

President for one-day weekly holiday
UNB, Dhaka

President Shahabuddin Ahmed yesterday said a consensus among political parties on creating a congenial atmosphere is a must for uninterrupted economic activities.

He made the remarks when an 18-member delegation of the newly elected FBCCI executive committee called on him at Bangabhaban.

They expressed their concern over the country's overall political situation affecting the economic activities.

The delegation members, led by FBCCI President Yousuf Abdullah Harun, said any kind of political programme affecting the normal life and economic activities is unwelcome by businessmen and industrialists.

They urged the President to utilise his good office for ensuring a peaceful atmosphere, which is pre-requisite to uninterrupted economic activities and development.

Renewing their demand for reverting to one-day weekly holiday in industrial and commercial establishments, they said two days' of weekly holidays are affecting production and commercial activities in the country.

President Shahabuddin gave them patient hearing and shared their concern.

He agreed that in the context of our socio-economic life one day weekly holiday is more suitable than that of two days.

Foreign envoys propose reform of election tribunals
BSS, Dhaka

Envoys of five top donor countries yesterday held a meeting with the Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed and proposed reform of the election tribunals through parliament for determining appeals against allegations regarding elections.

They requested the Election Commission to ensure responsible use of electronic media during the time of election and emphasised the need for developing a model code of conduct for the political parties putting more responsibility on the party leaders for the discipline of their candidates and agents.

The envoys were US ambassador Mary Ann Peters, Swedish Ambassador Anders Johnson, Canadian High Commissioner David Preston, Charge d'Affaires of Japan Kiokazu Ota, and Charge d'Affaires of European Delegation Gorge Volker Ketelsen.

Iqbal, 20 others sued under PSA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A complaint case under the Public Safety Act (PSA) against 21 people including ruling party lawmaker Dr HBM Iqbal was filed with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday.

General Secretary of Khilgaon thana unit of BNP Yunus Mridha filed the case accusing them of creating anarchy and killing three persons in the city's Malibagh area during the Opposition-called hartal on February 13.

Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Nurul Islam directed the Officer-in-Charge of Motijheel

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Tin Bigha corridor to be kept open 8 hrs a day

Indo-Bangla Joint Working Group also eases visa regime

M ANWARUL HAQ

Visa regime between Bangladesh and India will be simplified and restriction on movement through Tin Bigha corridor further relaxed, according to an understanding reached at the three-day meeting of the Indo-Bangla Joint Working Group that ended in New Delhi Saturday last.

As per the new arrangement, to be effective shortly, the corridor will be kept open for eight hours at a stretch with an hour's break in between.

The Indian side has agreed that the corridor, leased in perpetuity to Bangladesh, would be opened up for unfettered movement in phases, said officials who had attended the meeting.

Previously, the Indian authorities allowed passage to Bangladeshi inhabitants every alternate hour, causing great inconvenience.

The Indian authorities are learnt to have acted very promptly towards implementation of the new arrangement. According to home ministry sources, the Indians

have already brought about a change just two days after the meeting. The corridor is now kept open for two-hour periods punctuated by one-hour closures.

Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs Janibul Haq led the Bangladesh delegation while the Indian delegation was headed by his counterpart GK Pillai.

The meeting of the joint working group also agreed to simplify visa procedures for Bangladeshi citizens planning a trip to India and vice versa. The new visa arrangement, to be implemented on a reciprocal basis, will be effected shortly.

Students, businessmen and people seeking medical attention will be able to obtain long-term multiple-entry visas under the new arrangement.

The two governments are learnt to have agreed that students will now be eligible to receive student visa for the entire duration of their studies following admission. They will also be allowed multiple entries. Also, visas will be easily available for their spouses upon application. A visitor will be given a three-month tourist visa.

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Bangladeshi Army personnel patrol the Rangamati road yesterday where Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgaard of Denmark and Tim Selby (inset) of Britain were kidnapped from their car on February 16. Army and other security teams surrounded the area where the suspected tribal rebels hid themselves with the three kidnapped foreigners.

Press should have access to court proceedings: CJ
BSS, Dhaka

Chief Justice Latifur Rahman yesterday said the Press should have access to the court proceedings.

"I feel that the Press must have the right to express views faithfully and honestly on all that is done in a court of justice, but this should not be taken to mean that the right to criticise a judge is unrestricted or unlimited," he said while addressing the inaugural session of the 8th International Conference of World Association of Press Councils (WAPC) here yesterday as chief guest.

The proceedings in the courts at all stages in a case can be viewed by the Press and if necessary those might be brought to the public in the interest of justice, he said.

"Fair and truthful reporting is the essence of journalism. Please do not deviate from this path," Justice Rahman said requesting journalists to abide by professional ethics and formulate a Code of Ethics as part of journalist's convention.

With Justice PB Sawant, presi

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Govt likely to review Official Secrets Act 1923

UNB, Dhaka

The government is actively considering to review the age-old Official Secrets Act 1923 considered a barrier to free flow of information.

Law Minister Abdul Matin Khasru gave the hint while addressing a seminar titled "Right to Freedom of Information with Reference to Official Secrets Act and Other Related Laws" at a city hotel yesterday.

"Unfortunately, in our country much information is held back from the public due to this law," the minister said, adding that the law was enacted some 70 years back to protect the interests of the colonial government.

The seminar was arranged as part of the 8th International Conference of the World Association of Press Councils.

Presided over by chairman of Bangladesh Press Council Justice Habibur Rahman Khan, the seminar

was addressed, among others, by Bangladesh Bar Council vice chairman Barrister Amir-ul Islam, Supreme Court Bar Association president Barrister Mainul Hussein, Bar Council member Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, Sri Lanka Press Council chairman Wijeyadasa Rajapakse and president of National Union of Journalists of Malaysia Norlita Mohd Daud.

Describing the importance of free flow of information during election, the Law Minister said information is power and if the people are allowed to know what the government is doing they will be able to elect the right person. "There is a nexus between freedom of information and good government."

"Nothing should stand in the way to the right to information in the name of official secrets and the state affairs, except a few ... for the sake of national security and public interests," Khasru said.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina among the recipients of Ekushey Padak 2000 at the Osmani Memorial Hall yesterday.

Ekushey Padak 2000 handed over
BSS, Dhaka

Fifteen eminent personalities were awarded the "Ekushey Padak 2000" at a simple ceremony at the Osmani memorial hall here yesterday morning.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina handed over the awards to the recipients and their relatives. The award carries a gold medal, a citation and a cheque for Taka 40 thousand.

For the first time, five language martyrs Shaheed Abul Barkat, Shaheed Abdul Jabbar, Shaheed Abdus Salam, Shaheed Rafiquddin Ahmed and Shaheed Shafiur Rahman, received the award.

Mr Aiauddin Barkat, nephew of Shaheed Abul Barkat, Mr Nurul Islam, son of Shaheed Jabbar, Subedar (ret) Abdul Karim, younger brother of Shaheed Abdus Salam, Mr Khorshed Alam, younger brother of Shaheed Rafiquddin Ahmed and Begum Akila Khatun, wife of Shaheed Shafiur Rahman received the awards on behalf of the martyrs.

Begum Rebeca Mohiuddin, wife of late Mohiuddin Ahmed and Begum Atia Rahim, wife of late Zahedur Rahim received the awards on behalf of their late husbands.

The other recipients are Bhasha Soinik Abu Nasar Mohammad Gaziul Haque (language), Dr Neelima Ibrahim (education), Prof Jamal Nazrul Islam, (science and technology), Mr Ekhlisuddin Ahmed (literature), Mr Khalid Hossain (music), Syed Abdul Hadi (music), Abdullah Al Mamun (drama) and Shamim Sikdar (sculpture).

Price for nuisance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Commuters at the city's Farmgate intersection punished the driver of a private car for repeatedly honking horn despite red light at the traffic signal near the Police Box at around 10 am yesterday.

The driver of the white Toyota Camri stuck up at the traffic signal with buses, scooters and other vehicles was first warned by two young men on a motorbike not to honk the deafening horn unnecessarily. But he ignored the warning and continued to do so.

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PM blasts Opposition, urges people to resist hartals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday bitterly criticised the opposition parties for enforcing a series of hartals and urged the people to build up resistance at districts and ward levels against hartals.

With an oblique reference to BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, the prime minister said the defeated forces of 1971, 1990 and 1996 have forged an unholy alliance to destroy democratic process in the country.

She warned people against the evil design plotted by the conspira-

tors. Hasina, also president of ruling Awami League, was delivering her presidential speech at a discussion meeting organised by the party at the city's Paltan Maidan yesterday afternoon marking the International Mother Language Day today.

She again invited her arch political rival BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to return to the parliament to pave the way for an early general election. "If you (Khaleda) want elections, come to the parliament and ask for it, we're ready to give the elections,"

said Hasina adding in the same breath that Khaleda Zia has failed to deliver as Leader of the Opposition in the parliament. Khaleda should relinquish her parliament membership if she did not return to the Jatiya Sangsad, Hasina added.

The AL president ridiculed the opposition alliance for its 'failure' to mobilise public support in favour of its sit-in demonstration around the Secretariat on Sunday despite tall talks of assembling four lakh people

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Ekushey returns to inspire nation

FROM PAGE 1

the independence of Bangladesh. The martyrs of the Ekushey are thus regarded as the vanguards of national movement for independence. Ekushey February enkindles the spirit of nationalism, independence and sovereignty in the heart of the Bangladeshis every year.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia and Director general of UNESCO Roichiro Matsuura have issued separate messages on the occasion of Ekushey February and International Mother Language Day.

As the clock strikes 00:01, people from all walks of life will start thronging the Central Shaheed Minar to pay homage to the language martyrs, humming and singing the immortal chorus: "Amar Bhaiyer Rakte Rangano Ekushey February, Ami Ki Bhulite Pari (Can I forget February 21, the day which is drenched in the blood of my brothers).

President Shahabuddin is scheduled to place the first wreath on the alter of the Shaheed Minar one minute past Tuesday midnight, followed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Then, cabinet ministers, Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor along with Senate and Syndicate members, language heroes, Dhaka University Teachers Association, deans and provosts of DU and members of the "Amar Ekushey February Central Co-ordination Committee 2001 would place wreaths one after another. The Dhaka Reporters Unity would also place wreath at the first hour of Ekushey. BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in

Parliament Khaleda Zia is also expected to place wreath at the pedestal of Shaheed Minar at the first hour of Ekushey.

The Shaheed Minar premises will be open for public after the President, Prime Minister and other VIPs offer wreaths and leaves Shaheed Minar.

The Dhaka University authority is supervising the Shaheed Day programme at the Central Shaheed Minar.

The day is a public holiday and the national flag will fly half-mast atop all government, autonomous, private buildings. Similar programmes will be arranged at district and thana headquarters in observance of the day.

Different roads and road dividers in the city have been decorated with festoons inscribed with Bangla alphabets and miniature national flag. State-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar, privately owned Ekushey Television, Channel 1 and ATN Bangla put up special programmes. Newspapers today brought out special supplements highlighting the significance of Ekushey.

In observance of the day, different political parties, socio-cultural organisations, students organisations have drawn up elaborate programmes, which include probhat pheri (procession at dawn) and placing of wreaths, Qurankhwani, milad mahfil, cultural functions and discussion meetings.

Representatives of the foreign missions in Dhaka will place wreaths at Shaheed Minar in the morning. The Shaheed day will also be commemorated by Bangladesh missions abroad.