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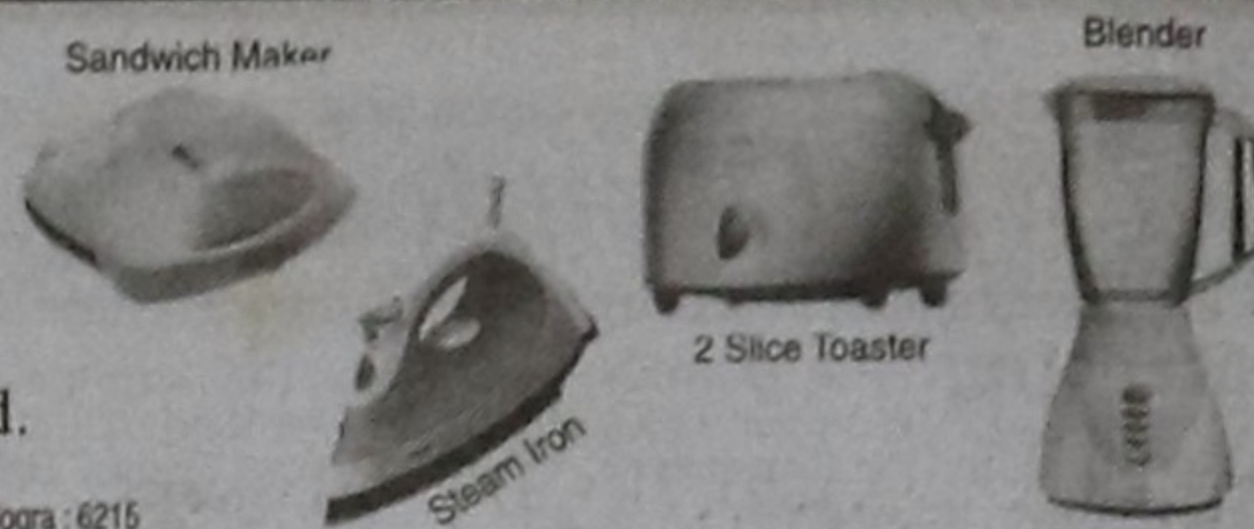
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AL has 'no respect for independence'

By Staff Correspondent

SHAKHIPUR, Tangail, Mar 27: BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said today the ruling party has no respect for the country's independence, although it always spoke about the spirit of the Liberation War.

She said that the month of March was very important for the nation because the nation had begun its war against the occupation forces to liberate the country and our Nation National Independence Day fell in this month.

"Every year the nation pays rich tributes to the martyrs who laid down their lives for the cause of independence. But the government, knowing the significance of the month failed to take the visiting US President to the National Mausoleum," Khaleda Zia said and wondered "is this Awami League's spirit of liberation?"

Addressing a huge public meeting at Shakhipur thana parishad ground in the afternoon, she said the government similarly spoke about the right to vote, but it had itself come to power through creating terrorism, rigging and snatching votes in 1996.

The leader of the Opposition in Parliament said the ruling party was conspiring to come to power again through rigging and snatching votes. But she cautioned that the party in future would not be allowed to rig the votes and people would never allow it to come to power.

Referring to AL's nearly four-year rule, she said the government had ruined the coun-

try's economy, destroyed industry, agriculture, education and the dignity and prestige of the nation in the world by making the country dependent on a 'certain country'.

Khaleda Zia said country's economy, agriculture and education had been made dependent on India and the government had opened the border so that the country could be flooded with low quality India commodities.

She said that the government was deliberately ruining the country's economic backbone to hand over Bangladesh to India "in phases". The AL has started the process since after its ascent to power and wanted to come to power again to permanently make Bangladesh completely subservient to India.

The BNP Chairperson said people of the country had realised the evil motive and designs of the government and realised that voting in favour of the AL in 1996 polls was a wrong thing to do and this was why people of all walks of life now rallied round BNP.

Turning to the Public Safety Act, she said the AL terrorists were moving freely around the country and continued looting, snatching, toll extortion and killing of people, but the PSA was not being used against the culprits. The Act was solely being used against the opposition leaders and activists.

She observed that the PSA was enacted only to harass the

See page 11 col 7



President Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pay homage to the martyrs of the Liberation War at the National Mausoleum in Savar on the Independence Day. —Star photo

Independence Day celebrated

The 29th anniversary of independence was observed on Sunday with a new promise to fight poverty and illiteracy in the march towards emerging as a developed nation in the next two decades, reports UNB.

Paying tribute to the independence martyrs, the nation also vowed to consolidate its bloodstained freedom and extend its benefit to each and every citizen.

As the day dawned with a 21-gun salute, President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina placed wreaths at the altar of national monument in Savar amidst the melancholic strain of the army's last post.

Thousands walked to the mausoleum to salute the heroes who sacrificed their blood to liberate the country from the brutal military junta of Pakistan in 1971.

In the early hours of March 25, 1971, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman proclaimed independence after Pakistani troops

cracked down on innocent people in what was East Pakistan.

After a nine month war, Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation with the surrender of Pakistani occupation forces on December 16.

As the nation celebrated its independence anniversary, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina launched a campaign against poverty, urging the people to fight against it as they had against the enemies in 1971.

See page 11 col 4

Land-grabbing behind fire in Mirpur slums

By Staff Correspondent

Rivalry between two local factions of the ruling party to grab 20 bighas of land at Mirpur Section 10 led to three incidents of fire at three slums there in the last four days, leaving thousands of people homeless, local people and witnesses alleged.

When asked, local leaders and supporters of the rival factions denied their involvement in the fire incidents but accused each other of trying to grab the land.

The land belongs to the Ministry of Works but different groups, patronised by influential people and a section of the administration, raised shanties there at different times to realise rent and do criminal and anti-social activities.

The latest incident occurred in the area yesterday in which one godown of garments waste was gutted. After the fire incident, the rival groups also clashed, but policemen deployed there remained silent spectators, witnesses alleged.

The godown was set on fire

due to rivalry between the two ruling party factions, some local people alleged.

On Friday, more than 200 shanties of day labourers, godowns packed with garments waste and looms of Benarasi sari were gutted in a fire at Block C.

Some more godowns were affected in another fire in the same area on Friday night. The fire was put out before it caused any major damage, witness said. Gunshots were also traded between two rival groups during that time, witnesses said.

After yesterday's fire, kerosene and some other inflammable materials were recovered from near a godown, they claimed.

Mansur Ahmed, Secretary of the local Garment Waste Traders' Association, was beaten by his rival Manik and his gang yesterday for his alleged involvement in the fire incidents. Manik is backed by Kamal Majumder, a ruling party MP from Mirpur.

Mansur Ahmed, who is backed by S M Mannan Kochi, a local leader of Awami Shechha Shebak League, denied the charge and asked how he can set fire to godowns while he himself is a garments waste trader.

If garment waste business can be removed from the area, Manik and his patrons will be able to grab the whole land, some supporters of Mansur alleged.

Some Supporters Manik said they want removal of garments waste business from the

area as it is polluting the environment. They blamed Mansur for setting fire to the shanties. If the slums are removed, Mansur and his gang will grab the land, they alleged.

BCL declares Sadik persona non grata on RU campus

RAJSHAHI, Mar 27: Ruling party backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) declared the Minister of Education A H S K Sadik persona non grata on Rajshahi University campus.

The RU unit of BCL in a memorandum submitted this morning to the VC demanded cancellation of the decision of increasing fees and establishment of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall at the place of Matihar Hall. In the memorandum, BCL held the education minister for postponement of the works on establishment of the proposed Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall.

Earlier RU authorities decided to demolish the tin-shade Matihar Hall to build a new hall after Bangabandhu's name. The foundation stone was scheduled to be laid by the Education Minister who postponed the programme in the wake of protests by some teachers and students belonging to the opposition.

Sharif's lawyer argues credibility of witnesses

KARACHI, Mar 27: The lawyer for deposed prime minister Nawaz Sharif wound up his final argument on Monday charging the prosecution failed to prove charges of hijacking against the ex-premier and demanding the charges be dropped, reports AP.

The trial was adjourned until Tuesday when lawyers of two co-defendants in the case will give separate closing arguments. Sharif's lawyers closing arguments sought to discredit the prosecution witnesses.

"The prosecution has failed miserably to provide any circumstantial evidence of hijacking," said Khwaja Sultan.

Sharif and six others, including his younger brother Shahbaz, stand accused of endangering the life of army chief Gen Pervez Musharraf by denying his airliner landing rights during the tense hours of an October 12 coup.

If convicted, the men could face the death penalty. They have all pleaded not guilty.

The verdict and sentencing is expected next week.

The prosecution says the anti-terrorists court trying Sharif and his colleagues is required by law to hand down the maximum penalty, which is death.

Sultan spent much of his final day of arguments reading aloud the testimony of four prosecution witnesses, including his star witness, Aminuddin Chaudhry, the former civil aviation authority chairman, in an attempt to point out discrepancies between their written statements and their testimonies given in court. Sultan said that there were discrepancies in times and names between the two accounts.

For example, he said one witness did not mention a senior bureaucrat Saeed Mehdi, also charged in this case, in his written statement but implicated him in his verbal testimony.

Sultan is the leading lawyer for five of the seven men on trial.

PM pledges UP complexes

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveiled yesterday a government plan to construct a full-fledged UP complex in each union to provide one-stop service to rural people, reports UNB.

"We have already finalised the design of the complex, where all necessary services will be provided to the people of the respective union," she said while addressing the UP chairmen and members from Sadar thana, Rangpur district, at her office.

Hasina said after the construction of the complexes in phases, all the services the Union Parishad provides would be available.

She said the government would construct 20 complexes each year under the plan.

"We have approved three types of designs, one for flood-prone areas, one for cyclone-prone areas and another for normal areas of the country, so that these complexes have multipurpose uses."

Hasina said development of a country is impossible without a smooth communications system.

In keeping with this the government has planned to

build a modern communications network connecting each union with thana headquarters and each thana with district headquarters," she said.

In response to the claims of the chairmen and members about no development in North Bengal during the previous government's tenure the Prime Minister said the previous government was in power to change their own lot. "And they did it."

The Awami League is working relentlessly to change the lot of the downtrodden by creating development plans that attached equal importance to all regions of the country.

None held yet in Sujon Murder Case

By Staff Correspondent

None was arrested in connection with the killing of BCL leader Kamruzzaman Sujon, gunned down by his rival on Saturday night.

Sujon, son of Shajahan Kabir of Elephant Road was shot dead by armed men at Shahid Salimullah Road in Mohammadpur.

He was killed by his rivals for control over toll collection and establishing control in the area, police said. Sujon was wanted in several murder, extortion abduction and arm cases.

Sujon was attacked when he along with his friend Tutul was travelling in a rickshaw at Dhanmondi area. Two armed men dragged him to a water tank in the area and shot him indiscriminately, police said quoting witnesses.

The gang fled the spot leaving Sujon wounded while Tutul managed to escape. He was absconding till yesterday, police said.

Zimbabwe 11 for no loss

By Sports Reporter

Zimbabwe were 11 without loss at lunch in their second innings in the second Test against the West Indies at Kingston yesterday.

Earlier, the hosts were all out for 339, a lead of 31, in their first innings with captain Jimmy Adams making an unbeaten 101.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

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