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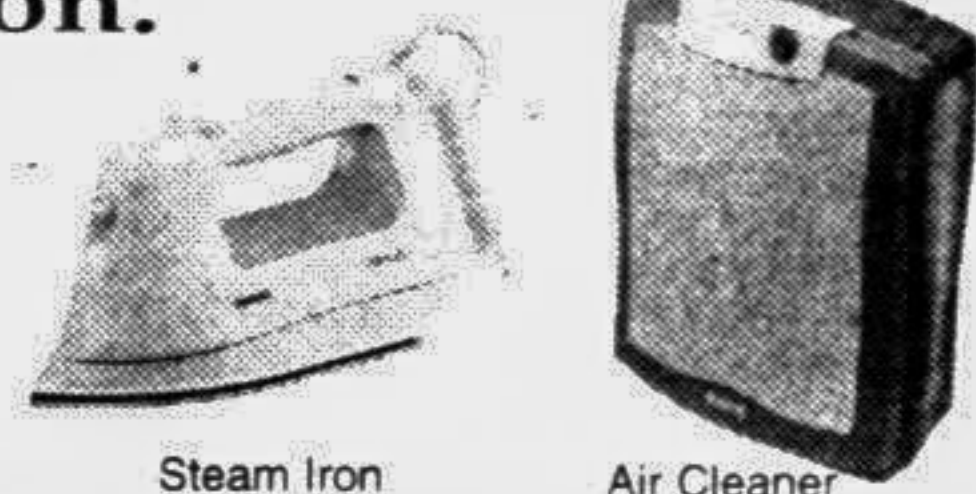
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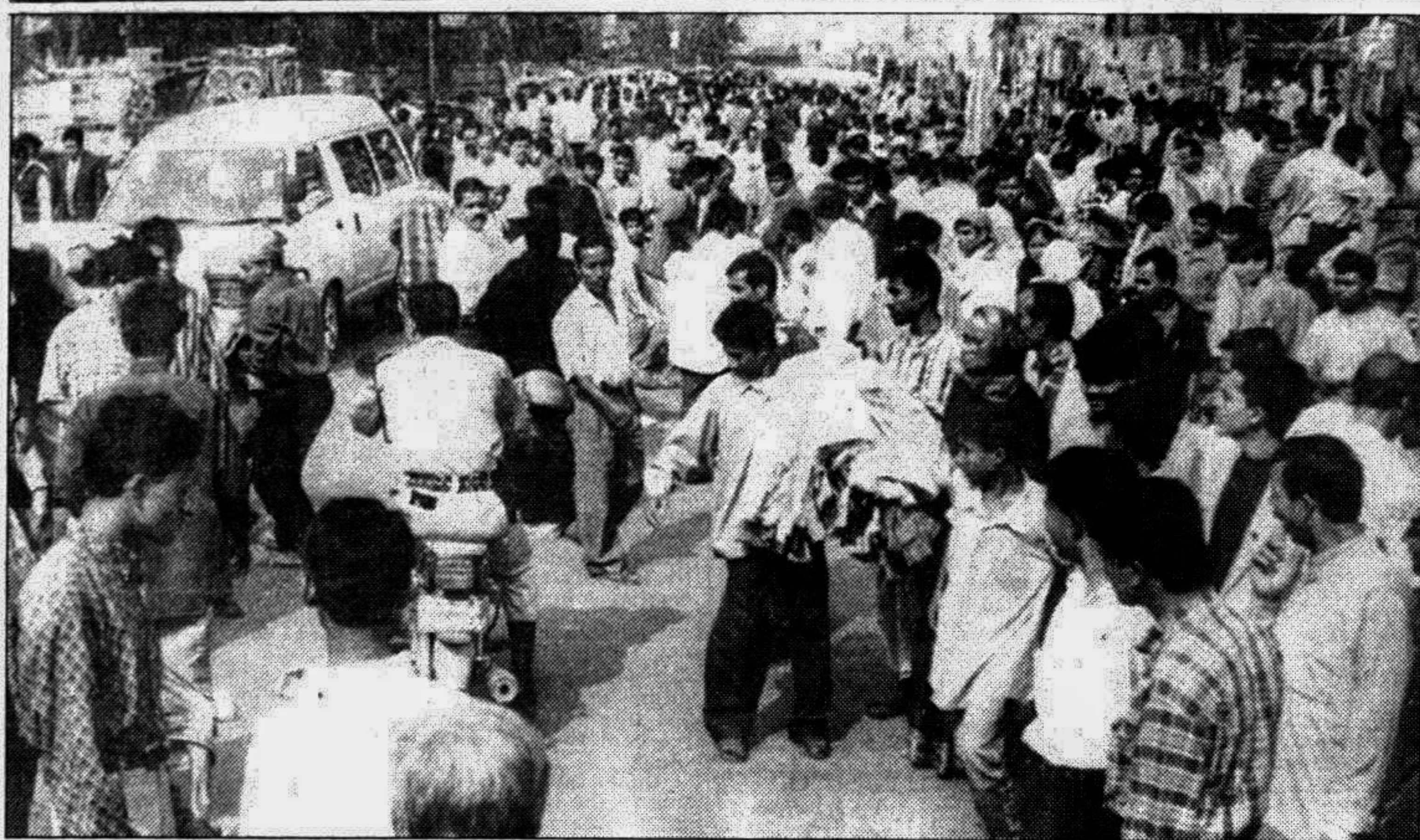
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Having failed to clear the roads and pedestrians' pavements around the GPO area, a desperate police sergeant drives his motorbike right through the makeshift hawkers' market yesterday. — Star photo

'Bring Ruma's killers to book'

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a press conference organised by Bangladesh Society For Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday demanded arrest and trial of the person responsible for killing housewife Kamrun Nahar Ruma.

They alleged that the victim Kamrun Nahar Ruma was provoked to commit suicide by her husband Major Md Ashraf Haidar through torture.

Ruma was found dead at her residence at Banani Army Staff Quarters on December 6.

They urged the authorities to hand over Maj Haidar to police.

Speakers blamed the army administration for not handing over Maj Haidar to police.

The press conference was addressed, among others, by Secretary General of BSEHR Advocate Sirina Huda, Advocate Elin. Chan and victim's brother Md Moniruzzaman.

AL extended meet tomorrow

A special extended meeting of the executive committee of Bangladesh Awami League will be held at Ganabhaban at 11 am tomorrow, reports BSS.

Party president and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will preside over the meeting.

Birth records can curb trafficking in women, children

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a discussion meeting in the city yesterday stressed the need for birth registration on women and children and their trafficking.

They were speaking on "Birth Registration: Law and Analysis of Social Situation", organised by Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA) at the office of the Voluntary Women Association (VWA).

Prof. M. S. Akbar MP, Chairperson of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Women and Children Affairs Ministry, speaking as chief guest suggested recognition to EPI card as birth registration card. This will also help prevent age lifting, a common practice in our society, he said.

Advocate Sirina Huda, who addressed the function as special guest, said birth registration will help protect rights of children. It should be made compulsory with legal provision for punishment for violators, and treated as identity card, she suggested.

Birth registration will also help rescue of children from brothels and determine the age of rape victims, she observed.

A survey should be conducted to evaluate the success of birth registration, introduced in the

country recently.

Advocate Saima Ali said birth registration started in some countries in 1886. Trafficking of women and children could be reduced through birth registration, she said.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Health Officer Sanjida Islam, Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, DCC ward Commissioner Rokeya Sahabuddin and Tatopi Bhoomik, a human rights activists from Calcutta also took part in the discussion, presided over by BNWL President Fouzia Karim Feroz.

Nirmul body to observe 'hated day'

Ekkatturer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee will observe 'hated day' today to denounce reemergence of an anti-liberation figure in Independent Bangladesh's political arena, reports UNB.

On this day in 1991, Ghulam Azam was made ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami. Since then, the Nirmul Committee has been observing the day as 'ghirina dibas' every year.

On the occasion, the Nirmul Committee will hold a rally at Central Shaheed Minar at 2 pm today.

Govt plans major changes in public exam system

The government decided to bring about major changes in public examination system, with new styles of question papers, from next secondary and higher secondary examinations, reports UNB.

A 10-point action plan has been taken up in this regard while some 600 question authors and moderators have already been given training for its implementation aimed at preventing copying and improving standard of education, an official announcement said.

The decisions were taken in a high-level meeting of the Education Ministry with Education Minister ASHK Sadique in the chair.

No questions would be made as it is in notebooks or guide-books available on the market, the meeting decided as a means of preventing unfair means at exams, which, of late, found an alarming spurt.

For better evaluation broad-type questions will be split into parts like Ka, Kha, Ga as of the subjects in Science for students of both Humanities and Commerce groups.

Figures of sums will be changed from the textbooks in making question papers of Mathematics.

It was also decided that the Public Examinations Act would be followed strictly from the next examinations and legal actions coupled with other measures would be taken to curb offences and negligence regarding examination affairs.

The meeting was told that Lesson Plan to be introduced for quality education and preventing unfair means at exams is at the final stage.

Secretary and Joint Secretaries of the Education Ministry, Directors-General of different departments and chairmen of education boards and Director of BANBAIS were present in the meeting.

Siddique yet to get permission for holding meeting at Paltan

By Staff Correspondent

The National Sports Council (NSC) is yet to give permission to Kader Siddique for holding a public meeting at Paltan Maidan (ground) on December 30, party sources said.

It is not possible to give permission for Siddique's meeting for paucity of time, said Obaidul Kader, State Minister for Youth, Sports and Cultural Affairs and also chairman of NSC when contacted by The Daily Star yesterday.

It takes at least two days for police clearance of the venue in the name of person, the minister said, adding Siddique's petition for holding a meeting at the Maidan reached the NSC yesterday. He said the petition should have reached the NSC at least one week earlier.

Siddique called the meeting at Paltan protesting vandalism at his convention at the Institution of Engineers Bangladesh where he floated the Bangladesh Krishak Samik Janata League (BKSJL) on Friday.

Leaders of BKSJL yesterday told The Daily Star that the director of the NSC told them they would have to discuss the issue with Council's president before giving permission.

Meanwhile, activists of the Bangladesh Chitra League allegedly beat up a BKSJL worker when he was passing through the Carzon Hall in a rickshaw with a loudspeaker announcing Siddique's meeting on December 30, a party press release said.

The BCL activists also took away the microphone and the rickshaw, the release added.

Extortionists slip through legal loopholes

By Chaitanya Chandra Halder

Punishment in extortion-related cases have been reduced due to legal procedure and changes in the law, said legal experts and officials of judiciary talking to The Daily Star recently.

Cases related to extortion and rape were covered under same provisions of the law in the Special Powers Act (SPA) of 1974 and these were tried by a judge of the rank of an additional district and sessions judge at the least.

The law also provided for maximum 14 years of rigorous imprisonment for extortion-related cases.

The Metropolitan Sessions Court recently transferred the extortion-related cases to the Magistrates' Court, which does not have the power to award punishment exceeding 10 years of imprisonment, sources said.

When Women and Children Repression Act 1995 was passed, rape-related law of the SPA was incorporated in the new Special Act of 1995 without

passing any provision for trial of extortion-related cases.

Cases related to extortion, however, were tried by the courts of District and Sessions Judge, Dhaka, till January last. Soon after creation of the Court of Metropolitan Sessions Judge, extortion related cases were transferred to those new courts which refused to entertain them.

The Metropolitan sessions Judge observed law did not allow trial of those cases in these courts. The Judge also ordered transfer of these cases to the court of the Metropolitan Magistrate.

About 1400 such cases were transferred to the court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Dhaka in four phases, sources said.

A circular issued by the Metropolitan Sessions Judge, Dhaka recently said, cases under section 385 of the penal code will now be tried by the lower courts, since the schedule 2 of the criminal procedure code had

not yet been amended.

Following the passage of the Women and children repression prevention act in 1995 cases related to rape were passed on to the new special courts.

Neither any new court was created for extortion-related cases nor the ordinance 4 (c) was amended before it was abolished from the SPA.

Since inception of the special courts for women and children, cases related to extortion have been kept outside the purview of the special tribunal courts, sources said.

The schedule 2 of the criminal procedure (Cr PC) deals with penalty of different crimes including that of extortion and rape.

A special tribunal court headed by a judge of the rank no less than that of the additional district and sessions judge was supposed to try the cases related to rape and extortion under the Special Powers Act of 1974, schedule 1, Ordinance 4 (c).

Nasaka, BDR trade fire on Teknaf border

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Dec 28: Border guards of Myanmar and Bangladesh exchanged fire at Tumburu point of Teknaf border last night, but no casualty was reported, BDR sources said.

The shootout began at 11-15 pm when Myanmar border guard Nasaka fired mortar shells targeting the Tumburu border outpost of BDR, the source added.

BDR immediately started firing in retaliation.

Nasaka fired 100 shells while BDR fired 86 bullets in the shootout that continued for five minutes, BDR source said.

After the exchange of fire, more BDR personnel were deployed at all BOPs along the 271 km border that separated the two neighbouring countries.

BDR sent a protest note to Nasaka authorities this morning and asked for holding a flag meeting immediately, sources said.

Cop-criminal collusion

By Staff Correspondent

One person, beaten up by a gang at New Market in the city, sought help from patrol police but police told him that they were helpless and advised him to come to a settlement with the gang.

Police also advised him not to go to police station.

Mizanur Rahman, owner of a leather goods factory, went to a phone booth at New Market yesterday evening to make a call. Some card phone sellers approached him to buy card phones from them. Rahman refused, saying he had some card phones.

All of a sudden they dragged him out of the booth and started beating. Rahman told this correspondent.

Left by the gang after the beating, Rahman approached patrol police for help. They told him that they were from Dhanmandi thana, which did not cover the area. The policemen also suggested him to wait for Lalbagh police who would visit the area shortly.

Rahman telephoned Lalbagh police who advised him to wait there. But no policeman came from Lalbagh thana even after two hours, Rahman alleged.

The victim then contacted traffic police, who advised him to come to a settlement with the gang.

Muhurirchar dispute: Border officials agree to draw line

From Shaikh Nazrul Islam

MUHURIGHAT CHECK-POST, Tripura (India), Dec. 28: A flag meeting between BDR and BSF today reached a consensus to allow Bangladeshi farmers to work in their lands in the disputed Muhurirchar along the Bangladesh-Indian frontier in Feni.

"We have agreed to make a working boundary in the 1.6 km border area," MM Khandewal, DIG, BSF Tripura told newsmen emerging from the eight-hour long meeting with his Bangladesh counterpart Col Showkat Hussain.

Bangladeshi would start enjoying facilities of cultivating 52 acres of disputed land after the agreement is signed in January next year.

The BSF DIG said they will maintain the possession on the basis of what they have had since 1993.

Copies of the agreement will

be sent to the respective governments for their approval.

The two sides will sit again at Majumderghat BOP, on the Bangladesh side on January 12, 2000, with an aim to sign the agreement, the officials said following today's meeting, hosted by the Indians.

Bangladeshi farmers were stopped from cultivating 53 acres of land at Muhurirchar from 1974. The two countries fought 59 times in nine phases during more than the last two decades in which at least five people were killed.

India is now in possession of about 22.5 acres of land near the disputed land while Bangladesh possesses 2.5 acres. But 52 acres of land were described 'disputed' since 1974.

Locals in the area said Indians with the help of BSF had cut major trees in the bordering areas, which could have been marked as the bank of the river.

Indians with the help of BSF, had dug trenches in disputed land and also put up bamboo fences, as they advanced during the last few years, local people alleged.

Muhuri river flows from India into Bangladesh at Nizaklikapur. The 1.6 km boundary was demarcated on the basis of Chakla-Roushanabad map.

The Mujib-Indira agreement of 1974 said that the main-stream of the river should be the boundary of 1.6 km border of the Muhuri river.

This is for the first time that the survey teams of the two countries visited the site.

The decision of fixing the 'working boundary' was taken as per the last DG level meeting between BDR and BSF held in Dhaka in October, sources said.

Incidents of border killing, kidnapping and snatching away of harvested crop mainly

See page 11 col 2

BNP's unacceptable response

From page 1

Khaleda Zia's part not to even acknowledge the PM's call. It is true that on the question of courtesy Khaleda Zia has far more to complain against the AL chief. We have written earlier and again yesterday that Sheikh Hasina's recent remarks on the BNP chief were, to say the least, in bad taste. It was in far worse taste to repeat them. With all that in the background we would not hesitate to say that BNP chief would have given a far more matured account of herself if she called back, thanking her for the call and suggesting what would have led to discussions across the table.

It is unbelievable on what trivial ground our politics is getting stuck. When the whole nation is anxious to see some sort of reason and sense return to politics, when our people are getting increasingly nervous at the rising crime and violence all over, and when the whole country is in the grip of a sweeping sense of frustration — at that time we see our two leaders refusing to meet one another either because an invitation is not sent by the appropriate officer, or because a phone call is not considered sincere enough. Can anything be more tragic? Should some silly issue of protocol take precedence over the nation's progress?

We cannot understand why the PM should not send an official letter to the Leader of the Opposition inviting her to talks. If Sheikh Hasina can go so far as to phoning Khaleda Zia thrice, then why can't she dictate to her PA a letter for her to sign? We had even suggested that letters could be exchanged at the Secretary-Generals' level about the talks, between Zillur Rahman and Mannan Bhuiyan. Then again, we cannot comprehend why the Leader of the Opposition cannot accept a per-

sonal phone call from the Prime Minister? Is the fate of our politics more important than her personal notion of propriety? Or it is her false sense of ego? What would have happened if she had called the PM back? Would her politics have collapsed? Would she look weak? Would she be denting her 'uncompromising leader' image? On the contrary, she would have looked matured and statesman like. She could have tried to convince the PM in changing her course of conduct. If nothing else, we would have at least seen that Khaleda Zia tried. At this stage we are forced to say that our Leader of the Opposition has gotten herself stuck on a negative note. She seems to know only one word. NO. No to everything. She refuses a TV debate with the PM. She refuses TV appearance with independent journalists of her choice. She refuses to attend Army Day function. The last one was because her card was not delivered properly. Even if it is true, can that be a sufficient ground to spurn what the nation expected to be an ice-breaking event. When the PM had publicly announced that she would take advantage of the occasion to invite Khaleda Zia for talks, it became more important for the BNP chief to attend. Of course the Army Day function is NOT a proper occasion to initiate talks. Of course a written invitation is far better than public declarations for talks. Of course Sheikh Hasina has been very insulting toward her, of course, of course.... But our question is how long are we going to be stuck with the personal and protocol issues, and when are we going to get down to the substantive issues, if ever. If Sheikh Hasina is being stubborn, does Khaleda Zia have to match it at home? Can't she take the moral high ground? Why should she do so? Because she wants to prove to us

— the voters — that she is more matured, more far-sighted, more patriotic, more modern, more compromising, more concerned with the welfare of the people than about going to power, etc. But alas! She is more interested in showing how she can be more stubborn, more vindictive, more destructive, more and more of everything negative aspect that our PM is showing. Normally a contest between leaders is to show who is better. In our case, it is to show who is worse.

We plead to both our leaders, please think of our poor, our malnourished children, our hardworking farmers and labourers, our oppressed women next time you decide to say NO. It is easy to create problems, harbour grudges, nurture hatred, find fault, reinforce prejudice, etc. It is far more difficult to put the past behind, compromise and co-operate for a better future.

Permit us to conclude with some instances of grand political compromises, done for the betterment of the people. We know how Nelson Mandela took Chief Buthe to win a foe. Remember that the Zulu chief actually plotted to kill Mandela and waged war against the ANC killing many fighters against the White racist regime. Closer to home, in Cambodia Hun Sen and Prince Ranarid who fought armed battles against each other, are now partners in the same government. More recently Magawati Sukarnoputri, having won by far the largest percentage of popular vote agreed to back Abdur Rahman Wahid as the President because she realised otherwise the army may take over. Leaders are always making compromises for the good of the country and the people that they are supposed to serve. In our case, we are not asking for such great acts of leadership as cited above. We are simply asking you both to come down from your high stung positions, get realistic, and talk about the next election, how to conduct it in a manner acceptable to both, and about building a tolerable future for our children. Is it too much to ask? After all it is with our votes that you are where you are.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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হজ্ব-যাত্রীদের জন্য বিমানের
ক্রেতা আয়োজন

নিউ জেনারেশন সুপারিসর বোয়িং-ট্রিপল সেভেন

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