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5 lawyers to meet PM, talk SC crisis

Star Report

Five senior lawyers will meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the last week of this month in a bid to resolve the crisis over appointment of two judges in the Appellate Division of Supreme Court, sources said.

The prime minister expressed willingness to meet the lawyers through message from the law minister's office to Barrister Ishtiaque Ahmed's chamber. The five senior jurists had been trying to get an appointment with the PM since last week.

Hasina regretted that she couldn't meet them earlier due to the conference and the general assembly of the Association of Asian Parliaments for Peace, scheduled to be held in Cambodia from January 22 to 26.

She leaves the capital for Cambodia tomorrow (Saturday).

Sources said that she was unable to give the lawyers any appointment before her visit. Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru would also participate in the conference.

On January 11, pro-opposition lawyers lodged strong protest when the government appointed two judges in the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court superseding two other judges. They demanded cancellation of the appointments. Later pro-government and pro-opposition lawyers held a meeting and assigned five senior lawyers to resolve the crisis.

The five lawyers -- Barrister Ishtiaque Ahmed, Dr. Kamal Hossain, Dr M Zahir, Dr MA See page 11 col 6

Police probe into PSA case against lawyers on

By Staff Correspondent

Police have already begun investigation into the case filed under PSA against 16 pro-opposition lawyers and a BNP MP in connection with the January 11 incident at the Supreme Court.

The investigators met the Supreme Court Registrar yesterday in this regard, OC of Ramna thana ABM Sultan Ahmed said. "We are trying to take statements of all the persons concerned. The investigation will continue."

Court sources said that the Registrar did not give any statement to police. He told the investigating officer that he would not say anything without prior approval of the Chief Justice.

Police also talked to some Supreme Court employees regarding the case on Wednesday. Sources said, some 20 employees have given statements so far.

The High Court on Wednesday issued a rule on the government asking it not to arrest or harass any of the accused in the case.

Bahaddarhat killings

22 Shibir men charge-sheeted

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Jan 18: CID today submitted a charge sheet against 22 Shibir activists for their alleged involvement in Bahaddarhat killing on July 12 last year, CID source said.

The carnage that sparked off a massive protests in the city and elsewhere, left 8 people including four BCL activists killed.

CID ASP M A Kader Khan, investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet in the court here today against 22 people after six months' investigation.

The chargesheeted Shibir activists were identified as Sajjad Hossain Khan, Habib Khan, Abu Nasir alias Gita Nasir, Mesbaul Kabir (president of Chhatra Shibir-city unit), Azizur Rahman (president of Chhatra Shibir-Mohsin college unit, Saiful Islam (general secretary of Chhatra Shibir-city unit), Miah Md Tawfik, Nasar Ahmed, Md Ilias, Abdul Hakim, Bazal Ahmed, Abdul Hamid, Baizidur Rahman, Selim alias BDR Selim, Rezaur Rahman alias Mukti, Md Alamgir Kabir, Abdul Quyum Chowdhury, Md Solaiman, Md Iqbal, Delwar, Anamul Haq and Azam.

Charges were framed against them in connection with the case filed with Chandgao thana.

The complainant Anwar Hossain, brother of Jahangir See page 11 col 1



BTTB mobile phones soon

Four lakh GSM connections at cheaper rate some time this year

By Mustak Hossain

The state-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) plans to introduce cellular mobile telephone service at a cheaper rate some time this year.

"BTTB has floated an international tender for supply, installation, testing and commissioning of required equipment and accessories for mobile telephone service in the country," a top official told The Daily Star.

The service would be launched in the shortest possible time as BTTB has its network throughout the country. BTTB would introduce Global Standard of Mobile Communication (GSM) technology, he said.

BTTB has a plan to install four lakh cellular mobile phones initially in the capital and other parts of the country and the number would be increased considering the demand and supply.

Another official of the BTTB said subscription,

monthly service charge and call rate of their mobile phone service would be lower than that of the private operators as BTTB would not have to invest much for infrastructure.

"The project would be financed on turn-key basis through supplier's credit scheme as BTTB does not have the resource to finance such big project now," he added.

The bids for the service will be received till February 28 and opened on the same day in presence of the bidders or their representatives at the office of BTTB's Director for Procurement. A pre-bid conference will be held on January 24 with all prospective bidders.

In 1999, BTTB had proposed to introduce 50,000 mobile phones at an estimated cost of about Tk 114

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SAPTA talks likely Jan 29-30

Tariff cut for least developed SAARC countries to top agenda

By Rafiq Hasan

The fourth round of trade negotiations under the South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA) is likely to be held in Katmandu on January 29-30 this year after two years of stalemate.

According to sources, the fourth round of talks, originally scheduled for July 1999, fell through at the last moment amidst uncertainty over the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit. The third round of SAPTA negotiations was held back in 1998.

With SAARC summit suspended for the last couple of years, the issue of increased trade amongst the member countries didn't make much progress. Against such a back-

drop, government officials are preparing for the SAPTA talks to boost regional trade. A delegation from the Ministry of Commerce is expected to participate in the negotiations, sources informed.

A high-powered meeting of representatives from top chamber bodies and relevant ministries was held at the commerce ministry a few days back to chalk out a strategy for the talks, the sources said.

Commerce Secretary Golam Rahman presided over the meeting.

According to a commerce ministry source the main agenda at the negotiation would be duty reduction by member countries for increasing intra-regional trade.

Following the first, second and third rounds of negotiations, India and Pakistan issued some notifications allowing certain percentage of duty reduction on various items from Bangladesh and other least developed countries (LDCs) in the region, namely Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives. India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are termed developing nations.

According to a source, although Pakistan committed at the negotiations that it would provide 30 per cent duty concessions on a number of items, it gave 15 per cent tariff reduction on 488 items and ten per cent rebate on 326 items in its notification.

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Dawn-to-dusk hartal on January 22

Tougher programmes if govt refuses to budge, warns Khaleda

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday called a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Monday to press the demands for immediate resignation of Awami League government and repeal of the Public Safety Act (PSA).

She warned of tougher action programmes for non-compliance.

The BNP chief announced the hartal programme on behalf of the 4-party Opposition Alliance at a huge public meeting at Paltan Maidan prior to a mass procession in the city.

Jatiya Party Senior Vice-chairman Roushan Ershad MP, Jamaat e-Islami Ameer Matiu Rahman Nizami and Islami Oikkyia Jote (IJO) Chairman Azizul Haq also addressed the meeting as special guests. Among others, BNP leader M Morshed Khan MP, who is facing two cases under PSA, was also on the dais.

Khaleda Zia, also Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad, demanded immediate dissolution of the Sangsad as "it has lost effectiveness and even ruling party MPs do not attend sessions now".

"In fact, the JS has ceased to function because of persistent quorum crisis. So it is meaningless to continue it. It will be wise to dissolve it to pave the ways for a fresh election".

Bitterly criticising the government's enactment and abuse of the PSA, the former prime minister said, "The law which is abused against people and cannot ensure security of the commonman has to be repealed immediately. She also warned of "dreadful consequences" of its abuse any more.

Referring to the "false" case against 16 leading lawyers of the Supreme Court and BNP leader M Morshed Khan MP, she said the government is curbing the right to peaceful protest. "They (16 lawyers and Morshed Khan) had staged a peaceful protest against politicisation of the country's higher court".

She charged the government for abusing the "black" SPA against Opposition leaders and activists and innocent people who do not like the "fascist AL"

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JS makes exhibition of Bangabandhu's portrait mandatory

Three months' jail or Tk 10,000 fine or both for violators

By Staff Correspondent

The Jatiya Sangsad yesterday passed a bill making mandatory "preservation and exhibition" of the portrait of Father of the Nation -- Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman -- in all government offices and educational institutions.

"The bill aims to stop any act of disregard for Father of the Nation by evil forces," said Dewan Farid Gazi, an Awami League lawmaker who piloted the bill. "Dignity of Father of the Nation needs to be protected for the sake of national unity and solidarity."

The bill prescribes three months in prison or up to Taka 10,000 in fines or both for violators of the new law.

Such punishments are meant for defaulting top officials at all government, semi-government and autonomous institutions, offices of the statutory government authority, libraries and auditoriums, educational institutions, Bangladesh missions

abroad and other legally specified offices and institutions.

Making derogatory and harsh remarks, written or verbal, on Father of the Nation and obstructing top officials of the specified organisations from carrying out their duties in this regard have also been made punishable in the law.

However, execution of the law will be relaxed for religious institutions.

The bill has authorised the government to make provisions through gazette notification to fulfil the objectives of the new law.

The House unanimously passed the bill titled "Preservation and Exhibition of the Portrait of Father of the Nation Bill -- 2001" with the main opposition parties continuing their boycott.

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8 killed as bus rams autorickshaw in Gazipur

GAZIPUR, Jan 18: Eight people were killed when a bus rams an autorickshaw at Sonakar on the Sreepur-Bormi road Wednesday night, reports UNB.

Police said today the Bormi-bound passenger bus from Dhaka dragged the autorickshaw several yards away. The three-wheeler then caught fire, leaving its driver and seven others dead.

Six of the victims were identified as autorickshaw driver Jamaluddin, 40, and Rafiqul, 40, Badal, 35, Azizul Haq, 45, Hasan Ali, 63, and Al-Farid, 35.

The passengers were traders from Gafargaon in Mymensingh district who came to Bormi Bazar in this district for business.

The incident occurred when they were going to Sreepur rail station for returning home, said one source.

The bodies were taken to local hospital. A UP member of See page 11 col 4

Opposition out to foil polls, says Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the opposition parties are hatching a conspiracy to foil the polls and destroy democracy sensing their defeat in the next general election, reports UNB.

"The opposition parties being scared of the defeat have started destructive activities, they are conspiring to boycott the election to destroy democracy," she told a meeting of Comilla (South) Awami League and its front organisations at Ganobhaban in the afternoon.

She also accused the opposition of trying to destroy the electoral process. "Even the last resort of the people, the highest court of the country, is not free from their attack and conspiracy," she said.

"They do not want the people to get justice, the rule of law to be established, the trial of Bangabandhu Murder Case to be completed," she said blaming the opposition for creating anarchy

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Dhaka-Yangon survey to ease border tension

Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed to carry out a joint survey to ease border tension triggered by exchange of fire between BDR and Nasaka on January 8 over construction of an embankment on the Naaf river by Myanmar's border force, reports UNB.

Foreign Secretary C M Shafi Sami told newsmen yesterday that the two sides do not want to see any escalation of border tension. He did not give any date for the joint survey but said, "it is being worked out at the highest level."

A strong note of protest from Bangladesh and a flag meeting between BDR and Nasaka led to a ceasefire. Bangladesh demanded immediate stoppage of construction of the embankment and Myanmar responded positively, the Foreign Secretary said.

"They (Myanmar) had earlier agreed to stop the construction for a certain period but subsequently came up with the proposal for a joint survey," Shafi Sami said. He informed that Bangladesh received the proposal on January 16.