

Following the footsteps

By Nazmul Ashraf

"Don't think that I'm leaving now... None should leave the House," said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to her colleagues in the Treasury Bench while going out of the parliament's main chamber at 10.30am yesterday.

However, she did not come back until House was adjourned at 1.20pm.

Her words worked for some time though. Some 80 lawmakers she left in the House stayed back, although many of them shuffled between the House and the lobbies.

But they started sneaking probably sensing that the PM who is also the leader of the House is not going to come back.

The number soon came down to 70 and then 60, the minimum requirement for a quorum. By the time the sitting was over, there were only 40 MPs.

Nevertheless, the presence of the prime minister for the second consecutive day yesterday further eased the quorum crisis. Hasina entered the House at 9.40am, five minutes after Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid did.

Once the prime minister left, the Deputy Speaker who was presiding the House followed her eight minutes later, handing over the chair to Panel Chairman Ali Ashraf.

Soon after the session began, a messenger came to the press

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Clinton to visit Bangladesh in Mar: FM

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad yesterday confirmed US President Bill Clinton's visit to Bangladesh in March, reports UNB.

"I confirm that President Clinton will visit Dhaka in the second half of March this year and there is no doubt about it," he told reporters at a briefing at the Foreign Office on his return from Oman.

Azad returned home yesterday morning from Muscat where he attended the two-day extra-ordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers of Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).

Asked about the specific date of Clinton's visit to Dhaka, the Foreign Minister said the date and programme will be announced by the US side.

Tremor shakes Ctg again

From Our Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Jan 24: A mild tremor jolted the port city of Chittagong again this morning. The tremor that occurred at 7.29 in the morning lasted for 20 seconds.

The epicentre of the tremor was some 180 kms off the port city while the direction could not be learnt, said Met office sources.

The intensity of the tremor was mild and no damage was reported by the Met office. The tremor occurred only 25 hours after the one that rocked the city yesterday morning.

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Prayer Timings

January 25

	Fajr	Azhan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:45	6:15	
Zohr	12:35	1:15	
Asr	4:15	4:30	
Maghrib	5:44	5:48	
Esha	7:15	7:45	

Source: Islamic Foundation

Business bid ends in futility

Khaleda snubs call to shun hartal

By Staff Correspondent

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia has rejected the business community's appeal for a dialogue with the government and called upon them to join the current out-governments movement.

Instead of requesting BNP to sit for dialogue, you urge the government to resign and hand over power to a caretaker government as per the Constitution," she said.

She was addressing a Businessmen's Conference at Osmany Memorial Auditorium in the city on its concluding day yesterday.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressed the conference on the first day, where she renewed her dialogue offer to the Opposition.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI), organised the conference to foster a

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dialogue between the government and the Opposition to end their stand-off and resolve the political crisis.

Khaleda Zia said, "The current situation does not permit holding of any dialogue with

the government as it is not sincere for a political settlement, and has destroyed the atmosphere for talks."

The BNP Chairperson and former prime minister said opposition parties have already launched a one-point out-governments movement. Resignation of the government is the only solution now to restore peace, political stability and ensure development.

Business leaders at the conference requested the Opposition leader to accept the offer for dialogue and find out alter-

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Sewerage discharge flows down the Buriganga River near Babubazaar.

—Star photo by AKM Mohsin

Legal Assistance Bill 2000 passed

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad passed a bill yesterday paving the way for free legal aid to the disadvantaged section of the society.

Under the new law, the state will finance lawyers for those who are needy, hapless and unable to get justice for various socio-economic reasons.

Such people can now apply to court for legal assistance from the state. A state-financed panel of lawyers will come in aid to the deserving persons after scrutiny of their applications by a committee.

Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru piloted the bill titled "The Legal Assistance Bill, 2000."

Seeking passage of the bill, he described the new law as a "milestone" in upholding people's fundamental rights as prescribed in the Constitution.

He said the law would ensure legal protection to 65 per cent of the population who could not afford legal assistance to address their grievances.

The minister told the House that an extensive publicity campaign through media would be launched to inform especially the disadvantaged section of the society of the new law. Legal aid committees had been formed in 61 of the 64 districts to this end, he added.

The bill was introduced in

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Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia talking to BNP leader and former finance minister Saifur Rahman (L) and FBCCI President Abdul Awal Mintoo (R) before addressing the Businessmen's Conference in the city yesterday.

—Star photo

ISI activities: Dhaka brushes aside Delhi's charges

Bangladesh has categorically brushed aside the oft-sounded Indian complaint that Pakistani intelligence agents are operating from Bangladesh territory into India, UNB quoting sources said.

The Indian delegation, during the meeting of the Joint Working Group of Dhaka and Delhi, yesterday alleged that some Pakistani Inter Service Intelligence (ISI) activities, especially in their trouble-torn northeast, were carried out from this side of the border.

But Dhaka denied outright the allegation saying it doesn't patronise any intelligence operation of any other country. "There is no camp or activities of the ISI or any other foreign intelligence agency in Bangladesh," meeting sources quoted them as saying.

They also told the visiting Indian delegation to inform Dhaka if they could specifically detect any acts being carried out by the Pakistani security outfit from the Bangladesh territory.

"Bangladesh will not give a single inch of its land to any country to conduct subversive acts in a third country," the delegation said allaying India's concern at a time when they are facing heightened tension and skirmish at the border with

Pakistan.

M Janibul Haq, joint secretary (political) of the Home Ministry, is leading the home side in the two-day meeting at the state guest house Padma. A seven-member Indian delegation is being headed by a joint secretary (northeast), GK Pillai.

The sources said the other things that came up during the five-hour meeting were matters of mutual interest as well as the ways of resolving the outstanding issues for further improving the bilateral relations between the two close neighbours.

Bangladesh said barbed-wire fencing along the border by In-

dia would affect the bilateral ties. They also suggested resolving the border disputes on various points for betterment of the existing relations.

As they talked security measures inside the respective territories and alongside the frontiers, Bangladesh officials informed that illegal arms and ammunition were coming from India.

They suggested the Indian side to check it at the border and destroy the sources of the illegal arms and ammunition, a threat to public safety for peoples of both the countries. Dhaka also called upon New Delhi to check cross-border flow of the narcotic drug, phenyl.

The meeting sources said both Bangladeshi and Indian officials said that a joint effort is necessary to check trafficking of women and children. Many women and children of Bangladesh are trafficked over to India.

Another matter discussed was problem in getting Indian visas by the Bangladeshi people. "The rigidity should be removed for the sake of the excellent bilateral relations," the sources quoted the host side as telling the Indians.

Charges framed against Emajuddin

By Court Correspondent

The Divisional Special Court in the capital yesterday formally charged former vice chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Emajuddin Ahmed with illegally admitting students to the university.

Prof Ahmed along with Hafizul Islam, director of social welfare and research institute, See page 11 col 8

Cabinet approves changes in Woman & Child Repression (prevention) Act

By Nurul Kabir

The Cabinet yesterday approved a law ministry proposal to re-write certain provisions of the Women and Children Repression (Prevention) Act, allowing courts to award seven years' imprisonment for filing false cases under the law.

Besides, it also okayed another change in the law, widening the courts' scope for granting bail to women and aged and sick people, Cabinet sources said.

Under the original law made in 1995, courts trying such cases do not have the authority to grant bail to any accused before the end of investigation. "With the proposed changes, the tribunals concerned will enjoy the authority to grant bail to women and aged and sick persons before the investigation is complete. In that case, the court has to hold a hearing of both the sides," said a top official of the law ministry.

Explaining reasons behind the flexibility, the official said, "Under the law, the aggrieved side usually implicates even relatives of the prime accused

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Traffic jam eases, breathing easier

Most of city's 2-stroke vehicles keep off roads

By Morshed Ali Khan

Air pollution and traffic jam in the city have drastically decreased as most of the estimated 75,000 two-stroke vehicles and thousands of illegal rickshaws kept off the roads for the second day yesterday to escape the on-going police crackdown.

Traffic department officials said they have already filed more than 4,000 cases against two-stroke vehicles for emitting black smoke and not having required papers and crushed several thousand illegal rickshaws on the spot.

Thousands of autorickshaws which were mainly responsible for air pollution in the capital have stopped plying fearing action under the special drive launched by police after the Eid.

The officials also said autorickshaw drivers also resorted to violence and barricaded roads at some places as

action was being taken for not having valid documents.

An official of DMP's traffic department said that they were finding difficulties in taking

Plate semis

Bangladesh play Ireland today

Sports Reporter

Bangladesh will take on fellow ICC associate member Ireland in the World Youth Cricket Championship plate group semifinal at the Walidara Stadium in the north eastern Sri Lankan district of Kurune Galla today.

The day's other semifinal is between Group Two champions South Africa and Zimbabwe.

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action as many of the drivers produced "either fake or inadequate documents."

"Some of them produced old receipts issued by traffic sergeants who seized all their documents for traffic offence," he said.

"Many of the autorickshaws do not have insurance, road permit and most of the drivers have fake driving licence," he added.

According to official records, there are 30,000 legal autorickshaws in the city. At present only the legal ones were plying the city streets and the rest have gone off the roads, another official pointed out.

About 100 illegal rickshaws were bulldozed at Mirpur Section-10 in the city yesterday. Sources concerned said there are about four lakh illegal rickshaws in the city.

Food output may rise by 1m MT this year

By Reaz Ahmad

Food production in the country during the current financial year is projected at 22.33 million tonnes, one million tonnes higher than that in the last financial year, official sources said.

The production in the last financial year was 21.35 million tonnes.

Higher production during the current 1999-2000 financial year is due to good yield of Aus crop and bumper production of Aman, they said.

In view of the increased domestic production and an all time high food stock in silos this year, the government has abandoned a budgetary plan to import five lakh tonnes of food grains in the current fiscal, food ministry officials said.

Food import under the private sector has also fallen drastically. Less than one million tonnes have so far been im-

ported under the private sector in first half of the current financial year, they said.

Production of Aus, the year's first rice crop, rose to 1.73 million tonnes from last fiscal's 1.62 million tonnes.

A bumper yield of over 9.5 million tonnes of Aman, the second crop, also surpassed last year's 7.74 million tonnes.

Two other major crops -- Boro (paddy) and wheat -- are in growing stage now. Boro production is expected to be around 9.2 million tonnes, a good harvest by any standard though much lower than the last season's record yield of 10.5 million tonnes. Wheat production has been estimated to be around last year's 1.9 million tonnes, they said.

Experts say it is a phenomenal growth this year and a great relief for the government, particularly the host side as telling the Indians.

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We Are Shifting

The offices of The Daily Star will be shifted to its new premises at the Karwan Bazar by the end of this month. Please direct all your letters and mails to the following address accordingly:

The Daily Star

19, Karwan Bazar (2nd & 3rd floors)

Dhaka -1215

Bangladesh

গ্লোব শপিং সেন্টার

নিউ মার্কেট, মিরপুর রোড, ঢাকা কলেজের উল্টা দিকে

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