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20pc rise in allowances of Ansars Rise above petty politics, join development work: PM

SHAHPUR, Gazipur, Feb 16: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today urged all quarters to rise above petty politics and forget all differences to join the current national development works, reports UNB. There is no alternative to democracy for a genuine development, she said addressing the 21st national rally of Bangladesh Ansars and Village Defence Party at Shaipur Ansar Academy here this morning. She urged all including VDP and Ansars to unitedly work for building up a society free from hunger, illiteracy and poverty. Praising the role of 45 lakh Ansars and VDP in maintaining law and order and public safety, especially in human resource development and income-generating projects, she said Ansars and VDP would be given more responsibilities in ensuring local development works and security to public life. She said despite limited facilities, Ansars and VDP have been working hard with the army in Chittagong Hill Tracts and made courageous contribu-

Book fair loses festive mood due to hartal

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair lost its festive mood due to hartal yesterday. The visitors at the fair were mostly from the Dhaka University and its adjoining areas. They did not spend much time at the fair like the previous days. Data Soft System, Bangladesh, which is providing list of the books available at the fair and other information relating to the fair, stopped their operation at the fair venue from yesterday due to the hartal. They are now doing this at their office. The fast food and drinks supplying vans were also not to be found yesterday. Foreign Minister Abdus Samad visited the fair in the afternoon delaying the hartal. Dhaka University Vice-

Hartal: Bomb blast

From page 1 by BNP called the general strike to press its demands for abolition of the Public Safety Act and resignation of the government. In the capital, police obstructed, tear-gassed and clubbed opposition activists while they took out processions at Bijoynagar and Naya Paltan and on Tongi Diversion Road during the hartal hours. About a dozen BNP activists, six of them female, were injured when police baton-charged and shot tear gas canisters at activists at BNP's main procession near Bijoynagar Law College at around 11 a.m. according to witnesses. Police went into action after some unruly activists tried to damage an auto-tempo which was passing through the procession. Police clashed with BNP leaders and activists and tried to enter into the party central office after pickets torched a motorcycle in front of the office at about 4 p.m. A BNP procession came under bomb attack allegedly by Awami League terrorists on Tongi Diversion Road in the morning. Three BNP activists—Matin, Faruq and Zaman—were injured, witnesses said. Police picked up eight BNP activists from the spot. Five people including three female garment workers sustained bomb injuries when unidentified miscreants hurled home-made bomb at a passenger bus at Sayedabad at about 8 a.m. The injured were identified as Panna, 30, Lucky Akhtar, 22, Tania, 20, Abdur Rajjak, 25. The identity of the other man could not be known immediately. The work for Venus Garments. They were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). According to the doctors, condition of Lucky Akhtar was critical. Abdur Awal, 65, was injured when pickets allegedly blasted bombs at RK Mission road in Gopibagh area at about 10 a.m. A rickshaw-puller named Jamal, 35, sustained bomb injuries when pickets threw bomb at his rickshaw at Tejgaon Satrasia crossing. Both the bomb victims were admitted to DMCH. Jatuya Ganatantrik Party (Jagpa) claimed that police detained four party activists in front of the party office at about 1.30 p.m. The arrested were Abi-

56 held on charge of attacking Hazari's car

CHITTAGONG, Feb 16: Normal life was disrupted due to the 36-hour hartal called by the opposition alliance. Sporadic explosions of home-made bombs during hartal hours created panicky situation in the city. But no casualty was reported, police said. Two people were arrested. All modes of vehicles stayed off the roads and highways though rickshaws were seen plying in large number. Most of the shops, markets and offices remained closed. Train service to and from Chittagong was as usual, railway sources said. Delivery of goods to and from Chittagong port remained suspended due to lack of trucks during hartal though cargo handling in the jetties and ship movement were carried out. Mills and factories at the industrial belts at Nasirabad, Sitakundu, Kalurghat and Patenga suffered production loss due to thin attendance of workers, sources said. Pro-hartal rallies and processions were held by the opposition workers at different points of the city and its surrounding areas. Anti-hartal rally and procession were also organised by the Jubo League and Chhatra League on the Darul Fazel Market premises and at New Market crossing this morning. Anti-hartal rally and procession were held amid tight security to avert any clash with hartal supporters. UNB adds: Opposition here have threatened to enforce a dawn-to-dusk hartal on Sunday if the police involved in assaulting their leaders are not taken to task and arrested operatives. The meeting addressed the lack of coordination encountered by the companies in certain areas since the concept of production sharing contracts was relatively new to the country. It was resolved Petrobangla would place a number of recommendations before the ministry in order to fix the problematic issues. The meeting was attended by NBR Chairman Abdul Mueed Chowdhury, Energy Secretary Dr. Towfik-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Petrobangla Chairman Mosharraf Hossain, NBR Member (Taxation), Petrobangla directors and oil company executives. The oil companies said it was unclear which currency they would use to return tax. They said the also had trouble estimating the depreciation equipment and property used for oil and gas exploration, abandonment cost and other issues. Abdul Mueed Chowdhury listened to the companies concerns before he instructed officials to take appropriate steps in keeping with the Bangladeshi context. Dr. Towfik-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the government wanted to prioritise foreign investment in Bangladesh. The taxation system would become more transparent and user friendly in the near future, he said.

Bomb explodes near KCC mayor office : One hurt

KHULNA, Feb 16: A powerful hand bomb exploded near the office of the Khulna City Corporation Mayor at noon today. One Habibur Rahman of the Licence Department was injured. He was rushed to Khulna General Hospital. Police could not identify the culprits responsible for the blast in the protected area of the City Corporation office where some riot police were earlier deployed in view of hartal. The mayor was not in his office during the explosion.

MPs revolt against Nepalese PM

KATMANDU, Feb 16: Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai faced ouster from office today as more than half of his governing Nepal Congress Party's lawmakers revolted against his leadership, reports AP. Bhattarai, 76, took office last May. The government has failed to fulfil the party's pledges and the prime minister has failed as a leader. We need to have a new leader, said Suresh Malla, head of the rebel group. The rebels sent a letter signed by 58 party lawmakers to the party parliamentary office, which is expected to hold a meeting within 15 days to settle the leadership issue. The rebels did not name their choice to replace Bhattarai. The governing party controls 113 seats in the 205-seat lower house of parliament. Bhattarai had offered to step down after the revolt first surfaced in December. But he apparently changed his mind. Party lawmakers blame him for poor administration, deteriorating law and order and failure to control attacks by Maoist insurgents. Parliament is scheduled to meet March 1.

Shell partnership under a fresh equity formula

Washington accuses bin Laden of masterminding the twin bombings of its embassies in East Africa in 1998. Bin Laden lives in neighbouring Afghanistan, protected by the Taliban religious militia, which rules roughly 90 per cent of that war-torn nation. The Taliban say bin Laden is a guest in their country and Afghan culture and tradition demands that he be protected. Bin Laden also has denied involvement in the US Embassy bombings. The United States has banned all trade with an investment in Taliban-ruled areas. Last November the United Nations imposed limited sanctions on the Taliban, barring international flights by their national airlines and freezing their overseas accounts. Also in Peshawar there were

US message on matchboxes, rupee notes for arrest of bin Laden

ISLAMABAD, Feb 16: The United States has taken its campaign to arrest suspected terrorist Osama bin Laden to the people of Pakistan—at least to those who smoke, reports AP. On Wednesday in the frontier city of Peshawar, which borders Afghanistan, the United States was circulating matchboxes with a picture of bin Laden accompanied by an Urdu language message: Reward for Osama bin Laden. The matchbox message promised that the identity of the informer would be confidential. It also carried a misprint in the reward offering 500,000 dollar instead of the 5 million dollar, which has already been announced by Washington. The US Consulate in Peshawar said it had launched the matchbox advertising campaign. Washington accuses bin Laden of masterminding the twin bombings of its embassies in East Africa in 1998. Bin Laden lives in neighbouring Afghanistan, protected by the Taliban religious militia, which rules roughly 90 per cent of that war-torn nation. The Taliban say bin Laden is a guest in their country and Afghan culture and tradition demands that he be protected. Bin Laden also has denied involvement in the US Embassy bombings. The United States has banned all trade with an investment in Taliban-ruled areas. Last November the United Nations imposed limited sanctions on the Taliban, barring international flights by their national airlines and freezing their overseas accounts. Also in Peshawar there were



Dhaka city unit of All-Party Action Council held a rally in the city yesterday. — Star photo

Opposition in Ctg threatens fresh hartal Sunday

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Mrs Sharif says Verdict in case against Sharif by month end

DUBAI, Feb 16: The wife of deposed Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif was quoted today as saying she expected the court trying her husband to issue its verdict at the end of this month. Reuter quoting newspaper reported. The Saudi-owned London-based al-Hayat said Kulsom Sharif had made her comments in the interview with the paper. "The military treats us like enemies of Pakistan. They cut off the telephone lines in my house and I cannot call abroad," it quoted Kulsom as saying. Kulsom has been allowed to visit her husband in jail. "He told me in my last meeting with him that he is writing his memoirs. He said he will tell all the truth in these memoirs," she said. Sharif, his brother and five others have been charged with kidnapping, terrorism, attempted murder and hijacking relating to an attempt on October 12 to divert a plane bringing army chief General Pervez Musharraf back to Karachi from Sri Lanka. Hijacking carries a possible death sentence in Pakistan.

Oil cos discuss tax issues with officials

The meeting was attended by NBR Chairman Abdul Mueed Chowdhury, Energy Secretary Dr. Towfik-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Petrobangla Chairman Mosharraf Hossain, NBR Member (Taxation), Petrobangla directors and oil company executives. The oil companies said it was unclear which currency they would use to return tax. They said the also had trouble estimating the depreciation equipment and property used for oil and gas exploration, abandonment cost and other issues. Abdul Mueed Chowdhury listened to the companies concerns before he instructed officials to take appropriate steps in keeping with the Bangladeshi context. Dr. Towfik-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the government wanted to prioritise foreign investment in Bangladesh. The taxation system would become more transparent and user friendly in the near future, he said.

Financial irregularities in Barendra project

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Accounts discussed various financial irregularities of the Agriculture Ministry's Barendra Multipurpose Development Project yesterday, reports UNB. The meeting discussed 10 audit objections of the project in 1991-96 and financial irregularities involving over Tk 3.22 crore. He asked the government to accept the opposition demands or face tougher agitation programmes in the days ahead.

Buriganga

From page 1 high tide is at its peak, the river water becomes almost immobile hindering the dilution of the lethal pollutants, the villagers explained. Sixteen-thousand cubic metres of highly toxic wastes from the Hazaribagh tanneries flow into Buriganga daily through two sluice gates at Rayerbazaar and Hazaribagh. The gates were built jointly by the Dhaka WASA and the Water Development Board (WDB). The Rayerbazaar sluice gate built about three years ago diverts the flow of a huge volume of tannery wastes from southern side to new areas outside the flood protection embankment. The sluice gate instantly contributed to polluting vast stretches of low-lying areas, natural canals and fresh areas of Buriganga River in the west.

Sylhet hartal: 4th day passes off peacefully

From Staff Correspondent SYLHET, Feb 16: The fourth day of the live-day hartal called by the opposition here passed off almost peacefully. However, considering the sufferings of the people, leaders of the opposition parties have reduced the hartal period. Hartal has been withdrawn for 12 hours from 6 pm today but it will be observed for 6 hours from 6 am tomorrow. The All Party Action (Opposition) Committee called the hartal for immediate withdrawal of the names of different halls and buildings in the Shahjalal University of Science & Technology. The commercial establishments were shut while all types of vehicles were off the streets and the educational institutions remained closed for the fourth day. Transactions in the commercial banks were also totally suspended while government offices could not function. However, the Biman service and rail communications were operational with a very few number of passengers. During hartal hours, some rickshaws and autorickshaws were damaged by the pickets in different areas. There was no report of any arrest from anywhere. The All Party Action Committee held a rally at the Court-poin with district Jatiya Party president Advocate Giasuddin Ahmed in the chair. It was also addressed by joint secretary of the district BNP Advocate Noman Mahmud, City Jamaat Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman, Khelafat Mujlis leader Moulana Khalilur Rahman. The speakers said that, the leaders of the ruling party would have to pay for ignoring the demands of the people of the greater Sylhet region. They also threatened to go for tougher programme. Meanwhile, the district Command of MuktiJoddha Sangsad at a meeting held in its office last night protested activities of the 'anti-liberation forces'. The speakers resolved that any move to change the name of the women's hall in the Shahjalal University named after Jahan Ara Khanam would be resisted at any cost. Anti-people forces are out to create an unwanted situation in the name of movement, they observed. Enam Ahmed Chowdhury District Commander presided the meeting. District Awami League President Syed Abu Nosor Advocate and General Secretary A N M Shafique in a statement issued to the press tonight said the activists of BNP had pushed the people to the extreme in the name of movement. They are doing this for their personal benefit, the leaders said. Warning the opposition, the AL leaders said, undemocratic and vengeful activities would not be tolerated. They also called upon the government for taking stern steps against those who are engaged in the vandalism and anarchy.

Abolish PSA, demands Opposition

The opposition alliance leaders reiterated their demand yesterday for immediate abolition of the Public Safety Act and early general elections. They said the current movement is now becoming a mass upsurge and the fall of the government is imminent. Speaking at a press briefing at 29 Minto Road, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said the government is pushing the country towards a conflict and instigating the opposition parties to create lawlessness. Bhuiyan alleged that the government like in the past attacked opposition activists in different parts of the country to foil the hartal. The BNP secretary general said police raided houses of party leaders and activists in Feni on Tuesday night and seized immovable goods without any court order. He asked the government to accept the opposition demands or face tougher agitation programmes in the days ahead.

Muggers stab businessman in Demra

A businessman was stabbed by a gang of muggers at a place called 'Signboard' in Demra area Tuesday night. The victim was identified as Solayman Mian, 45, owner of Azad Pipe Factory in the area and a resident of Road Number 15, Dhanmondi Residential area, Dhaka. Solayman came under attack by the gang as soon as he reached near his factory by a baby taxi at about 8:30 pm. When the victim came out of the vehicle and was about to pay the fare of the vehicle, a gang of five intercepted him and asked to part with his valuables. When Solayman refused to oblige, the gang stabbed him on his right chest and fled the spot. He was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition from where he was shifted to the Orthopaedic Hospital. When contacted, Demra police said that a case had been filed but none was arrested in this connection.

Energy sector posts

From page 1 leadership crisis. Key organisations like BAPEX, Eastern Refinery, Padma Oil and RPGCL are being run under make-shift arrangements due to lack of top officials, sources said. The post of Director Operations in Petrobangla is vital for PSC monitoring. But there has been no serious attempt to fill up the vacancy through promotion or appointment. As a result, Petrobangla is handicapped in the current Second Round Block Bidding for oil and gas exploration and so the Energy Ministry has become more involved in negotiations with foreign companies, the sources said. Consequently, PSC negotiation has become a cumbersome and uncoordinated process. The worst is that nobody seems to be paying attention to this," he said. The government should pay immediate attention to recruitment of manpower in this sector. 2 cases filed From page 1 demand, which occurred on February 11. However, chances of rescuing the kidnapped child were slim, they said. Nayan Alamgir, Tuhin and Rubel were also charged in the case but have eluded arrest, police said. However, police said they didn't know why a case wasn't filed immediately after the incident occurred. The victim's family could not be reached for comment. On Tuesday, Shampur police registered a case under the act in connection with the same event, but nobody had been arrested at that time. In the second case, Sufia Begum, a resident of BNP slum under Mohammadpur Police, registered a case against 23 people, including 13 identified people, yesterday for a creating panic in the area with home-made bombs. She also accused the gang of stealing Tk 10,000 from her. Mohammadpur Police said they haven't made any arrests, but insisted such incidents were not unusual in the area. The case was not politically motivated, they added. The MD and two top execu-



Osama bin Laden

reports of 100 rupee notes being circulated on which a Pashtu language message was stamped again announcing the 5 million dollar reward. The reward which was announced several months ago also offers possible asylum or relocation to anyone with information leading to bin Laden's arrest. There were reports this week in a Pashtu-language newspaper that bin Laden had recently visited the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, barely 75 kilometers from bin Laden's base. Pakistan's military leader, Gen Pervez Musharraf is to travel to Afghanistan, possibly this weekend, to meet the Taliban leadership to discuss a strategy to combat terrorism. Previously Musharraf offered to negotiate between the Taliban and the United States to find a solution to the issue of bin Laden. The Taliban have offered to allow international observers monitor bin Laden's movements in Afghanistan, or try him in an Islamic court presided over by judges from three Islamic countries. Washington has refused.