

BJP slams opposition's spoiling tactics

NEW DELHI, Jan 4 : India's ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party kicked off its two-day national executive meeting here today with an attack on spoiling tactics being employed by opposition parties, reports AFP.

In his opening remarks to the meeting, BJP president Bangaru Laxman accused the opposition of trying to "throw spanners" into the workings of the BJP-dominated coalition government.

Opposition parties have in the past month sought to accentuate differences between the BJP and its more secular-minded allies by highlighting the former's links with a controversial campaign to build a temple on the site of a mosque razed by Hindu zealots in 1992.

In his speech, Laxman stressed the BJP was committed to carrying out the coalition's "national agenda of governance" which specifically avoids certain communal issues.

He also claimed that the BJP's recent initiative to woo Muslim voters was bearing fruit despite the "propaganda" put out by the opposition.

"Those who were unwilling to listen to us in the past are today prepared to enter into a dialogue with us," Laxman said.

DNC trio lets liquor

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clubs and bars, the official informed. "This would give you a clear picture of the level of corruption in the department."

Each and every bar and illegal liquor supplier in the city and elsewhere in the country regularly pay their 'dues' to the trio. Spirit shops, warehouses and over 100 hotels are also on their list. The list also includes legal and illegal rectified spirit manufacturing units. The manufacturers keep good relations with these officials so that they can sell more than the approved limit.

Tipu Sultan Road is another hot spot for illegal liquor traders, who sell their products in jerry cans whereas the government rules require that liquor be sold in bottles.

Junior DNC officers also complain that corrupt high officials have discouraged special drives to get rid of the illegal trade. While cases initiated remain shelved, the businesses go on unchallenged," they said.

In April last year, DNC Inspector Abul Khasem filed a case against a shop at Tipu Sultan

"Thousands of people from these sections across the country have come closer to us."

Commenting on the situation in the troubled state of Kashmir, Laxman said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's recent ceasefire initiative had "inaugurated a new era" in the region.

The initiative has exposed the militant outfits that are perpetrating violence in the state and their sponsor, Pakistan," he said.

"The incidents of violence by these forces only betray their panic at the success of the initiative," he added.

India and Pakistan have fought two wars over Kashmir, where a Muslim insurgency against Indian rule has claimed 34,000 lives since 1989.

He also touched on other issues such as the alleged dumping of cheap Chinese goods in the Indian market and confronting the problems faced by the country's farmers.

The national executive meeting is expected to focus on formulating a strategy for coming elections in the politically crucial northern state of Uttar Pradesh, the eastern states West Bengal and Assam and the southern states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Cabinet discusses draft of President's New Year speech in JS

The Cabinet in a special meeting yesterday discussed the draft of the President's New Year speech to be delivered in Parliament when it goes into session on January 11, reports UNB.

The House will hold discussion on the President's speech. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presided over the meeting held at her office.

Cabinet members and state ministers of different ministries attended the meeting. Cabinet secretary, PM's principal secretary and concerned secretaries were present.

Iftekhar Chy appointed advisor to UNCTAD secy general

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has appointed Ambassador Iftekhar Chowdhury of Bangladesh as special advisor to Rubens Ricupero, Secretary General of UNCTAD, says a press release.

Dr Iftekhar Chowdhury will assist Ricupero in the latter's capacity as secretary general of the Third UN Conference on LDCs.

Dr Chowdhury joined the post on Tuesday on deputation from the government service.

Ambassador Iftekhar Chowdhury has been serving as the Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN in Geneva since 1996. He has been actively involved with all international agencies there.

Lethal injection

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Chowdhury is investigating into incident.

Body Fluid of the victim was sent to ICDDRBR for viscera test, hospital sources said.

Ali's brother-in-law Mizanur Rahman filed an unnatural death case with Sabujbagh police station in this regard.

Three shot dead in Assam

GUWAHATI, Jan 4: Unidentified gunmen attacked the home of a top separatist leader in India's remote northeast today, killing two of his relatives, police said.

In another attack, assailants shot dead a close relative of an activist of the outlawed United Liberation Front of Assam, also in Nalbari district, 120 kilometres (75 miles) west of Guwahati, the capital of Assam state.

Police said the attacks appear to be in retaliation for Wednesday's killing of three former ULFA militants, who had surrendered and were running a farm with government aid.

No one claimed responsibility for either attack. At least 50 former ULFA militants and 20 relatives of ULFA leaders have been killed in the past three years by Unidentified gunmen in what officials believe is a series of retaliatory killings.

Four men carrying AK-47 rifles entered the home of Raju Baruah, ULFA's deputy military chief, in Nalbari district early Thursday and shot dead two of his relatives after forcing them to line up, a police spokesman said on the phone.

On Wednesday, two groups of former rebels warned the ULFA leaders against killing their former colleagues. "The ULFA would face disastrous consequences if it continues with such violent acts," they said in separate statements.

More than 3,000 ULFA militants have surrendered to the state government in Assam since 1997. After laying down their arms, they have set up farms with government money as part of a rehabilitation programme.

Indian agriculture minister resigns

NEW DELHI, Jan 4 : Indian Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar tendered his resignation from the coalition government Cabinet today following a rift within his regional Samata Party, reports AFP.

Talking to reporters on his arrival at Patna, capital of the eastern state of Bihar, Kumar said he had quit following a revolt against his proposals for Samata's merger with another regional party.



Pat Harrison, President of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW) called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday. He also presented a crest of the organisation to the Bangladesh President. -PID photo

JCD leaders to resign

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Rebel leaders and activists told The Daily Star that they have already started collecting signature for resignation in a prescribed form and would soon organise a massive gathering on the DU campus to make an announcement in this regard.

They said they have received very positive response the JCD units in most of the educational institutions in the city as well as other parts of the country. The rebel leaders alleged that Pintu and Laltu are now splashing out money to have the activists on their side.

The leaders further alleged that several BNP hardliners are providing financial support to the Pintu-Laltu faction to create a split in the rebel camp.

Majority of the leaders and activists of BNP and its different front organisations are worried about the fate of the JCD. They termed the decision to select Pintu and Laltu as president and general secretary "absolutely wrong." They said the JCD might be ruined if Khaleda Zia sticks to her decision.

Sources said BNP Secretary-General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who has been working to trash out a solution since

announcement of the new committee on December 23, convinced the rebel leaders and activists to refrain from staging violent demonstrations.

The leaders of Dhaka University and Jagannath College units, and South and North units of the city committee signed a statement, on the advise of Bhuiyan, expressing their total allegiance to the leadership of Khaleda Zia and denied to have played any part in the incidents of violence following the announcement of the new committee.

The statement was to be released to the press accordingly.

However, Khaleda, reportedly at the instigation of hardliners, asked the rebels through the secretary-general to issue a press statement congratulating the new committee and apologise for opposing it.

But the rebel leaders and activists rejected the proposal and said they would never congratulate the Pintu-Laltu committee and apologise because they are fighting for the removal of non-students and terrorists to make the JCD into a genuine student organisation.

A top-ranking BNP leader told The Daily Star yesterday that

although the demand of the dissidents is logical, the party chief is not showing them a way out to stop demonstration which is seriously tainting the image of the party and that of her own.

Meanwhile, the hardliners have mounted pressure on the party chairperson to expel the rebel leaders and activists from the JCD. The BNP chief has already suspended membership of former JCD leader Kamruzzaman Ratan.

A hardline BNP leader, who wanted not to be named, said yesterday that the decision to expel the rebel activists is almost final and that the expulsion will take place at any time. Besides, he said, they are also trying to talk Khaleda Zia into removing some moderate BNP leaders from key party posts.

"We are determined to settle everything by this month...we want to free BNP from the clutches of so-called moderates because it is not possible to topple Awami League and participate in the next general election by doing politics of mass contact," the hardliner

"We have to behave with Awami League accordingly," he observed.

BNP boycott to continue

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chief.

At the meeting, BNP policy makers discussed the Speaker's letter and viewed that the prevailing atmosphere in parliament was not congenial for BNP's return to it. They blamed both the ruling Awami League and the Speaker for making the House "ineffective".

Lawmakers from BNP, Jatiya Party (Ershad) and Jamaat-e-Islami have been abstaining from attending parliament sittings since the 13th session of the 7th Jatiya Sangsad.

They have been boycotting JS sessions protesting the Speaker's "biased role, not allowing Opposition MPs to speak on important national issues, indecent remarks on the Leader of the Opposition and non-implementation of two 4-point agreements" signed between the Treasury Bench and the Opposition earlier.

A bill on retention of reserved seats for women will be placed in the House in the upcoming session. Passage of the bill proposing amendment to some relevant constitutional provisions needs two-thirds majority.

The meeting said the issue of reserve seats for women can be solved if the government resigns

immediately to pave the way for an early general election.

They said the bill seeks retention of the present provision of indirect election to the reserved seats for another 10 years. But women's bodies and the civil society have long been demanding direct election to the seats.

BNP has a plan to modify the existing quota system to meet the demands, the sources said.

About voting right of expatriate Bangladeshis, the meeting said the Election Commission at the instruction of the government has already rejected the demand. The government has no intention to include the expatriates in the voter list, it said.

Referring to the Speaker's offer for dialogue, the BNP Standing Committee observed that despite repeated appeals the Speaker did not take any initiative to resolve the contentious issues. So his offer cannot be relied on, it said.

Sources said some of the Standing Committee members and MPs favoured attending the first sitting of the House on January 11, which will be addressed by the President.

The meeting was attended by Prof AQM Badruzza Chowdhury, M Saifur Rahman, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Oli

Ahmed, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Dr RA Gani, Chowdhury Tanveer Ahmed Siddique, Khandaker Mahbubuddin and Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain.

Indian missile explodes during demonstration: One killed

NEW DELHI, Jan 4 : An anti-tank missile exploded during a military demonstration in southern India today, killing a technician and setting fire to a facility which stores part of the country's arsenal of guided weapons, reports AFP.

The United News of India said the explosion occurred at a production centre of the state-owned Bharat Dynamic Ltd. near the southern city of Hyderabad.

Five others were injured when the missile flew awry and hit a wall and exploded during a demonstration, officials from the armaments company said.

The blast ignited portions of the complex, which also houses surface-to-surface Prithvi missiles and other Indian-built guided missiles.

The fire was swiftly brought under control.

The accident coincided with India's successful test-flight of its glitch-ridden Light Combat Aircraft in the nearby city of Bangalore.

Megawati due today

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honour.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Dr Alwi Shihab along with several senior government officials will be on Megawati's 73-strong entourage that includes a 12-member media team. Megawati's husband Taufiq Kismas, himself a member of parliament, will also be on her entourage.

Dhaka is the third leg of the Indonesian vice-president's four-nation tour and follows her private visits to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah and Switzerland.

From Bangladesh, she will fly to Malaysia for an official visit. Contrary to published reports, this is Megawati's second trip outside Indonesia. She had earlier visited Papua New Guinea.

Megawati will be staying at the Sonargaon Hotel.

Although second in the state hierarchy, the Indonesian vice-president's visit is deemed significant and is expected to cement economic, cultural and political ties between the two countries. Both countries are important members of the Non-aligned Movement (NAM), the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) and the Developing Eight (D-8), a newly created eight-nation economic bloc.

Incidentally, the D-8 Commis-

sioners meet in the capital on January 16 and 17 in preparation for the next summit.

Megawati is the second ranking Indonesian leader to visit Bangladesh. In 1979, now deposed president Suharto paid an official visit to Bangladesh. In March last year, Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and senior minister Haryono Suyono visited Dhaka to attend the D-8 Summit.

The itinerary of the visiting Indonesian vice-president includes official meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, dinner at Gonobhaban, and visits to the Savar Memorial, Bangabandhu Museum and Asrayan project at Gazipur. She will also pay a courtesy call on President Shahabuddin Ahmed. Meeting with Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad has been left out of the final itinerary.

Megawati is due to hold a press conference on the morning of her departure on January 7.

The two countries are expected to emphasise on increasing bilateral trade. Currently trade is heavily tilted towards Indonesia. In 1999-2000, Bangladesh exported goods worth only 8.13 million US dollars against Indonesian imports of 159.47 million dollars.

JS body surprised

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different authorities following the Magurchhara blow-out.

The claim led to arguments between Unocal and Petrobangla. The sub-committee observed that it was still not clear about the actual situation.

Occidental's PSC (production sharing contract) for blocks 13 and 14 had expired on January 10, 1998 after it failed to fulfil its commitment that included drilling of at least one exploratory well. The Supplemental Agreement was signed through an understanding that Occidental would gradually pay all compensation.

One of the investigators of the

Magurchhara blowout said at a sub-committee meeting in November that negligence of Occidental caused the disaster.

The committee repeatedly asked the Energy Ministry officials to submit the probe report on the Magurchhara blow-up, which is still missing after being prepared in June 1997.

The parliamentary committee also expressed its dissatisfaction at the ministry and Petrobangla saying that even after three years of the incident the government could not find out the cause and get compensation, rather the company responsible for the incident had been rewarded.

Intense lobbying

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from among their senior colleagues, following the tradition.

Faced with a dilemma, the Law Ministry has decided to put it on hold for the time being as it is awaiting opening of the new annexe to the Supreme Court building, likely on January 9 by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The deferral was intended not to hurt any one, particularly the pro-government lawyers.

In the list of 15 are the names of Deputy Attorneys General Shamsuddin Choudhury, Manik, Syed Mahmud Hossain and Iman Ali; lawyers Faruq Ahmed (Vice-president of Supreme Court Bar Association), Golam Dastagir, Subroto Choudhury, Khalilur Rahman, Moazzem Hossain, Hasan Faiz and Mohsin Rashid; judicial officials Abdul Hye (Acting Law Secretary) Anwarul Huq (Jt. Secretary in law ministry), Alzalur Rahman, Marziul Huq (Registrar of Supreme Court)

and Abdur Razzak (Solicitor in the law ministry). The name of Golam Dastagir was included later.

A delegation of pro-Opposition lawyers called on the President on Wednesday to express their grievances about the some of the persons in the list.

They stressed the need for upholding the independent image of the judiciary and pointed out that age of some of the persons was below 45, the minimum age required for appointment as a judge.

The President assured them that he would follow constitutional provisions.

Article 95(1) of the Constitution provides that President shall appoint the Chief Justice and other judges. But Article 48(3) provides that the President would act on the Prime Minister's advice on all matters other than appointment of the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice.

PDB poised to turn

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needed for the Phase-1 plant. PDB will save another 1.9 million dollars on this count, it said.

Thus, Marubeni argued that it is offering more benefits than those in the agreement with AES.

Commenting on this, one source said, "This is basically twisting of the whole concept. What we get after 22 years is not important. We really don't know what will be the actual value of Marubeni's offer. But we want free electricity now. This will help the power sector right now."

"Besides, Marubeni had all along agreed to the conditions of the Phase-1 plant. Why should it shift now?"

Last year, Marubeni was given copies of documents signed between AES and PDB to help it

prepare a design and draft agreement for the Phase-2 plant.

The 1997, Marubeni and Sithe Energies of USA had participated in the bidding for the Meghna-hat Phase-1 project as a joint venture (with 50:50 stake). But Sithe later dropped out. In recent correspondence with the government, Marubeni did not make any reference of Sithe.

However, at a recent negotiation meeting, Marubeni admitted that Sithe was no longer with it. It proposed that Totalfina of France and another Japanese company might be interested to join it in the deal on the Phase-2 plant.

AES signed a contract with the government to supply electricity at a levelised rate of 2.79 cents per KWH for the next 22 years.

DCC drive to rid

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But DCC officials said that with only three magistrates, two patrolling assistant estate officers and 70 eviction labourers in its Estate Department, DCC alone could not evict the hawkers who indiscriminately occupy busy roads and pavements in such a big city with nearly one crore people.

Neither DCC nor DMP has any permanent monitoring cell for this. "Hawkers could not have reoccupied the pavements soon after the previous eviction drives if we had a permanent monitoring cell", said a DMP official.

A number of unauthorised shops near DMCH removed on Tuesday under the present drive were set up again the same day and a DCC team had to spend another day to demolish those. "This could happen just because there is no monitoring body", an official said.

While visiting some spots from where hawkers were evicted this time, this correspondent found that police were deployed there to prevent hawkers from occupying those again.

DCC officials said they often had to face violent protests from organised groups of hawkers

during eviction drives in the past without the presence of police. Even they had to give up such drives earlier as DMP could not always provide DCC with police force.

When asked about this, some DMP officials said the city has a police force of nearly 18 thousand and this is far less than the requirement. As soon as normal activities resume in the city, DMP would not be able to take care of the spots where eviction drive was conducted, they added.

But DMP's Additional Commissioner Farruk Ahmad, who is now acting Commissioner, told this correspondent, "The current eviction drive is not a temporary one and we are not going to allow hawkers to reoccupy the roads."

Police will remain deployed on those spots as long as possible, he said. He sought cooperation from all to keep the pavements and roads free of hawkers.

DCC's Chief Estate officer Fazle Elahi said, "The on-going drive is different from the earlier ones. We will try our best to continue the drive as long as needed."

Ministry of Food

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supplying it. "Six months after the decision to make the matter public by placing the investigation report before the parliament, Food Ministry is now saying that it must give its views on the matter before the report is placed in the House," a committee member told this correspondent requesting anonymity.

When contacted, Food Minister Amir Hossain said night that he could not attend the standing committee meeting yesterday because of a special cabinet meeting at the same time at the Prime Minister's Office.

Replying to a question about the delay in placing the investigation report in parliament, he said, "I was not present at the meeting. I think the ministry has now given its views."

Mentionably, finding the foul play in rice import, the parliamentary sub-committee had recommended domestic procurement of rice instead of import.

39 Kalaroa BNP men granted bail

SATKHIRA, Jan 4: All the 39 leaders and workers of Kalaroa BNP unit were granted bail today, reports UNB.

Former MP Habibul Islam Habib, ex-chairman of Kalaroa upazila Bazlul Karim, Sonabaria UP chairman Abdur Rashid, Kayla UP chairman Rakib Molla, Advocate Abdus Samad and JCD leaders Asad were among the 39 accused who were sent to jail hajat on January 2 in connection with a case filed against them for attempting to foil the public meeting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Kalaroa on October 5.

Forty lawyers led by Advocate Mansur Ali moved the bail petitions before the District and Sessions Judge's Court at 11 am.

After a lengthy hearing, judge M Mahbubur Rahman granted bail to the accused chargedsheeted under the Public Safety Act (PSA).

Arafat, Barak agree to give ME peace

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meeting with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat to be briefed on his view of the peace plan proposed by US President Bill Clinton.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Mussa said the stand backed reservations Arafat had given in conditionally accepting the plan after talks with Clinton in Washington on Tuesday.

But Israel strongly opposes allowing Palestinian refugees to return to homes in what is now the Jewish state, and Prime Minister Ehud Barak repeated Thursday he would not sign away sovereignty over the east Jerusalem hill the Jews call Temple Mount.

Mussa said the foreign ministers backed the Palestinian right to sovereignty over the site known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif, or Noble Sanctuary, containing the al-Aqsa mosque.

The ministers "unanimously supported the Palestinian position on Jerusalem and Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif without ambiguity," Mussa said after near four hours of talks.

"There is a commitment in the Arab, Islamic and Christian world to the rights of the Palestinians over Jerusalem and over refugees, particularly the right to

return," Mussa said.

Asked about an eventual Palestinian agreement to the Clinton peace plan, Mussa replied there were still questions and clarifications sought by the Palestinians.

Arafat gave no statement after the meeting here, even though top aide Nabil Shaath said he would announce the Palestinian position after briefing the ministers on the US proposals.

Clinton has proposed that the Palestinians should have sovereignty over the mosque esplanade, the third holiest site in Islam, and Israel over the "Wailing Wall" on the western side of the sacred hill.

The wall is the last vestige of the Jewish temple destroyed by the Romans in AD70, the holiest site for Jews.

The plan also provides for Palestinian control over Arab areas of east Jerusalem, 95 per cent of the West Bank and 100 per cent of the Gaza Strip.

However, the Palestinians would be required to waive the right of return of refugees who fled Israel in the wake of the creation of the Jewish state in 1948 and their descendants.

In an interview with Voice of Palestine radio, Shaath, who is in Cairo, said that Arafat had

voiced reservations to Clinton about refugees and over anything short of full sovereignty over the holy site in Jerusalem.

"We request the amendments of some points or to start negotiations while accounting for the Palestinian reservations," he said.

"We cannot commit to resolutions that do not give the legitimate rights of return to refugees based on (UN) resolution 194. We accept no suspicions in regards to Palestinian sovereignty over Haram al-Sharif," he said.

Despite the continued reservations, top Israeli and Palestinian security officials will meet in Cairo Sunday with the US CIA director George Tenet to try to do what previous encounters have failed to do, reduce the three-month spiral of Arab-Israeli violence.

Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben Ami said Thursday that Israel demands that the Palestinian leadership work to end "terrorism" in the area before a new peace push can go ahead.

"After a suggestion by US President Bill Clinton to reduce the violence and start security cooperation, there will be a security meeting in Cairo," a Palestinian official told AFP.