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Lara Dutta is Miss Universe

NICOSIA, Cyprus, May 13: A 21-year-old model from India who said beauty pageants give women a platform to "voice our choices and opinions" was named Miss Universe 2000, reports AP.

Lara Dutta succeeded Mpule Kwelagobe of Botswana to become the 49th winner of the pageant Saturday.

Claudia Morena, 22, of Venezuela was second and Helen Lindes, 18, of Spain was third.

Dutta, who holds a master's degree in Communications, topped 78 other contestants who had competed during the last three weeks on this Mediterranean island, which promoted itself as the island of love. According to Greek mythology, the goddess of beauty, Aphrodite, was born here.

Dutta won the crown after impressing the judges with an answer to the final question of the contest: What would you say to those who condemn the contest as an affront to women?

"Pageants like Miss Universe give us young women a platform to toil in the fields that we want to and forge ahead to be entrepreneurs, be it the armed forces, be it politics," Dutta responded. "It gives us a platform to voice our choices and opinions and it makes us strong and independent that we are today."

Moreno and Lindes were also asked the same question.

As her name was announced, Dutta, wearing a single strap, glittering red gown, raised her hand to her mouth. She then hugged Moreno, who was standing next to her.

Dutta consistently impressed the judges with her beauty and poise. She won the swimsuit contest with 9.44 points out of a maximum 10 while Moreno was second with 9.37. She came fourth in the evening gown competition with 9.40 points behind Moreno (9.55) and Columbia's Catalina Acosta, 22, (9.52) and Lindes of Spain (9.51).

The Cypriot Church condemned the pageant as unchristian and an affront to feminism.

After sunset Friday, about 100 people, mostly women in their 50s and 60s, held an all-night protest vigil at a hilltop church overlooking the Eleftheria stadium where the pageant is being held.

Earlier, the parishioners distributed leaflets on the street that said: "Shame to the beauty contest which plunges women down to the bottomless pit of hell."

About 50 demonstrators also gathered outside the pageant venue late Friday while a dress rehearsal was going on.



Tears roll down the cheeks of Lara Dutta after her coronation as the Miss Universe 2000 yesterday in Nicosia.

—AFP photo

Efforts to nominate CEC on consensus to continue: PM

FFs' allowance from next fiscal year

CHITTAGONG, May 13: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday she would continue her efforts to nominate a person as new Chief Election Commissioner on the basis of national consensus, reports UNB.

The Prime Minister said this while addressing a grand rally of freedom fighters organised by the Combined Freedom Fighters Front of Chittagong at M.A. Aziz stadium.

Hasina said since assuming power, she had tried to rule the country on consensus so that democracy gets stronger. She referred to her letter to Khaleda for discussion on a new CEC after resignation of Abu Hena. But Khaleda outright rejected it, she said.

The Prime Minister said despite the authority vested in her by the Constitution, she had been continuing discussion with different political parties on the question of nominating a person for CEC.

She referred to her discussion with the 11-party combine and said more discussion would take place on the matter.

"Then I will take decision and sent a proposal to the President for approval," she told the rally.

Hasina called upon the freedom fighters and democratic forces to frustrate the "opposition's blueprint" to disrupt democratic rule.

"We've earned democracy and voting rights, we'll not allow it to be foiled. Get united and be alert against conspirators," she said.

Hasina said all the four were against the country's liberation war, and were the beneficiaries of Bangabandhu's killing and post-75 military dictatorships that trampled constitution and people's voting right.

She said these four "conspirators" joined hands to overthrow the present democratic government since the beginning as it is engaged in restoring the spirit of great liberation war and institutionalising democracy to improve the economic condition of the people.

But the opposition's so-called movement has failed, the Prime Minister said, adding that despite continuous threat, "we are running the government to establish a poverty and illiteracy-free Bangladesh."

She urged the people and freedom fighters to remain alert so that the "conspirators" could not snatch away the people's voting rights.

The Prime Minister said her government has provided financial benefits to families of

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Saarc judges for strengthening judiciary to protect HR

The two-day preliminary meeting for the proposed South Asia Judicial Colloquium Series began in the capital yesterday, reports BSS.

Special emphasis has been given on strengthening the judiciary in the SAARC countries for effective protection of human rights in this region.

Held at a city hotel, the meeting being attended by Chief Justices of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, put forward several suggestions for effective guarantee of human rights in the South Asian Judiciary, and which "would focus on the areas of access to justice and judicial remedies for the vindication of human rights."

Justice Fernando said the judiciary in South Asia has "a heavy responsibility" in response to the needs and expectation of the public, to ensure good governance to facilitate access to justice, to strengthen rule of law and to safeguard

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One stabbed to death in city

A middle-aged man was stabbed to death in the city's RK Mission Road on Friday night apparently following dispute over boundary of his house, reports UNB.

Family members said armed terrorists attacked Bidhu Saha, 50, while he was walking in front of his 7/1 RK Mission Road residence at about 11 pm.

"He was out of the house as load-shedding was going on in the area at that time," said victim's brother-in-law Shiron Saha.

His relations found him lying in a pool of blood on the street and immediately rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where the attending doctor declared him dead.

"We are not sure, but the killing of Bidhu, father of a son and a daughter, might be a sequel to dispute over boundary of his house," Shiron Saha said.

A case was filed with Sutrapur thana in connection with the killing.



—Star photo

Wrists of BCL activist severed at Mymensingh

From Our Correspondent

MYMENSINGH, May 13: A group of terrorists severed wrists of an activist of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at College Road adjacent to Ananda Mohan College at about 10 am today.

The victim was identified as Russell, 28.

Police said, Russell came under attack while he was going to Ananda Mohan College.

He was first admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) and later shifted to Dhaka as his condition deteriorated.

Bus rams fountain at Gulistan

Parts of grill-wall of the newly constructed fountain at Bangabandhu Square in Gulistan were damaged and the pump operator was injured as a bus rammed it yesterday morning, reports UNB.

Anisur Rahman, pump operator of the fountain, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Police and witnesses said driver of a bus of the Rider Paribahan lost control over the steering and rammed the fountain at about 8 am.

Driver M Zahangir Alam was arrested and later produced before the court.

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