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Prime Minister says People of all faiths have equal rights

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government has guaranteed freedom of all people to perform their respective religious rites and live in peaceful co-existence, reports UNB.

"We believe in democracy and secularism... People of all religious faiths have got full freedom to perform and culture their religious rites in this land." She said while addressing the members of Buddhist community at her office on the occasion of holy Buddha Purnima.

The Prime Minister said Buddha's philosophy was love, welfare and happiness of mankind, which is also the essence of all religions. Those who think of the country must also think of love and welfare of the human beings.

About contribution of people irrespective of region, creed and culture to the war of liberation in 1971, she said it is the responsibility of all to build up the country as an abode of peace and prosperity so that every citizen gets the benefit of independence.

Hasina said the present government has taken special care for backward sections of the society so that they could enjoy equal rights and facilities in education and jobs and equal honour in society. She said various development programmes were taken up and financial assistance was extended for development of minority groups and their places of worship.

Amidst cheers, she said the government allocated one bigha

of land for construction of Buddhist Monastery at Merul-Badda area in the capital. Besides, seven representatives from different tribes are enjoying the status of cabinet minister or junior ministers. Two Ambassadors — one from Buddhist and another from Christian communities — were appointed as Bangladesh's Ambassadors to Bhutan and Nepal.

The Prime Minister announced donation of Tk one crore to the welfare fund of the Buddhist community. Earlier, leaders of Buddhist community praised the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in resolving national problems like sharing of the Ganges water with India and insurgency in the Chittagong Hill Tracts through historic peace accord and anti-nuclear mission to India and Pakistan that earned her international laurels.

The Buddhist leaders resolved that they are united behind the leadership of Sheikh Hasina and ready to make any amount of sacrifice at the call of her.

Those who spoke on the occasion were Ms Ethin Rakhain MP, Rakhal Chandra Barua of Buddhist Association, ML Barua of Buddhist Federation, Dr Pranab Kumar Barua of Bouddha-Kristi Prachar Sangha and Dr Shukumar Barua of Buddhist Youth Welfare Association.

A group of Buddhist monks recited from their holy book wishing welfare of the country and the Prime Minister.



BNP-led opposition alliance brought out a mass procession in the city yesterday demanding resignation of the government. — Star photo

Opposition procession demanding resignation of govt

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance yesterday brought out a mass procession in the city demanding resignation of the government and trial of the ministers, who reportedly threatened the judges.

Secretaries general of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote led the procession that paraded different city streets chanting anti-government slogans.

They addressed a rally at Paltan Maidan before bring out the procession.

Addressing the rally, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan asked the government to quit power immediately or face dire consequences.

Replying to AL's allegation that the opposition parties are conspiring to come to power through backdoor, Bhuiyan said the demands for resignation of this "corrupt, incompetent, and anti-people" government and holding of early national election are democratic and the BNP has no desire to go to power through backdoor.

He told the ruling AL to step down from power immediately and declare election to prove its popularity. The Awami League will be washed away if the future election is free and fair, Bhuiyan said.

Mannan Bhuiyan blasted the role of some officials and employees of the Radio and Television and asked them to maintain neutrality.

JP secretary general Nazim Rahman Manjur said there can't be any discussion with the present government on appointing a CEC because it has lost its right to stay in power.

The opposition will not sit with the Prime Minister, but with the President, he said.

Jamaat secretary general Matjur Rahman Nizami said

the statement made by Finance Minister Shah AMŞ Kibria clearly proved that the government wanted to stage a drama in the name of dialogue with the opposition.

Presided over by city BNP president Sadek Hossain Khoka MP, it was addressed, among others, by BNP leader Abdus Salam and Kazi Abul Bashar, JP leader Saifur Rahman and Taiibur Rahman. Jamaat leaders ATM Azharul Islam and Jashimuddin Sarkar, IOJ leader Abdur Rab Yusuf and DL leader Saifuddin Ahmed Moni.

The meeting over several thousands leaders and workers of the four parties brought out a big procession that paraded Dainik Bangla, Fakirerpool, Naya Paltan, Bhojnagar and Topkhana and ended in front of the Jatiya Press Club. No untoward incident was reported.

Thinley said the people of Bhutan has great feelings for the people of Bangladesh and there was a lot of shared feelings of closeness, mutuality and a common cultural affinity.

He expressed the hope that tourist traffic and exchange of people would increase between the two neighbours. "Perhaps, we could together market the great sandstone and sunshine of your country along with the scenic mountains to encourage people to visit each other's country."

Thinley said Bangladesh is one of the three countries enjoying visa-free entry into Bhutan.

Bhutan, he said, treasures its culture and its heritage just as Bangladesh does. "We only allow tourism flourish in an orderly manner so that our ecosystem and our culture is protected. Last year, only 6000 foreign (mainly Western) tourists were allowed into Bhutan. We want low volume, high quality tourism."

Bhutan charges 200 dollars a day for tourists from other countries so that it does not have an unplanned flow of people who could pollute the eco-system and natural heritage.

The Bhutanese foreign minister hoped that the SAARC Summit "had a brief halt" and that technical cooperation in all areas would continue among the members.

Asked when the SAARC Summit would be held, Thinley said: "I am the foreign minister of only one of the seven countries, and I cannot, in my wisdom, answer that question."

He said Bhutan, which has never hosted a SAARC Summit due to lack of infrastructure facilities, is now ready for it and expects to hold the 2003 summit.

Sub-regional cooperation

Kamal visits CCCI office under police protection

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, May 16: Situation at Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) has taken a dramatic turn today when its ousted president Kamal Uddin Ahmed visited the chamber office this afternoon, sources concerned said.

Kamal who claims himself as the CCCI president, went to the chamber office under police protection at 3-20 pm today. But he could not enter the president's room as it was locked and some chamber directors were staying in the conference room, chamber sources said.

Kamal then looked for the secretary of CCCI to open the president's room, but he was not available at that time.

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Meghnaghat project: PDB blames AES for stubbornness

By Staff Correspondent

The Power Development Board (PDB) yesterday said that its dispute over the Meghnaghat Power Plant project site with US power company AES could not be resolved even after 13 hours of meeting due to stubbornness of AES.

In an official explanation regarding the news on AES-PDB dispute published in various newspapers Monday PDB said that AES had been declining to take over the Meghnaghat first phase land site on various pretexts, including that the development works there had flaws, since January 3.

On Sunday, AES filed a letter to the Secretary for Power expressing its frustrations about PDB's rigid stance regarding resolving the Meghnaghat crisis. AES alleged that PDB deliberately and repeatedly differed with AES on drafting an agreement Saturday last.

The PDB explanation said yesterday, to ensure whether the site had any flaws, PDB's consultant Mott MacDonald tested the site and certified that the works were up to the standard. Later, PDB assigned two international experts: Dr. VM Sharma and Dastidar, to verify the land test reports. They also opined that the works were flawless.

Last Saturday, under the auspices of the State Minister for Power, PDB-AES met to resolve the crisis. During this

meeting, AES submitted a draft agreement outlining a demand of US 10 million dollars to undertake "so-called remedial works" for the project site. PDB then said that since there were no flaws in the site, PDB would not agree to waste any money for this purpose. However, for the sake of an agreement, the

Energy Ministry agreed to pay US 4.3 million dollars.

During the amendment of the draft agreement, PDB proposed AES to conduct the remedial tasks together. AES declined this proposal. Later, PDB chairman again proposed, "remedial works should be done in a competitive and transparent way." Again AES declined.

"In other words, AES does not want the government or PDB to know how it would spend the remedial money," the explanation said, accusing AES of felling the combined move of PDB and the Energy Ministry to resolve the crisis. AES also walked out from the meeting keeping the Power Secretary and PDB chairman waiting.

Correction of a draft agreement through discussion is a standard practice, PDB said, adding that it was AES which proposed some suspicious conditions which PDB found disagreeable. These were: a. obtaining 4.5 million dollar from PDB in the name of the so-called flaws, b. conducting remedial works as per one-sided assessment, and c. conducting remedial works in a non-transparent manner.

PDB further claimed that it had always been cooperating with AES on all aspects to help progress of the project and refused AES's allegations in this regard.

CJ critical of failure to try war criminals

Chief Justice Latifur Rahman is seriously critical about the war crimes and the failure to try the criminals, but expects Bangladesh to ratify the Rome Statute for establishing International Criminal Court that can do the job, reports UNB.

"Unfortunately, we failed to try the perpetrators who committed such crimes," he said apparently about the failure of the successive governments in holding trial for the offences like killing, raping and causing sufferings of innocent people in 1971.

"Even the international community failed to use its available machinery to deal with the situation either with a view to terminating the gross violations of human rights which were occurring or to deal with the threat to international peace which they constituted."

He said: "We cannot forget the fact that Bangladesh was liberated after a protracted war of liberation wherein millions of people were killed, thousands of women raped and sufferings of the innocent men and women knew no bounds."

The Chief Justice made the observations while inaugurating a two-day national conference on "International Criminal Court and Ratification by Bangladesh" at a local hotel yesterday afternoon.

He said widespread violation of human rights was perpetrated in many parts of the

world systematically or in planned manner.

Although much progress has been made in the protection of human rights worldwide, the disturbing reality is that people who killed, tortured and raped systematically or on a massive scale are still likely to escape punishment.

Besides the atrocities committed by Pakistan in 1971, there were such incidents in Vietnam, Cambodia and Korea, where neither the national system nor the world community could bring to justice those responsible for such crimes of genocide, he said.

It is indeed, the Chief Justice said, gratifying to note that at long last the international community recognised the importance of setting up of a permanent International Criminal Court to bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes like genocide and crimes against humanity.

So far 96 countries have signed the Rome Statute and only nine ratified. Ratification by 60 states is needed for establishing the court in the Hague. Bangladesh is one of the signatories, but yet to ratify it.

Asian Network for International Criminal Court (ANICC) in cooperation with Ain O Salish Kendra is organising the conference in their bid to persuade the governments to ratify the Statute for establishing such a court which will deal

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Honest, efficient person to be made CEC: PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last night said an honest and efficient person would be nominated as Chief Election Commissioner, reports UNB.

She said this while holding a meeting with a 14-member delegation of Jatiya Party (M-M) led by its chairman Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju.

The Prime Minister said with the resignation of Mohammad Abu Hena the Election Commission virtually fell inoperative and said the EC be re-constituted soon appointing a new CEC.

Referring to her initiative to nominate a consensus CEC, Hasina said she had invited Leader of the Opposition to discuss the matter and set a new trend in democracy upholding the spirit of parliamentary democracy.

She has already instructed ministers and Awami League leaders to discuss the issue with the Opposition at their respective levels, but they did not respond.

The JP leaders said after Khaleda Zia's statement at Kurigram public meeting the Prime Minister had no option but to move ahead as per Constitution.

"Jatiya Party now want that the Prime Minister take step as the Constitution dictates," the JP leaders said.

Emerging from the meeting Anwar Hossain Manju told newsmen that they requested the Prime Minister to reconstitute the EC and appoint CEC as per constitutional provision.

About Khaleda's rejection of planned dialogue with the government, he said by doing this she proved that she even did not listen to her own partymen.

The meeting was attended by Sardar Amzar Hossain, Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Adv Fazole Rabbi MP, Sharfuddin Ahmed Jhantu MP, Monirul Huq Chowdhury, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto MP, Mustafizur Rahman MP, Sahadat Hossain MP, Golam Hossain MP, Golam Farook Ovi MP, Abdur Rahim and Sayed Tarek.

Bhutan for bus link

From page 1

would allow a shorter passage point and be able to connect the eastern part of Bhutan where the bulk of the Bhutanese people live.

A Bhutanese trade delegation will have a detailed discussions on transit, bus service and expansion of items on the trading list with Bangladesh officials in Dhaka shortly, he said.

Thinley said the people of Bhutan has great feelings for the people of Bangladesh and there was a lot of shared feelings of closeness, mutuality and a common cultural affinity.

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Sub-regional cooperation



Queen honours Liz Taylor

LONDON, May 16: Clad in an embroidered frock coat and riding in a wheelchair, actress Elizabeth Taylor went to Buckingham Palace today to be made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire, the distaff equivalent of a knight, reports AP.

Queen Elizabeth II presented Taylor with the award for services to the entertainment industry and to charity, including her prodigious fundraising for AIDS research.

Afterwards, the much-married star — who uncharacteristically arrived on time — said she wished former husband Richard Burton could have been there.

"I came to Buckingham Palace once before, years ago, with Richard, when he received the OBE," she said, referring to his elevation to Officer of the Order of the British Empire "I miss him so much."

Today doesn't compare to anything else that's happened to me in my life," she added.

Along with a heavy pearl necklace and pearl and diamond earrings, the actress wore one of the large diamond rings lavished on her by Burton, who died in 1984. The couple married and divorced twice between 1964 and 1976.

Taylor, 68, was allowed to use a palace side entrance, where an elevator carried her wheelchair up to the ballroom

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AL to observe Hasina's home-coming day today

Bangladesh Awami League and its front organisations will observe Sheikh Hasina's home-coming day today, a party press release said, reports BSS.

On this day in 1981, Sheikh Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu and now the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, returned home from exile.

Leaders and workers of Bangladesh Awami League and its front organisations will greet their leader at 9 am today. She will be given a grand reception at 3 pm to mark the historic occasion, the press release said.

Bus collision kills 3 in Narsingdi

From Our Correspondent

NARSINGDI, May 16: At least three people died and 15 others injured in a road accident near Raipura Mahmudabad bridge on the Dhaka-Sylhet highway today.

According to police and witnesses, the accident occurred when a Dhaka bound bus from Bhairab collided with a microbus coming from opposite direction at about 10:30 pm, leaving three passengers dead on the spot and injuring 15 others.

The identity of the deceased could not be known immediately.

Police recovered the bodies and sent them to Narsingdi Sadar Hospital for autopsy.

Of the injured, five were admitted to Raipura thana health complex while others to private clinics.

A case was filed with Raipura police station in this connection.

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