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12-hr hartal today

By Staff Correspondent

The countrywide 'blockade' called by the BNP-led opposition alliance will begin at 6 am today.

The hartal was called to protest enactment of what it said 'black and repressive' Public Safety Act and attack on its mass procession on Sunday.

All-Party Action Committee (APAC) held rallies and brought out processions in the city yesterday afternoon in support of the 48-hour 'blockade hartal' in two phases — from 6 am to 6 pm today and 36 hours from 6 am tomorrow.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement yesterday urged the people to make today's dawn-to-dusk hartal and the 36-hour-long hartal from Wednesday a success to accelerate fall of the 'unfit, corrupt and fascist government'.

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Many questions still unanswered, jurists say

By Staff Correspondent

Three leading jurists have expressed their reaction on the President's assent to the Public Safety Bill.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed and Dr Kamal Hossain, in a joint statement yesterday, said: 'We have just been informed that the President's signature was obtained today (the fourteenth day, being the last day for such purpose) by ministers including the Prime Minister and extending an assurance that the unacceptable stringent provisions regarding bail would be rectified by an amendment to the law. Since Parliament is not in session, presumably such an amendment would be attempted by means of an Ordinance. It is thus clear that the Public Safety Bill as presented is admitted to contain unacceptable provisions at least with regard to bail.'

In our view there are other

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Prayer Timings

February 15		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:30	6:00
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:45
Maghrib	5:58	6:00
Esha	7:30	8:00

Source: Islamic Foundation

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President assents to Public Safety Bill

Provision prohibiting bail to be deleted thru' Ordinance: PM

Shortly before the deadline, President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday assented to the Public Safety Bill, despite opposition plea for him not to sign it into an act, reports UNB.

The President gave assent to the Bill after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, along with Foreign Minister Abdu Samad Azad and Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru, went to the Bangabhaban in the afternoon and parleyed with him for about an hour from 2:25 pm.

A press release from the Bangabhaban said during discussion with the Prime Minis-

ter, the President pointed out certain objectionable provisions of the Bill, particularly the one that prohibits bail during pendency of appeal against conviction.

The Prime Minister assured the President — who had not signed the tough legislation until the eleventh hour of the stipulated 15 days time — that the provision as to bail would be deleted through an ordinance to soon after the act would come into force.

"President Shahabuddin, on the assurance of the Prime Minis-

ter, assented to the Public Safety Bill 2000," said the press release.

The President yesterday also assented to another tough legislation — the Women and Children Repression Prevention Bill 2000 — passed in Parliament the same day, January 30, with the Opposition staying out of the House for long.

The Public Safety Bill was brought by the ruling party to deal with rising crimes like snatching, hijacking, extortion, grabbing of tender, ransom, damage of vehicle and

other property and obstructing traffic.

Opposition leaders Khaleda

President has lost his neutrality, says Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia has said President Shahabuddin Ahmed did not want to assent to the Public Safety Bill but he was pressurised to sign it.

"He (Shahabuddin) was a judge and everybody knew him as an impartial judge. But he is not as people knew him and he has lost his neutrality if he signed the Bill under pressure from any one," she told newsmen at her official residence yesterday.

The former prime minister was giving her instant reaction on signing of the controversial Bill by the President.

JS women's seats Bill seeking extension of tenure okayed

By Staff Correspondent

Cabinet yesterday approved a Constitution Amendment Bill seeking to a ten-year extension of the tenure of 30 reserved seats for women in the Jatiya Sangsads.

The approval came at a cabinet meeting held yesterday morning with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Under Article 65(3) of the Constitution, the tenure of 30 reserved seats will be expired on April 14, 2001.

However, the Bill has not envisaged any change in the constitutional provision under which the female MPs in the reserved seats are being chosen by 300 legislators elected directly by the people.

The Bill — Constitution 14th Amendment Bill — will be placed in parliament during its next session, Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Abdul Matin Khasru told The Daily Star yesterday.

Passage of the Bill requires support of at least two-thirds of the 330-member Jatiya Sangsads.

It is our constitutional obligation to make sure that the

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Agitation to continue even during Clinton visit'

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance will continue its anti-government agitation even during the visit of US President Bill Clinton.

Clinton is scheduled to visit Bangladesh on March 25.

Movement programmes cannot be stopped considering some one's arrival or departure," Khaleda Zia said when asked whether the Opposition would postpone its programmes during the visit of the US President.

The BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament was talking to newsmen yesterday after President Shahabuddin Ahmed assented to the controversial Public Safety Bill.

Giving her instant reaction, she said, "Our current programmes will continue and we will announce fresh programmes later."

IMF chief hurt during Sunday's procession

By Staff Correspondent

The International Monetary Fund's chief in Dhaka was injured and his vehicle was damaged during an opposition procession on Sunday evening.

"I have to report a security incident involving IMF staff and property in Dhaka," wrote Ronald P. Hicks in a letter he sent to headquarters about the incident.

Sources said the attack occurred just after the vehicle left the IMF's office in Dhaka. The opposition supporters shattered the car's windows, spraying the chief in the face with glass.

Police said they had no information about the incident.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina plucked a guava from a tree at a makeshift peasant's house at Paltan Maidan in the city yesterday and gave it to a child.

—Star photo

Step to make up hartal loss EPB to keep textile cell open Saturday

By Rafiq Hasan

The Export Promotion Bureau's textile cell will be open next Saturday to make up for time lost during the opposition alliance's three-day hartal.

"I have talked to the vice-chairman of the EPB and he has agreed to keep the textile cell open next Saturday," said Anisul Haq, vice-president of the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association.

The announcement followed a recent meeting between officials from the association and the bureau. The association argued the cell should remain open because the garment sector had been seriously hampered by frequent hartals.

At first, M. Tazul Islam, director general of the textile cell, agreed in principle to the plan. However, he has assured association leaders since that the cell would remain open should the need arise.

Last month, the government ordered customs, ports, the export departments in state banks

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Local body polls We are just waiting for the schedules, says PM

By Staff Correspondent

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the government is ready to hold the Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad elections but the Election Commission is yet to announce the polls schedules.

"We are ready to hold the Zila Parishad and Upazila Parishad elections. But I don't understand why the Election Commission is not announcing the polls schedules ... I don't know why they (EC) are shifting the dates for the elections repeatedly," she said.

Hasina was speaking at a reception accorded to her at Paltan Maidan in the city by Bangladesh Krishak League yesterday for being awarded the prestigious Ceres Medal by the FAO.

The Prime Minister said her government has introduced four-tier local government bodies for decentralisation of power with the objective of empowerment of the commonman and ensuring development at

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Second Round Block Bidding negotiations resume

By Staff Correspondent

The government yesterday resumed Second Round Block Bidding negotiations for oil and gas exploration in various blocks.

Unlike in the past, this time the Energy Secretary is heading the negotiations. Shell Oil yesterday held talks over blocks 5 and 10 at the Secretariat.

The government will also have a meeting with Irish company Tullow and American oil giants Chevron-Texaco on Thursday over Block 9. Due to a hartal called by the Opposition, the meeting may take place at the Petrobangla office.

According to the Bank Company Act, commercial banks can sanction loans if the amount is below 15 per cent of its paid up capital. If it is more than 15 per cent, the bank must clear the transaction with the Bangladesh Bank, which is what happened in this case.

Usually, it takes the central bank 10 to 15 days to make a decision on a case. However, sources said Sonali Bank did not submit a loan repayment plan to the central bank, which it needs before any decision can be made.

As a result, the central bank had to initiate its own investigation into the Rahman Group, which took time to complete. The central bank is not bound by a deadline, which means the question of irregularity or violation of law does not arise, concluded the expert.

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Sumon murder Complaint case against 16 DB men, 9 others

By Staff Correspondent

Sumon's relatives yesterday registered a complaint case with Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, accusing 16 Detective Branch officials and nine local armed men of killing Sumon.

Haji Mozammel Hossain, brother of the deceased lodged the complaint case with the CM's court yesterday.

The court ordered Shyampur OC to begin an investigation in connection with the murder and register a regular case in this regard. The Shyampur police earlier refused to register the complaint of Sumon's family on ground that the DB had already filed a case in this connection.

Sumon, 23, his elder brother, Shamim Hossain, and niece Tuli, 10, were shot during a DB raid at their Karimullah Bagh residence in Shyampur at about 3:30 am on Wednesday. The DB was accompanied by some masked men during the raid, the victim's family members alleged.

Sumon died at DMCH while two others are still under treatment there.

The 16 DB personnel involved in the pre-dawn raid on

Winter rains should help this year's boro rice crop easily surpass the government's production target of 92 lakh metric tons, says experts and officials.

"Of course, there are a lot of ifs, ands or buts in predicting a good crop," said an expert. "Despite good weather throughout the season, occasional hailstorms and flash-floods can cause localised crop losses."

The unexpected rains that swept across the rice-rich north and north eastern districts provided plenty of water for boro. It was a blessing for farmers, since boro requires extensive irrigation otherwise.

Experts said the rain will help farmers cut their irrigation costs. This, coupled with reports of rising paddy prices, should ensure that farmers have enough money to invest in capital-intensive boro cultivation.

However, the government set this year's target at 92 lakh metric tons, since farmers tried to compensate for the 1998 flood by planting more boro, suggested a report published by the food ministry.

Officials said access to seed and fertiliser were key to maintaining production momentum.

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