the Constitution in the case of a single dissident, then how can we expect it to respect the Constitution when the far bigger question of holding a free and fair election comes?

To say that we condemn the attack on Siddique's convention is hardly expressing our deep disgust for what the ruling Awami League has done. It has acted in a fascistic manner violating not only democratic norms but also establishing laws regarding the fundamental rights of citizens that guarantee their lives and their property.

When the BCL cadres were shooting randomly at the convention participants they must have been given to think that they were above the law and that the Constitution, the courts, the parliament, the police force, and the right to life of every citizen meant NOTHING, and that his gun was THE LAW, and those who supplied him with it, were the ultimate guardians of what was RIGHT and WRONG. This is a sure recipe for destroying democracy. Awami League did it once in the form of BAKSAL. We hope, and still believe, that it will not do it again.

Kader Siddique is not the issue here. RIGHT TO DISSENT IS. The whole democratic system hinges on this ONE CORE right. The Soviet system may have had many benefits, but it collapsed for the absence of this single right—the right to think and behave differently and provide alternative options for the nation. A nation dies from within when diversity is throttled and degenerates into slavery. If the ruling Awami League does not understand and respect POLITICAL DISSENT then we will have to conclude that it is not fit to lead a political party of the 21st Century, and as such not fit to rule us.

Khaleda willing to talk

From page 1

This is to protest the Speaker's 'partisan' conduct, denying BNP members' right to speak in the House, and ruling party's slanderous, false and indecorous remarks against herself, her family, former President Ziaur Rahman and BNP. She told the Dhaka correspondents of foreign media.

There is absolutely no atmosphere to sit in Parliament. Parliament is being used for BNP's character assassination."

But, she said, "We didn't boycott Parliament. We didn't say that we would never go back. We are staying off the Parliament session. BNP members are attending Parliamentary Standing Committee meetings on permission from us."

Furnishing statistics that she was present only for 22 days out of 22 working days (roughly) in the present parliament, a correspondent asked whether it indicated that she did not feel comfortable with the parliamentary system. "It's not true," she said straightaway and argued that she had been in her parliament office and listened to the House proceedings.

The opposition leader repeatedly alleged that the ruling party used parliament to propagate filthy, slanderous words against herself and the members of her family. But the Speaker did not take any action.

Besides, no important issues were discussed in Parliament and the Speaker denied BNP members the microphones and even switched off her's. Since she was not allowed to speak in parliament and there was no environment, she felt it better to work for the party and make public contacts, Khaleda said.

The former prime minister blamed her successor for influencing the Speaker and interfering in his conduct of the House. "But I did not interfere in (former Speaker) Razzak Ali Saheb in conducting Parliament."

To a question about an unseemly cycle of hartals called by two major parties—BNP and Awami League—by turn in tit-for-tat action damaging the country's interest, the former Prime Minister said while in power she had opposed strikes. Now in the opposition, she does not like hartal, she claimed.

Khaleda referred to several demands put forward by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, which include Prime Minister's apology for casting aspersions on her, saying that her party would consider return to parliament if the demands were met.

Asked if her party MPs and leaders split on the question of joining the House and whether the decision of abstention was taken at BNP parliamentary party, Begum Zia said there was no difference of opinion among the lawmakers on abstention

from the House. She said the decision was taken at the last meeting of the BNP parliamentary party.

Asked about dispute between Jatiya Party and BNP on question of resignation of opposition MPs from Parliament, Begum Zia said: "We are just abstaining from going to Parliament. The resignation Letters of my party MPs are deposited with me. When we will deem it fit, we will resign after consultation with party MPs."

Begum Zia avoided a direct reply when a correspondent wanted to know what changes she found in Ershad overnight whom she once put behind bars for seven years in the Janata Tower case and whom she used to call "autocrat, corrupt and licentious."

She handed over the microphone to party secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan to reply. Bhuiyan said: When dacoits attack a village, all villagers unitedly build resistance against the dacoits and free the village.

Asked how she looked upon Jamaat leader Prof Gulam Azam who opposed the Liberation War and whether BNP's liberal politics got bogged down for launching movement with anti-liberation and autocratic forces, Begum Zia said the country is under parliamentary democracy. It is the people who would decide whom to accept and whom to boycott.

Making points in favour of her movement in league with Jamaat-e-Islami, she said Jamaat is a political party, it took part in the elections and people voted them to parliament. "I don't find anything wrong in sitting with them and launching movement."

She said while BNP was in power, Awami League joined hands with Jamaat in staging movement against BNP. "If the people accept them, what is the difficulty to sit with them? Besides, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman saheb had pardoned them all."

Asked for comment about Gulam Azam's remarks that the spirit of 1947 that split the British India is the same as of the spirit of 1971, Khaleda said BNP is an independent political party and has its own manifesto. "We don't know who says what," she said. "We are united to establish a people's government and solve their problems."

Gulam Azam made the remarks at the iftar party of Jamaat-e-Islami on December 23 where Begum Zia was present among other top leaders of the four-party opposition alliance.

Earlier in her written statement, Begum Zia portrayed a dismal picture of the economy, law and order and "political repression" on the opposition.

OCAB president Matir Rahman Chowdhury chaired the briefing and general secretary Nadeem Qadir gave vote of thanks.



(From L to R) Rehnuma Amin, Samira Rahman and Sheikh Tina Salem of North South University, winners of the English Debate at the 4th Inter University Championships held at Jahangirnagar University recently, seen with their trophy.