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Parliament clears Public Safety Bill

Month-long millennium session ends making 12 new or amended laws

By Nazmul Ashraf

The month-long winter session of the Jatiya Sangsad was prorogued yesterday with the passage of two tough laws to combat growing incidents of crime affecting peace and safety in public life and crimes against women and children.

There was unusual haste in the process of passing the bills. Introduced in the House on Thursday, the bills were scrutinised on Friday and passed yesterday.

The controversial Public Safety Act triggered street protests by major opposition parties which, however, kept special tribunals.

Calling the Public Safety Act a "black law aimed at political persecution", components of the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance held separate street demonstrations in the city. The alliance on Saturday called a 36-hour countrywide shutdown from Wednesday morning protesting the new law.

The law for women and children provides for death penalty as maximum punishment. The Public Safety Act provides for maximum 14 years rigorous imprisonment. The House passed the two laws with a faction of Jatiya Party lawmakers led by Communications Minister Anwar Hossain voting against while MPs of opposition BNP and its allies continued their boycott of the parliament.

The JP MPs threatened to walk out but the Prime Minister managed to stop it after talking with the communication minister. BNP members however attended the meeting of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Ministry on Friday.

360-MW plant building begins

Haripur hopes to produce power by Oct 2001

By Staff Correspondent

Construction of the 360 MW Haripur power plant by US company AES began in Narayanang yesterday.

The first gas-fired plant in the private sector is scheduled to begin commercial operation in October 2001. The site development work at Haripur along the bank of Shitalakhya river began in April last year.

The project contractor -- Hyundai -- began construction of the plant's base yesterday by fielding a RC pile reclaimed from the river earlier.

"AES Haripur and its sister plant AES Meghnaghat involve a total expenditure of more than 500 million dollars, the single biggest private direct investment in the country. We hope to complete construction of the Haripur project on schedule and start work on the 450 MW Meghnaghat project soon."

James Hogg, Managing Director of AES Haripur and Meghnaghat told a group of newsmen during a visit to the project site yesterday.

Both the projects underwent different types of problems in negotiations with the government and in development of the sites.

World Bank's sister concern IFC and some other banks are financing the projects. "There is no problem in getting the finance now. It is being worked out at our London office," he said.

A major problem that delayed the Haripur project was handover of the required land. It was supposed to be constructed on a 20 bigha site, but the government could finally hand over 18 bighas of land.

"We have made some changes in the project design due to change in the size of land. Now there is no problem," said an AES high official.

The Meghnaghat power plant, being constructed on 100 hectares of land on the bank of Meghna river, will be the largest one in the country. The project has been delayed by more than two years due to problems in negotiation and alleged inefficiency of the site developer.

The Power Development Board (PDB) is now urging AES to take over the land, saying that the site is ready. But AES says the site has been developed "so poorly that it would be unsafe to construct a power plant there". The disagreement is also delaying the project.

"We believe the problem with the Meghnaghat project will be solved within a month," the AES high official said. Despite the delay, it will be possible to complete the project by 2002, he added.

However, despite AES' invitation, there was no representative of the Energy Ministry, PDB or the Power Cell at the site during yesterday's visit.

The 200 million US dollars Haripur project will sell power at a flat rate of US 2.73 cents per kilowatt hour, the lowest power tariff in the country, under a 22-year sale agreement.

The Haripur plant will consume around 50 million cubic feet of gas per day (mcmd) and the Meghnaghat plant 100 mcmd. This will contribute to expansion of gas market in the country. AES will purchase gas from PDB at the rate of 2.4 dollars per unit, more than double the bulk rate.

Opposition protests 'anti-people' law

BNP says it will hasten AL's fall

By Staff Correspondent

All opposition parties yesterday staged demonstrations in the city to protest passage of what they said the "anti-people and black" Public Safety Act in parliament.

BNP and three other components of the four-party opposition alliance held separate rallies and brought out processions.

The 11-party left alliance observed a token hunger strike at the Mukhtangan from 8am to 4pm and brought out a black flag procession in the afternoon to protest passage of the law.

As soon as the law was passed in the parliament, BNP held a brief rally in front of its Naya Baitan central office and brought out a procession that paraded different city streets.

Addressing the rally, city BNP Chairman Sadek Hossain Khokha MP said his party is determined to resist application of the law and force the Awami

League government to withdraw it through a massive movement.

The AL government had earlier passed the one-party BKSAL system in parliament only in eight minutes and yesterday, it passed the "black law" in 15 minutes.

Khokha said the law is against democracy, human rights and fundamental rights of the people and the motive to introduce the law is to cling to

power through repressing opposition activists and suppressing movement.

He said the whole nation is united against the "repressive and black law". Passage of the law will hasten the fall of AL government he said and called upon the people to observe the opposition-called 36-hour hartal from February 2 to protest it.

The rally over, BNP leaders See Page 12 Col 4

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The rally over, BNP leaders See Page 12 Col 4

'Don't back terrorists, muggers, drug dealers'

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged her political opponents and critics not to encourage muggers, terrorists, extortionists, drug and gold smugglers by denouncing as black law a new legislation passed by Parliament yesterday, reports UNB.

Hasina also urged the people to help her government enforce the law impartially to stamp out anti-social acts from society and ensure public peace and safety.

She came up with the ap-

peals immediately after the House passed the controversial Public Safety (Special Provision) Bill 2000 amidst abstention by main opposition parties and strong criticisms from a faction of Jatiya Party MPs loyal to her government.

"This law is for the people, for society, for safety of public life and property, for free movement and living, for free protecting human rights," the prime minister told Parliament winding up discussion on the See Page 12 Col 3

Akheri Munajat today

Two million devotees to pray for the Ummah

By Rafiq Hasan

The Biswa Ijtema at Tongi concludes today with the offering of Akheri Munajat seeking divine blessings for continued peace, progress and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah.

President Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia will join the Munajat.

The three-day Ijtema, the second largest religious congregation of the Muslims next to Hajj, is being attended by more than two million devotees from home and abroad.

One of the three top leaders of World Tablig Jamaat will lead the Akheri Munajat (concluding prayers) which begins after 11 am. The three are Moulana Saad and Moulana Jobaer Hasan of India and Moulana Mufti Joyal Abedeen of Pakistan.

The supreme consultation committee of the World Tablig Jamaat will decide who will lead the prayers.

Official sources said the President and the Prime Minister are scheduled to go to the Ijtema venue by road, but two helicopters will be kept ready for carrying them, if necessary.

A large number of women will also join the prayers, staying at different houses nearby.

Buses, trains and all other kinds of transport continued carrying thousands of devotees to Tongi from all over the country till yesterday. This will continue this morning also.

Around 5,000 devotees from 70 countries are attending the Ijtema.

Plying of all types of vehicles on the road from Air Port to Joydevpur was stopped from late last night to facilitate smooth movement of thousands more willing to join the Akheri Munajat.

Meanwhile, two more devotees died yesterday, raising the number to eight since the Ijtema began on Saturday.

Hornuz Ali, 60, died of heart failure on way to the National Institute of Cardiovascular Disease (NICVD) in an ambulance. He hailed from Phulpur in Mymensingh.

Another devotee aged about 70 died on the spot when a truck hit him on a road nearby. His identity could not be known.

Many devotees fell sick following long journey from different parts of the country and taking adulterated food at makeshift hotels and restaurants. Civil Surgeon of Gazipur Abu Taher Khan said that 53 devotees were admitted to Tongi Hospital so far.

More than 27 dowry-free marriages were solemnised at the Ijtema ground after Asr prayers yesterday.

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The S. A. A. T. BALL (Stars Against Acid Throwers)

Babita (flanked by two acid victims) and Golam Mustafa (3rd from left), superstars of yesteryears, join stars of today to launch Stars Against Acid Throwers at Hotel Sheraton last night.

First Hajj flight Feb 15

The first Hajj flight will leave Dhaka for Jeddah on February 15, an official band-aid said yesterday, reports BSS.

About 7700 Muslim devotees will perform Hajj this year under the government management.

As per the schedule, the Hajj pilgrims will start arrival at the permanent Hajee camp from February 11, the handout said.

PM leaves for Brussels tonight

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves for Brussels at midnight tonight at the invitation of her Belgian counterpart Guy Verhofstadt to hold discussions for bolstering relations between Bangladesh and the European Union in general and the two countries in particular, reports BSS.

The official talks during the four-day visit (February 1-5) will provide an opportunity to the prime ministers of the two countries to discuss the entire range of bilateral relations between them as well as regional and international issues of mutual concern, foreign secretary CM Shafi Sami told a briefing on the visit yesterday.

Hasina would hold official discussions with Romano Prodi, President of European Commission who as Prime Minister of Italy visited Bangladesh.

She will also have meetings with Nicole Fontaine, President of the European Parliament and Joaquim Miranda, Chairman of the European Parliament's Committee on Development Cooperation, the foreign secretary said.

The other high point of the visit will be the formal conferment of honorary doctorate on the prime minister by the Catholic University of Brussels, one of the oldest educational institutions in Europe.

The Doctorate Honoris Causa will be conferred for her decisive role in the process of democracy, the protection of human rights in Bangladesh and her contribution to regional peace and development, Shafi Sami said.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury and some senior officials will accompany the prime minister.

The foreign secretary said the prime minister has been invited to address eminent scholars at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels and a seminar organised by the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS).

The visit, is expected to forge a closer contact at the highest political level between Bangladesh and Belgium and help in widening the prospects

BNP to ask President not to assent Bill

BNP will urge the President not to give assent to the Public Safety Bill passed in Parliament yesterday, reports UNB.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the party's Standing Committee at 29 Minto Road last night that discussed action plan to resist the "black law".

The meeting was presided over by party chief Khaleda Zia. As the meeting was continuing, BNP secretary general Ab-

dul Mannan Bhuiyan told a group of newsmen that they were trying to meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed.

Bhuiyan said they would urge him not to give assent to the bill and also take to the streets to protest its passage.

Asked if BNP will challenge the law in the court he said they were considering all out movement against it. He did not rule out other options.

Entertainers to help acid victims

By Staff Correspondent

Sports, television, music and film stars gathered at the Sheraton Hotel last night to help the acid survivor's foundation support group launch Stars Against Acid Throwers.

Stars included Aminul Islam Bulbul, captain of the national cricket team and president of the new organisation, and popular model Md. Adil Hossain Nobel, the organisation's vice-president.

Shahid Hasan, Babita, Golam Mostafa, Shuvro Dev, and six acid attack survivors also attended.

The organisation announced it will hold a spectacular night of entertainment on February 17, 2000 to raise money to support survivors of acid attacks.

The event will feature a street, a raffle, music, an international buffet and dancing. Tickets are Tk 1,500. They are available at the Dhaka Sheraton or by phone (8824740).

Thousand suffer awful burns from acid attacks annually, but a shortage of proper facilities means most don't get proper treatment.

Dhaka Medical College Hospital has less than 20 beds allocated to burn victims, including those from acid attacks. There is also a shortage of plastic surgeons.

Cabinet okays 2 draft laws

The Cabinet yesterday approved a draft law for transforming Water Development Board into Water Development Corporation to bolster activity in the sector, reports UNB.

In its regular meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair, the council of ministers also discussed the draft laws formulated to make way for setting up six science and technology universities.

A cabinet committee to finalise the laws was formed in the meeting, said an official announcement.

Besides, it approved a draft law relating to combined appointment of non-cadre gazetted officers (first and second grade) of tax, customs and VAT.

Dhaka-Delhi deal towards Teesta water sharing

Bangladesh and India yesterday agreed to sign a short-term Teesta water sharing agreement, reports BSS.

Experts of both the countries reached consensus on signing of the agreement at the secretary-level meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint Committee of Experts at a city hotel.

The meeting recommended a scientific survey by the experts of Bangladesh and India for signing a long-term agreement

on sharing of water of the Teesta river.

During the interim period a short-term agreement for sharing of water of the Teesta river will be signed.

After the meeting, Bangladesh Water Resources Secretary Dr A T M Shamsul Huda and Indian Water Resources Secretary Zafrul Hasan expressed their optimism about the signing of the agreement on

water sharing.

They said talks will be held on the agreement after the recommendations to be adopted at the expert committee level of the Joint River Commission of India and Bangladesh within the next three months.

The two secretaries said, the meeting discussed the sharing of water of seven rivers, including Teesta, Muhuri, Goati, Khoai and Manu.

Sonia detained, released

NEW DELHI, Jan 30: Police detained India's main opposition leader Sonia Gandhi and others from her Congress Party today when they staged a protest here against the government's plans to revise the constitution, reports AFP.

Congress president Gandhi after her brief detention marched to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's residence and handed over a protest note, police said.

The police said the 53-year-old Gandhi was arrested for breaching prohibitory laws and added that she was immediately released and allowed to go to Vajpayee's official residence.

Hundreds of followers shouted slogans as the Italian-born Gandhi set off on the protest march from the Congress headquarters in central New Delhi, witnesses said.

Gandhi's public protest against policies of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party-led coalition government is the second since she was elected as a member to parliament in elections last year.

Pranab Mukherjee, a former Congress foreign minister, said the march was also to protest against purported attempts by the BJP to force Indians towards its rightwing Hindu policies.

"The Congress had to take to the streets as rampant recognition to communal organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Voluntary Force) is derailing the pluralistic character of our polity," he said.

The Congress was also demanding a ban on the Sangh in the BJP-ruled western state of Gujarat, Mukherjee told reporters following his arrest.

The BJP is affiliated to the Sangh and other Hindu revivalist organisations.

Police tortured Rubel, witness tells court

By Court Correspondent

Shahidullah, the sixth prosecution witness in the Shamim Reza Rubel murder case, told the court yesterday that he had witnessed police torture the victim on the day of the incident.

Cross examination of Shahidullah, was also completed in the Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday. The court fixed February 22 and 23 for the next hearing.

Shahidullah, a lungi trader, witnessed police torture of Rubel in front of his house on the day of the incident. Shahidullah's shop is located in front of Rubel's house at Siddeshwari in the city.

Rubel, 24, a BBA student of Independent University, was picked up by a team of Detective Branch of Police from near his residence on July 23, 1998, and was subsequently tortured to death in custody on the same day.

The CID chargesheeted 14 people including former AC Akram Hussain and Mukuli Begum, a local Awami League leader, for the killing of Rubel. Of the accused 10 were produced before the court at about 2:30 pm yesterday.

The remaining four — SI Nurul Alam, constables — Mong She Oen, Abul Kalam Azad and Zakir Hossain — have been absconding since the killing.

Another day-long hartal in port city

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 30: A dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in greater Chittagong today by and large peacefully, barring explosions of cocktails and chase and counter-chase between police and pickets.

The Opposition Alliance's Chittagong unit called the hartal, demanding immediate cancellation of the recently held Chittagong City Corporation polls.

Witnesses said pro-hartal pickets damaged some rickshaws in Bahaddarhat, Chawk-bazar, Sirajuddallah road and Nur Ahmed road areas during the hartal period.

Police dispersed pickets at Nur Ahmed road near city BNP office at about 11 am, but chase and counter-chase between police and pickets continued for about an hour.

In Bahaddarhat area also, there were chase and counter-chase between police and pickets at around noon, witnesses said.

Five pickets were arrested during the hartal.

Road communication between Chittagong and other parts of the country was totally disrupted as vehicles stayed off the roads and highways during the hartal.

Hundreds of rickshaws, however, plied on the city roads.

Railway sources said train service to and from Chittagong was as usual.

Most of the shops and markets remained closed. A small number of offices functioned with thin attendance.

Delivery of goods to and from Chittagong Port was suspended due to lack of trucks during the hartal. But cargo handling inside the jetties continued, port sources said.

The opposition parties organised rallies and processions in different areas of the city during the hartal.

Supporters held of the ruling party an anti-hartal rally in front of the Municipal School in the city Bipani Bitan.

Consumer law under scrutiny

By Staff Correspondent

The Law Commission (LC) is examining the Consumers Protection Act of Bangladesh with the aim of suggesting improvements of the existing draft, official sources said.

The draft was prepared about five years ago but could not be made law due to bureaucratic tangles, sources at the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) said.

The draft of the Act is now being compared with the consumers protection acts of India and Sri Lanka, sources said.

"We are studying the effectiveness of the law in the two countries in implementing the substantive rights and liabilities provided in the two acts for protection of respective consumers in these two countries", a source said.

Prayer Timings

January 31

Fajr	5:45	6:15
Zohr	12:15	1:20
Asr	4:15	4:30
Maghrib	5:50	5:54
Esha	7:15	7:45

Source: Islamic Foundation