

Census starts Jan 23

Low publicity keeps many in the dark

By Staff Correspondent

There seems to be inadequate awareness among the people regarding the 4th population census although only five days are left for it.

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) which will conduct the census did not take necessary steps till yesterday for display of billboards, sticking of posters and distribution of leaflets in this regard.

The census begins at zero hours on January 23 with the counting of floating people and ends on January 27.

Asked by this correspondent, many of the city dwellers said they do not know about it.

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JS business hit hard by quorum crisis

By Staff Correspondent

Planned to continue till January 30, this year's maiden session of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) has already started suffering from quorum crisis, making it pretty difficult for the Chair to run scheduled businesses.

The third sitting of the current session yesterday suffered heavily due to lack of quorum, which requires the presence of at least 60 members in the 330-strong House. Absence of quorum was also witnessed on the first two working days.

Large-scale absence of the lawmakers including ministers forced Deputy Speaker Abdul Hamid drop some scheduled items and go for alternative arrangements for others.

The day's sitting began 20 minutes behind the 10 o'clock schedule for lack of quorum. The deputy speaker had to wait until

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PSA case against lawyers stayed

By Special Correspondent

The High Court yesterday issued a rule upon the government to explain within two weeks why the Public Safety Act (PSA) should not be declared ultra vires the Constitution and ordered that till disposal of the rule, the 16 lawyers and a BNP lawmaker sued under PSA shall not to be disturbed, arrested or harassed.

A Division Bench of the HC comprising Justice Abu Saeed Ahmed and Justice Khademul Islam Choudhury issued the rule after hearing two writ petitions, one filed by the 16 lawyers and the other by Manzoor Morshed Khan MP earlier on the day.

Morshed Khan's writ was the second filed by him against the PSA. He filed his first writ on January 11 challenging filing of another case against him under PSA in Chittagong.

The same court on Thursday last issued a similar rule upon the government and asked police not

to harass or arrest him and his son till hearing of the rule on January 30.

Following the order, the government moved the Supreme Court, which fixed January 21 (Sunday) for the hearing.

Yesterday's rule was issued upon the Home Secretary, Law Secretary, Commissioner of DMP, OC of Ramna police station and Ezharul Huq Sagar, a junior lawyer of the Supreme Court who filed the case on Sunday under sections 10 and 12 of the PSA.

The 16 lawyers and Manzoor Morshed Khan were accused of "rioting and vandalism" at the Supreme Court during a sit-in on January 11. They were protesting appointment of two Supreme Court

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**Bangabandhu Murder Case
Next order on Death Reference Feb 14**

By Special Correspondent

The Third Judge for hearing the death reference in Bangabandhu Murder Case in the High Court has fixed February 14 for the next order in this regard.

Justice Fazlul Karim gave the order after hearing state attorneys and defence counsels yesterday.

The judge also ordered the Registrar of the High Court (HC) to complete the "supplementary paper book" of the case by January 14, adding the December 14 split verdict by the Death Reference Bench of the court. The paper book must be distributed among all the parties concerned by February 11, he said.

Justice Karim directed the state attorneys, specially the

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105 BNP MPs term PSA case "naked tyranny"

By Staff Correspondent

Deputy Attorney General designated for the case, to ensure that state lawyers for four absconding accused out of the five acquitted in the split verdict are present on the next date of hearing.

If the lawyers for them are not willing to continue, the Solicitor General should appoint new ones, he said.

The state attorneys yesterday strongly pleaded that hearing of the case should start at an early date. But the judge said they could ask for this when formalities on the paper book are completed.

The attorneys said they are ready to expedite preparation of the supplementary paper book and sought fixation of an early

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Commentary

Political intimidation in legal garb

by Mahfuz Anam

The case under the dreaded and dreadful Public Safety (read Stifling) Act against 16 lawyers of the Supreme Court and an eminent business leader is nothing but thuggery under judicial garb. It is the most blatant, shameless and unethical use of governmental power in recent times. Laws are meant to impart justice. Laws can also be used to wield the big stick. That is the fundamental difference between democratic governments and the autocratic ones. The present government is slowly and surely blurring the difference. Today there is no check on the powers of this go-

ernment and on some of its powerful ministers, to speak nothing of the Prime Minister himself. Our foolish opposition has given a 'walkover' in the parliament which has made this government further unaccountable.

What Sheikh Hasina's government did on Monday was not meant to impart justice or to uphold the dignity of the High Court and far less to uphold the freedom of the judiciary. It was clearly meant to intimidate the opposition-leaning lawyers. It was to show all the opposition members and those who support

them that the sword of the PSA hangs over their heads which can suddenly fall on them on the whim of the ruling party leaders.

The PSA case against these lawyers has shaken the faith of the public in a most fundamental way in the government's claim to the rule of law. The Awami League government leaders cannot understand what a great harm this action has done to their credibility as one that believes in the supremacy of law. The case in question was a partisan use of governmental power of the most crude and unthinking kind. As believers in democracy

and the rule of law, we stand aghast and dumfounded in this most naked abuse of power.

The irony of it is that when the government was actually gaining public sympathy for the shameful behaviour of the opposition supporting lawyers in the Supreme Court premises the other day. This paper along with the general public strongly condemned the unbecoming and unacceptable outburst of those lawyers, which resulted in the

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Over 100 hurt in Chakoria gunfight

From Our Correspondent

COX'S BAZAR, Jan 17: More than 100 people were injured, 30 of them by bullets, during an hour-long gunfight over possession of 500 acres of land at Raja Kali under Chokaria Upazila.

The clash took place at around 12:30 pm between two rival groups one led by Hanif Chowdhury and the other by Shawkat Chowdhury for 500 acres of waqf estate land, police said.

The injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hos-

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By Almas Zakiuddin
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Prayer Timings

January 18

Fajr 5:30 Azan 6:10

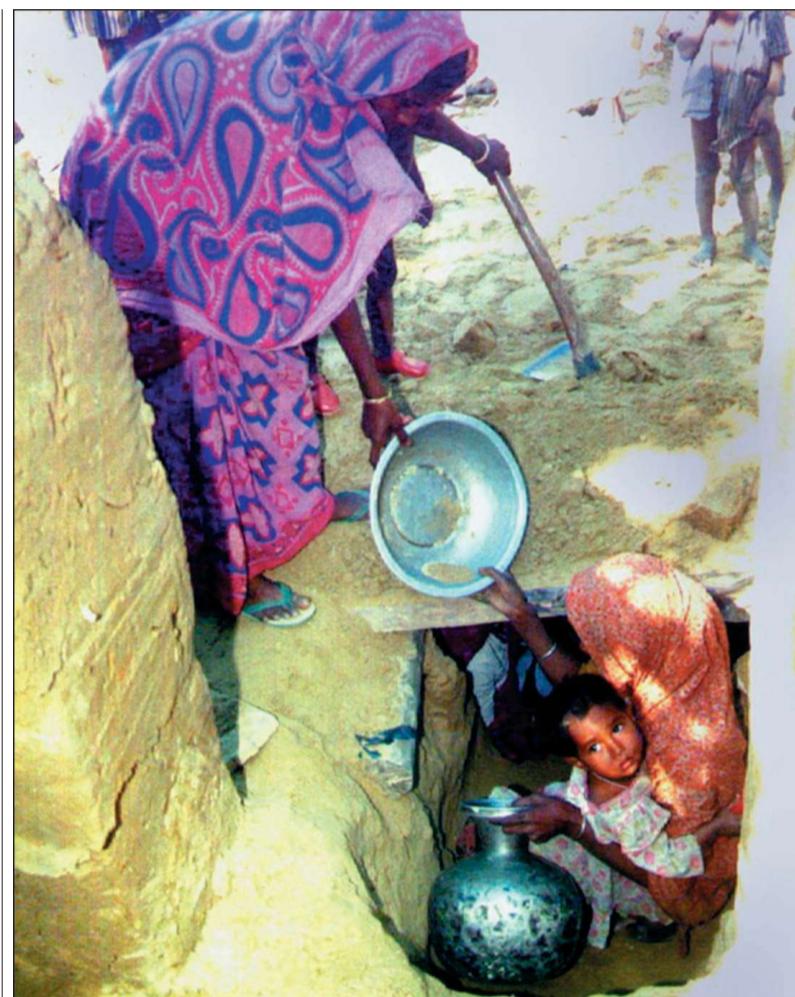
Zuhr 12:45 1:20

Asr 4:05 4:20

Maghrib 5:40 5:45

Esha 7:15 7:35

Source: Islamic Foundation



Villagers along with their children and belongings take shelter in a bunker Tuesday in a village of the south-eastern border town Teknaf. Many Bangladeshi frontier villagers have left their home or sent their families to safe areas fearing a flare-up amidst reports Myanmar had mobilised its regular troops to back its Nasaka frontier guards. Tension remains high on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border with both sides reinforcing troops after last week's shootout over the construction of an "illegal" embankment on the river Naf.

--AFP photo

Kibria asks banks to cut bad loans to 18pc

By Inam Ahmed

With the country's banking system showing a positive loan recovery trend over the last one year, Finance Minister SAMS Kibria has asked the banks to take up all out programmes to reduce defaulted loan to 18 per cent, about half of what it is today.

During a meeting between the managing directors of local banks and the finance minister, it was also decided that a task force would be set up to monitor the situation in bankruptcy courts. This is necessary as there is a heavy backlog of cases.

At the same time, the minister assured that bonds would be issued against the defaulted loans, created through borrowing by public sector corporations from the two privatised banks Pubali and Uttara.

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Hartal likely by month-end

Opposition's mass procession today

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance will bring out mass processions across the country this month demanding repeal of the Public Safety Act, resignation of the government and immediate holding of national elections.

As part of the programme, the BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote and other smaller rightwing political parties will jointly bring out mass processions in all cities and at district and thana headquarters.

In Dhaka, the opposition alliance will hold a rally at Paltan Maidan at 3pm and later bring out a mass procession.

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City to face 100MW power shortage from March

By Razir Rahman

The city will face more than 100 MW load shedding from March this year due to delay in the implementation of a number of projects of Dhaka Electric Supply Authorities (DESA) to improve power supply, sources concerned said.

However, as some projects under a crash programme of DESA are likely to be completed by mid-March, there would be less voltage fluctuation and supply of power would be stable.

The Prime Minister's Office had earlier asked the authorities concerned to take steps to keep load shedding in the city as low as possible in the coming lean season.

The demand for power in the capital in the lean season shots up to more than 700 MW a day.

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By Staff Correspondent

The Power Development Board (PDB) Tuesday accepted Marubeni's proposal for the 450MW Meghnaghat phase-2 power plant under terms and conditions that violate a Cabinet Purchase Committee directive.

The PDB is now drafting a strong recommendation on the Marubeni project and would forward it to the Ministry of Energy next week. If found acceptable, the energy ministry would then send the proposal to the Cabinet Purchase Committee for approval.

Since losing the original bid for first phase Meghnaghat project in 1997 to AES, Marubeni had been strongly lobbying to get the second phase of the project. In 1998, it proposed to the government that if awarded the contract, it would

develop the second phase as per AES terms and conditions and tariff pricing.

Accordingly, the Cabinet Purchase Committee gave PDB the green signal to go for Meghnaghat-2 with Marubeni on condition that the contract

should be made as per terms, conditions and pricing of the first one. The committee specifically said that like AES Marubeni would have to provide free electricity during the initial operating period (IOP) of the plant.

However, since the negotiations began from early last year, Marubeni shifted from its original position and started pursuing alternative proposals.

Marubeni's alternative proposal side-tracked the option of free electricity worth US \$35

million dollars as was offered by AES. Instead, Marubeni offered a package of benefit which, it claimed, was worth 39 million dollars. This benefit would be given to PDB in phases after 22 years of the Meghnaghat plant's operation.

Instead of free electricity in the IOP, the Japanese company is offering free electricity worth 5.7 million dollars at the end of 22 years. After the end of the 22-year contract period, it would give to PDB the plant as a gift. The power plant after 22 years of service should be worth 31.4 million dollars.

Providing very weak technical papers, it argued that the plant would have such high value even after 22 years because the plant

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