

What's on today....

Opening ceremony: A new building of Social Marketing Company (SMC) will be inaugurated. Venue: SMC Building at 33, Banani C/A. Time: 4:30 pm.

Discussion meeting: Renowned journalist Arnold Jaiten will deliver a lecture on his experiences during the Liberation War. Arnold was situated in Bangladesh as a correspondent of AP during the war. He is the director of Freedom Forum-based in Hong Kong. Venue: Liberation War Museum, Segun Bagicha. Time: 5:00 pm.

Music and dance festival: The second-day of festival of Indian classical music and dance festival organised by the High Commission of India will be held. An Odissi dance performance by Sharmili Biswas and troupe and Sampoorna, a dance drama on temple dancers will be presented. Venue: National Museum auditorium. Time: 7:00 pm.

Seminar: A seminar will be held on Family Planning Programmes in the 21st century. Organisers: International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), ICDDR,B: Centre for Health and Population Research and Partners in Population Development. Venue: Sasakawa auditorium of ICDDR,B. Time: 8:00 am.

..... and tomorrow

Global Tiger Forum assembly: The inaugural session of the first general assembly meeting of the Global Tiger Forum will be held. Chief guest: Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Minister for Environment and Forest. Venue: Hotel Sheraton. Time: 10:00 am.

Music and Dance festival: Dhrupad (vocal) recital by Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha will be presented on the 3rd day of the Indian Classical Music and Dance Festival today. Venue: National Museum auditorium. Time: 7:00 pm.

Seminar: Chalchitra Film Society will hold a seminar on Films in Bangladesh: In Search of Origin. Jago Huva Saveria (Day Shall Dawn) will be screened at the end of the seminar. Venue: Goethe Institut, House No 10, Rd No 9, Dhanmondi R/A. Time: 5:30 pm.

Weather

Moderate fog likely

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

Thick fog may occur over the river basins of the country and moderate fog may occur elsewhere over the country during the morning.

Night temperature may fall by 1-3 degree Celsius over the country. Met office said.

The country's highest temperature recorded yesterday was 31.7 degree Celsius at Cox's Bazar and the lowest 11.0 degrees at Bogra and Syedpur.

The sun sets in the capital today at 5:34 pm and rises tomorrow at 6:43 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	25.8	17.5
Chittagong	29.4	16.5
Rajshahi	21.8	15.1
Khulna	27.8	18.2
Barisal	27.5	17.0
Sylhet	25.5	16.3
Cox's Bazar	31.7	17.5

HERE and THERE

BLIA installation ceremony

CHITTAGONG, Jan 16: Vice-Chancellor of Chittagong University Prof Abdul Mannan has underscored the importance of strict adherence to the essence of all religions for building up an abode of peace, reports BSS.

Prof Mannan was addressing as chief guest the installation ceremony of the newly elected office-bearers of Bangladesh chapter of Buddha's Light International Association (BLIA) at Swarnika Community Centre here on Friday, a press release of the BLIA said today.

He emphatically said that there is no alternative to practising the true essence of religions for transition from the way the world is being vitiated with the conflict, war and hatred in the name of religion.

The ceremony was presided over by outgoing president of BLIA, Dr Bikiran Prashad Banua.

The Vice-Chancellor gave away prizes among the winners of the literary and essay competitions and presented crest to Nun Chu Men and Dr Bikiran Prashad Banua who were conferred with the title of Ambassador of Peace, the press release said.

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BSEHR

By Staff Correspondent

Secretary General of the Bangladesh Society for the Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) advocate Sigma Huda demanded withdrawal of the case filed against human rights activist advocate Zia Habib.

In a statement Sunday, she said the case was filed by a sub-inspector of Chittagong Kotwali thana police Abdul Quader as advocate Habib was involved in protecting human rights and laws.

Referring to Habib's bold role against the rape incident of Senator at Chittagong, advocate Sigma Huda alleged that a section of dishonest police officers and vested quarters was harassing him through filing of false and conspiratorial cases.

The BSEHR leader urged the concerned authorities for taking necessary legal actions against the culprits through a proper investigation and said the BSEHR has decided to take legal measures after carrying out an investigation into the matter.

BNP parliamentarians demand release of arrested activists

BNP parliamentarians yesterday demanded immediate release of Chhatra Dal president Habibunnabi Sohel, general secretary Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and president of Ramna thana BNP Chowdhury Alam, reports UNB.

In a joint statement, they also demanded withdrawal of "false" cases filed against them. The BNP lawmakers said the government arrested the BNP leaders in a bid to foil the anti-government movement.

They said arrest of Sohel, Pintu and Alam and keeping them in jail under special powers act is the reflection of fascism of the government.

Obituary

Kazi Golam Gaus in New Eskaton Road died in the city yesterday morning. He was 87, says a press release. Gaus was the Chief Scout Commissioner of the then East Pakistan. He also worked with FAO as an expert.

He left behind two sons, two daughters and a host of relatives and admirers to mourn his death.

His qulshuani will be held at his 4 New Eskaton Road residence on January 19 at 4 pm.

French envoy calls on CCC Mayor

CHITTAGONG, Jan 16: French Ambassador to Bangladesh Allen Brown Brewitt called on Chittagong City Corporation Mayor A B M Mohiuddin Chowdhury here today, reports BSS.

During the meeting the mayor apprised the ambassador of various development and service projects of the city corporation including turning Chittagong city into a mega city and building up a 17-kilometre deep sea port from Patenga to Faujdharhat.

They also discussed matters of mutual interests.

The ambassador commended Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury for overall development of Chittagong City.

Road mishap: 25 injured in Lalmonirhat

LALMONIRHAT, Jan 16: About 25 people were injured in a road accident at Ratipur on Lalmonirhat-Rangpur Highway today, reports UNB.

The mishap took place as the driver of a Rangpur-bound minibus coming from Patgram lost control over the steering and fell into a road side ditch at 11 am.

Of the victims, 8 were rushed to the Rangpur Medical College Hospital and 5 others to the district Sadar Hospital.

Rangpur Medical College Hospital sources said condition of two unidentified injured was critical.

No signs of breakthrough in political stalemate: Report

Political peace in Bangladesh could remain a far cry as there are no positive signs in sight of any breakthrough taking the "steam" out of confrontational politics, says a study report, reports UNB.

The report titled 1999: A tale of Golden Crops, Bitter Politics and Bruised Human Rights in Bangladesh, prepared by News Network, a feature-news service, aired fears that the government's unilateral move to hold Upazila Parishad vote might trigger fresh unrest on the already-fraught political arena.

There are few reasons to believe that government's move for holding crucial Upazila Parishad elections without the opposition won't trigger fresh unrest and widespread political violence. This could also discredit the government, says the report released in the city yesterday.

It observed that if the opposition could build up an effective pressure through all-out movement in February-March, the government might think of general elections ahead of the schedule. The next pair is due in July 2001.

On the other hand, the report said, it could not be an easy sail for the opposition camp to steer its current agitation towards its climax maintaining a solid unity among the partners of the four-party alliance.

"The alliance's unity still look fragile," it said, adding top alliance leaders were yet to reach a consensus on crucial issue of future electoral coalition. Besides, they were yet to fully convince the people of justification of their movement.

Parliamentary Standing Committees on ministries headed by MPs have started questioning the performances of the government and thereby establishing some sort of transparency and accountability. The Prime Minister's question-answer session was seen a major step towards establishing a responsible government.

The report observes since the fall of dictatorial regime of Ershad in 1990, there has been a general agreement that democracy should be allowed to function. It appears that despite opposition's future agitation, parliament may drift almost to the end of its term like the previous one under Khaleda Zia.

On law-and-order and human rights situations in the past year, it said the government was trying hard to come to grips with law and order by nabbing terrorists. It was also taking steps like establishment of human-rights commission to ensure human rights. But it would require more nonpartisan view to improve the situation further.

On the economic front, there were signs of recovery because of Boro season, but that could not get momentum because of poor industrial and export growth.

It said the government had tried to give boost to the export sector through currency devaluation but had failed because of negative manufacturing growth. However, inflation was contained only due to stable price of essentials, especially of rice and vegetables thanks to the farmers' toil and mull.

The report said that the other reason why the recovery was slow was less financing to the private industrial sector. The government said the sector could not come up with proper investment needs while the private businesses traded back the charge to the government cursing its attitude towards credit facilitation to the private investors.

But a sound growth of economy depended on a stable political environment and minimum understanding among major political groups on issues of national interest. The country's future would now largely depend on how politicians behave in the coming days," the report comments.

It said in 1999 Bangladesh witnessed successive bumper crops as agriculture sector bounced back after the disastrous floods the previous year. The quick recovery was largely attributed to fair weather and government's intervention with large amounts of farm loans.

Parliament went into session mostly without the opposition that increased its pressure on the government to stand down calling early general elections.

The year was heralded with antigovernment agitation and ended up in the opposition consolidating an alliance of four parties — Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Begum Khaleda Zia, Jatiya Party led by H M Ershad, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote.

It was yet another year that closed in political uncertainty for Bangladesh. The search for political stability remained as elusive as before," says the report in its observations.

Political murders, shocking bomb attack on Uddichi's cultural function in Jessore, deteriorating law and order, eviction of sex workers and slum-dwellers followed by shortage of power and drinking water in the first part of 1999 came down heavily on social security and peace.

All this bred an entrenched conflict between the two major power blocks led by Awami League and BNP, having a taint of personality clash between two inveterate rivals — Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and

Leader of the Opposition Begum Zia.

And diplomats and development planners appeared dismayed after their veiled on-again, off-again "mediation" fell flat on the rugged terrain of Bangladesh's baroque politics.

The summit of Begum Zia, H M Ershad, Prof Golam Azam and Sheikh Haidat Azizul Huq crystallised their one-point demand for snap general elections under a caretaker authority.

In the sunset days of 1999 Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina repeatedly offered dialogue with the opposition without any success. She even placed a dramatic phone call to Begum Zia to start political negotiations. Begum Zia did not respond to Sheikh Hasina's telephone on December 26, dashing all hopes for an early breakthrough.

An apparent cold war between the executive and the judiciary gave a wrong signal to smooth functioning of the two vital organs of the state and the state affairs. Separation of the judiciary from the executive remained a far-fetched expectation.

Although the press is enjoying freedom, state-owned Radio and Television were not given autonomy. However, the government allowed a private television station and several satellite channels to go on the air.

Law and order climbed down the slope. However, police crackdown on terrorist syndicates along south-and-south-western region flicked a ray of hope among the inhabitants of the vulnerable belt.

There were reports of violation or denial of human rights, eviction of sex workers at Tanbazar and slum-dwellers in Dhaka triggered protests by NGOs and political groups, incidents of death in police custody, gang-raping acid throwing and repression or murder of brides for dowry took place almost matching the previous year, despite campaigns by NGOs and human-rights organisations.

The report says for Bangladesh, 1999 was, however, the year for achieving hefty international fame. In the World Cricket and external diplomacy, the country carved vibrant positions. Bangladesh made an enviable debut in the World Cup Cricket by defeating former Champions Pakistan.

Besides, in the world forum, Bangladesh got membership in the UN Security Council. UNICEF declaration of 21st February as International Mother Language Day in recognition of the Bengalis' supreme sacrifice for mother tongue enhanced Bangladesh's image abroad.



Investment Forum Sylhet Bangladesh and Sylhet Centre UK held a discussion at a city hotel yesterday on the probable investment for expansion of tourism industry. — Star photo

4 arrested in Dilip, Alfaz murders

JHENIDAH, Jan 16: Four people were arrested here today in connection with the murder of Mir Illas Hossain Dilip and his associate Alfazuddin, reports BSS.

The Janaza for Dilip, a leader of outlawed Biplobi Communist Party (BCP-ML) and editor and publisher of the 'Daily Bir Darpan' was held today. He was buried at his family graveyard of Fakirabad village.

Dilip played a key role in surrender of armed cadres of several outlawed parties in Khulna Division in June last year at the call of the government. He left behind his wife, a son and a daughter.

Dilip and his associate Alfazuddin, general secretary of Jhenidah District Timber Merchants' Association, were shot by three unidentified assailants at a shop yesterday evening. Dilip died on the spot while Alfazuddin succumbed to his injuries on way to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital.

The cause behind the killing could not be known. No party has yet claimed responsibility of the murder.

BNP joint meeting today

By Staff Correspondent

A joint meeting of Dhaka city units of BNP and its front organisations will be held at the central office of Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Muktiuddha Dal today at 5:30 pm.

BNP will also hold a discussion at the National Press Club tomorrow in observance of the 64th birth anniversary of late President Ziaur Rahman.

The discussion, organised as part of the 10-day celebration programme, will begin at 3:30 pm, said a BNP press release.

Seminar on family planning begins today

A four-day seminar on "Family Planning Programme in the 21st century" begins here today under the auspices of the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population (IUSSP), a global society of leading population scientists, researchers and programme planners, reports BSS.

It is being co-hosted by the Operations Research Project (ORP) of ICDDR, B, Centre for Health and Population Research and Partners in Population and Development (PPD), a press release said.

The IUSSP's Dhaka seminar marks the beginning of its scientific work in the next millennium. Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Minister for Health and Family Welfare, is scheduled to inaugurate the seminar at the Sasakawa auditorium of Jhenidah District Timber Merchants' Association, while Dr M Amanullah, State Minister for Health and Family Welfare, and Alamgir Farouk Chowdhury, Secretary for the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, will attend the seminar as special guests.

Mannan Bhuiyan condemns arrest of party activists

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has condemned the arrest of the leaders and activists of Noakhali, Mohammadpur, Naogaon and Siripur units of BNP and its front organisations.

In a statement yesterday, Bhuiyan said the government has arrested the party workers to fulfil their political will.

He demanded release of the partymen and withdrawal of what he termed 'false cases' filed against them.

Khaleda slates assault on physician couple

By Staff Correspondent

BNP chairperson and leader of the opposition in parliament Begum Khaleda Zia expressed her anger due to the assault of a physician couple on Thursday night at Eskaton area in the city.

Condemning the incident in a statement yesterday, she said a chaotic situation was prevailing in the country as there was no rule of law.

Referring to the incident of assault, in which Dr Zahed Ekram and Dr Rahela Khan were attacked by the ruling party goons, Begum Zia said that the terrorists of ruling party were endangering the life, property and honour of the people.

She demanded immediate arrest and exemplary punishment of those involved.

Death condoled

By Staff Correspondent

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday expressed profound shock at the death of Abdul Ohab Akand of Mymensingh.

Abdul Ohab was the father of former MP and president of Pulphur thana BNP Abul Basar Akand.

Bhuiyan sought blessings for the departed soul and expressed sympathy with the family members of the bereaved family.

Ohab died Friday at his own residence of old-age complications. He left behind five sons and four daughters to mourn his death. His namaj-e-janaza was held at Pulphur thana premises.



An elderly woman sits outside her collapsed home in China's southwest Yunnan province on Saturday. Thousands of victims of an earthquake in southwest China spent the night outdoors in makeshift shelter as temperatures plummeted and the area was hit by two strong aftershocks. —AFP photo

Businessman

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Some of the designated speakers said they even did not know that they have been chosen to address the conference.

One of them said he had received an invitation for attending the inaugural session. "Without stating that the conference was to continue for two days and that the Leader of the Opposition has also agreed to attend the conference on the second day."

"If this is to be a grand conference of the business community, then FBCCI should have consulted all the chambers and associations in the first place to know their problems and put the issues up for discussion. But it hasn't done anything to this end as yet," one frustrated chamber leader said, requesting anonymity.

He also said: "The FBCCI chief is likely to return from India only three days before the conference begins. So, it's not going to be possible to discuss all the problems facing different sectors in such a short time."

He said even the vice-president is out of the country.

Six Indians held with magnets remanded

BAGERHAT, Jan 16: Six Indian smugglers, arrested with magnets on Friday, were placed on police remand for five days when they were produced before the court today, reports UNB. Bibhuti Bhushan Biswas, Birendra Nath Mallik, Sushanta Tribedi, Tapan Kumar Sarkar, Biswanath Laskar and Sajal Chakraborty were arrested by Detective Police when they were going to Benapole in a microbus.

Police said the arrested in their statement admitted their involvement in cross-border smuggling.

3 killed, 100 hurt in Habiganj clashes

HABIGANJ, Jan 16: Three people were killed and more than 100 injured in two separate clashes in Aijerjanj today and yesterday, reports UNB. Witnesses and police said as a sequel to previous enmity, two groups of people of Nagar village were locked in clash today, leaving Mujibur Rahman, 25, killed on the spot. One group was led by Abad Mia and the other by Rahman Mia.

In another clash between two rival groups of villagers at Shibpasha village over realisation of borrowed money left Kajal Mia, 22, and Toyeab Ali, 50, dead on Saturday. More than 100 others were injured in the clash in which both sides used deadly weapons.

New DMP commissioner takes over

Mohammad Motiur Rahman, the newly-appointed Commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), yesterday took over the charge from A K M Shamsuddin Ahmed, reports BSS.

Earlier, Rahman, former Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Dhaka Range, handed over the charge to Abul Kashem Hawlader who was transferred to the Dhaka Range from Special Branch (SB), official sources said.

Meanwhile, former DMP Commissioner Shamsuddin Ahmed joined the Special Branch as the Additional Inspector General of Police (Add. IGP) this afternoon.

No dialogue

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"We are preparing a draft of the reply and hope to finalise it within a day or two," Prof Chowdhury told newsmen after the meeting. "Hopefully, we will send the reply tomorrow."

BNP had hoped that the Speaker would take an initiative for a dialogue between the ruling party and main opposition parties, Chowdhury said. But his third letter hinted that he (Speaker) shifted from his position, Chowdhury added.

Another leader who was present at the meeting said, "We will not shift from our five preconditions... The government must fulfil those prior to a dialogue." He sought anonymity.

Action Council issue

Hectic negotiation to resolve dispute

By Rezaul Karim

Hectic negotiation is on among top leaders of the BNP-led opposition alliance to resolve the row over the structure of the All-Party Action Council (APAC).

Sources said a section of Jatiya Party leadership, led by its secretary general, raised objection to the composition of the action council after it was agreed upon unanimously on Thursday. They abstained from attending a meeting of the four secretaries-general of the alliance partners scheduled on Friday.

Jatiya Party was given a day to come up with their views about the council. They however did not put up their points till late last night.

According to the finalised composition of the APAC, each committee will have not more

than 101 members, led by a convener, at all city, district, municipality, thana, ward and union levels.

The liaison committee finalised the modalities of the APAC on approval by BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia and JP chairman HM Ershad on January 9.

The secretaries-general of BNP, JP, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote were due to sign a circular on guidelines of the APAC on Friday. The circular was to be sent to all units on Saturday. But everything became uncertain due to JP's role.

Leaders of the alliance partners have expressed their dissatisfaction over the JP's "repeated" trouble. They said since the formation of the alliance, the JP has been creating trouble at the last minute.

Legislators seek US citizenship for Cuban boy

WASHINGTON, Jan 16: In an unusual move, Republican lawmakers are seeking to obtain US citizenship for six-year-old Elian Gonzalez, hoping to prevent his return to Cuba, reports AFP.

The Washington Post reported that several members of the US Congress, including Florida Senator Connie Mack, planned to introduce bills to make Elian a citizen when Congress returns from recess on January 24.

Attorney General Janet Reno maintains that Elian's father, Juan Miguel Gonzalez, has the sole legal authority to speak for his son. Gonzalez has said he wants the boy returned to him in Cuba and withdrew a request for political asylum filed by the Miami relatives who are caring for the boy.

But if Elian is granted US citizenship, Reno would no longer have the authority to honour Gonzalez's wish and repatriate Elian.

Mack said granting Elian citizenship would redirect the contentious debate swirling around the boy, allowing US officials to focus on the child's well-being rather than the intricacies of US immigration policy.

"Right now, you have attorneys arguing archaic, confusing and hard-to-understand immigration law," Mack said, as reported in The Washington Post. "It's shifted to an issue of custody.... You go away from being focused on the law to being focused on what's best for the boy."

The number of people who have become US citizens

through an act of Congress is minuscule, the Post reported. Some like British prime minister Winston Churchill and Mother Teresa, were named honorary citizens because of their good deeds.

Elian Gonzalez was found off the Florida coast clinging to an inner tube on November 25. The boy's mother and stepfather drowned when a boat carrying 13 Cuban nationals trying to flee Cuba for the United States overturned.

Since then, Elian has been living with his paternal great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez, a mechanic who came from Cuba in 1980.

The boy's plight has ignited a wave of demonstrations in Cuba and fanned ideological flames have separated the Cold War foes for more than four decades.

At a demonstration in Havana Saturday, well-known Cuban television actors read florid texts accusing the United States of "infamous betrayal," before an audience of some 150,000 protesters.

On Friday, Elian's maternal and paternal grandmothers led a demonstration of some 100,000 women calling for the boy's return. US media outlets reported Saturday that a deal had been struck allowing Elian's grandmothers to travel to the United States to retrieve the boy.

"I am outraged. I want to go and pick him up but I will not stay there one minute longer than necessary," said Elian's paternal grandmother, Mariela Quintana, on Friday.

Iran to send mission to Afghanistan

TEHRAN, Jan 16: Iran's foreign ministry is to send a team to areas in Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban militia, whose rule Tehran does not recognise, Iranian radio said Sunday, reports AFP.

It will inspect the premises of Iranian diplomatic missions in the capital Kabul, Herat in the west and Jalalabad in the east, the radio said.

It quoted a ministry official as saying that such inspections would normally take place annually but none had been held since the Taliban seized power in Kabul in 1996.

The official added that Iran's consul-general in Herat had been in the city for a week to prepare for the visit.

Iran, which recognises the ousted Afghan government of Burhanuddin Rabbani said in December it had received a message from the Taliban proposing direct talks to settle their differences.