



81st anniversary of Bangabandhu's birth today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 81st anniversary of birth of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will be observed in the country today.

Different socio-cultural and political organisations have taken up elaborate programmes in observance of the day.

Editorial on page 4

The day is a public holiday. The day is also observed as National Children's Day.

The ruling Awami League will begin its programmes by hoisting the National Flag and party flag atop the Bangabandhu Bhavan in the city

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Mandela, Grameen Bank awarded Gandhi Peace Prize 2000

BSS, New Delhi

Bangladesh's Grameen Bank and former South African President Dr Nelson Mandela were awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize-2000 by President Narayanan at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here yesterday.

Grameen Bank and Dr Mandela have jointly been chosen for the award in recognition of their exemplary work for promotion of peace and non-violence. The award carries an amount of rupees one crore or its equivalent in foreign currency and a citation.

Dipal C Barua, general manager of Grameen Bank received the prize on behalf of his organisation.

"As Dr Mandela abolished apartheid, the Grameen Bank also abol

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Now Chief Whip's youngest son

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ashik Abdullah, youngest son of Chief Whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah, damaged several vehicles and beat up some drivers of different vehicles as his car got stuck in a traffic jam in the city's Sadarghat area yesterday morning.

Ashik and some of his relatives arrived at Sadarghat at about 7am yesterday from Barisal in Suravi-4 launch. Two cars went to the Sadarghat terminal to receive Ashik and his relatives.

As they got stuck in a traffic jam, their car drivers started to honk incessantly. At one stage, Ashik came out of his car and started

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

INSIDE TODAY

Article 4

Peace talks must resume
Column: Spotlight on Middle East
Muslehuddin Ahmad

Literature 9

Essay: The Bridge on the River Kawai: A bridge to the future; and Reflections: Income and well-being

Business 6-8

Eight textile mills may go to workers
March 23

Pakistan needs \$10b aid to meet financing gap till '04

OPEC meets to cut output

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 17		6.09pm
Mar 18	6-05am	

Prayer Timings

March 17		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-20	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-30
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-13	6-18
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Ershad's move for understanding with govt but Manzur opposes

STAR REPORT

The government is trying to reach an "understanding" with the Jatiya Party faction led by jailed former president HM Ershad, JP sources said.

GM Kader, a JP lawmaker and younger brother of Ershad, is playing the role of a mediator in this regard.

Kader met Ershad twice at the Dhaka Central Jail in the last three days.

The sources also confirmed that Kader had a meeting with an influential minister recently, who arranged his meeting with Ershad in jail.

Meanwhile, a sizeable section of the faction, led by party Secretary General Nazir Rahman Manzur, have become "desperate to nip in

the bud" the move for understanding.

The section has taken a "firm stand" that the party would not break away from the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance.

A JP Presidium member loyal to Manzur said they will seek Kader's "removal" from of the Presidium at its next meeting for toeing a government line and trying to create a rift in the opposition alliance.

Anticipating their move, the government made an arrangement yesterday so that Ershad's wife and JP Presidium member Raushan Ershad and Deputy Leader of its Parliamentary Party TIM Fazle Rabbi could hold a meeting with Ershad at Dhaka Central Jail. Fazle Rabbi met Ershad yesterday but Raushan did not. Earlier on March 13, Kader had a 30-minute discus-

sion with Ershad at the jail.

As Ershad was taken to a special court on Thursday for hearing on Gen Manzur murder case, he handed his counsellor Khandakar



H M Ershad

Mahbub Hossain a written message.

A meeting of the party policymakers was held on the same day the office of Asiatic Printers, owned by the party secretary general.

The meeting was informed that Ershad had asked party MPs to join the upcoming parliament session to "ascertain through division vote how many JP lawmakers have sided with the other faction of the party led by Communications Minister Anwar Hossain Manju".

Ershad also asked for "whipping" of MPs loyal to him for joining the parliament session. If any party lawmaker defies "whipping", he/she loses parliament membership.

Thursday's meeting decided that a meeting of the JP Parliamentary

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Major parties analysing previous results to assess strength

ZAYADUL AHSAN

With the next parliamentary election nearing, all the major political parties including ruling Awami League are now taking into consideration the results of the last Jatiya Sangsad election to assess their respective strength in the 300 constituencies.

Such an assessment is crucial for the BNP-led opposition alliance, components of which are planning to share the electoral battle against the ruling party.

The parties are also taking into consideration the results of the fifth parliamentary polls held in 1991. They are ignoring the results of the "controversial" sixth parliamentary polls, sources in the ruling and the opposition parties said.

The opposition alliance will begin formal discussions soon to find out an "amicable formula" for seat-sharing on the basis of performances of component parties in 1991 and 1996 polls.

Some other criteria for seat-sharing are also being informally discussed. The two big partners BNP and Jatiya Party are in the focus of discussions.

The ruling AL is also preparing to contest for all the 300 seats, keeping in mind the prospect of an opposition electoral alliance.

Some prominent figures in the opposition camp are likely to be nominated, putting aside any for-

Positions of four major parties in the 5th and 7th JS elections

Subject	JS	AL	BNP	JP	Jamaat
Percentage of vote	7th	37.44%	33.61%	16.40%	8.61%
	5th	33.67%	30.81%	11.92%	12.13%
Seat won	7th	146	116	32	03
	5th	100	140	35	18
Second position	7th	133	113	37	14
	5th	166	58	28	30
Third position	7th	18	45	133	84
	5th	24	48	61	95
Deposit lost	7th	02	36	136	225
	5th	05	58	152	106

mula. But there are varying interpretations in the opposition parties on the results of the two polls.

The AL also has its own interpretation.

An analysis of results of the two elections show that AL defeated BNP in 1996 election both in terms of winning seats and bagging votes. But it had lost the 1991 election to BNP as it got less seats although the percentage of votes it scored was higher.

Following is the party-wise results of the two elections.

Awami League
In the 1996 election, AL got 146 seats and 37.44 per cent of votes cast. It was in second position in 133

constituencies, third in 18 and fourth in two constituencies. It's candidates lost deposits in two constituencies.

In 1991 polls, AL won 88 seats. Its allies contesting with 'boat' symbol got 12 seats. The percentage of votes for 'boat' was 33.67 against 33.61 of BNP. In that election, AL contested for 264 seats, leaving 36 for its allies. It was in second position in 166 constituencies. AL candidates lost deposit in five constituencies.

BNP
In 1996 polls, BNP got 116 seats and 33.61 per cent of votes. It was in second position in 113 constituencies, third in 45, fourth in 23, fifth in one and seventh in two consti-

ties. The party candidates lost deposits in 36 constituencies.

In 1991 polls, BNP got 140 seats although it lagged behind AL in terms of votes, which was 30.81 per cent of the total. It was second in 57 constituencies. Its candidates lost deposits in 58 constituencies.

Jatiya Party

In 1996 polls, JP got 32 seats and 16.40 per cent of total votes. The party was in second position in 37 constituencies, third in 133, fourth in 72, fifth in 16, sixth in two and seventh in one constituency. It fielded 293 candidates and 157 of them lost deposit.

In 1991 election, it fielded 272 candidates and 35 of them returned. It got 11.92 per cent of votes cast. The party got second position in 28 constituencies, seventh in 61 and eighth in seven constituencies. It's candidates lost deposit in 152 constituencies.

Jamaat-e-Islami

Contesting for 300 seats, Jamaat got only three in the last election and scored 8.61 per cent of votes. The party was in second position in 14 constituencies, third in 84, fourth in 152, fifth in 36, sixth in 10 and seventh in one constituency. It's candidates lost deposit in 225 seats.

In the 1991 election, Jamaat contested for 222 seats and got only 18, scoring 12.13 per cent of votes. It

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Vajpayee fails again to explain scam, parliament adjourned amid turmoil

AP, New Delhi

Government and opposition lawmakers called each other thieves yesterday, forcing Parliament to adjourn for the fourth day and preventing an address by the prime minister on a bribery scandal that brought the resignation of two Cabinet ministers.

The two sides continued screaming at each other, coming close to blows outside the main gate of Parliament as police forces gathered near a statue of Indian independence leader Mohandas K Gandhi.

The Indian government has been in turmoil since Tuesday, when an Internet media company released tapes of political, military and defence ministry officials receiving money and discussing

Vajpayee yesterday promised that he would "clean up the dirt" of a bribery scandal. "You have my word, I will work to clean up the dirt that has come into view," Vajpayee said in a recorded address broadcast on state-run Doordarshan television. He said a sitting or retired Supreme Court judge would investigate all the allegations raised this week by the Internet media group, Tehelka.com, reports AP.

bribes with journalists posing as defence contractors.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has tried for three days to address Parliament on the scandal, but opposition lawmakers have stood before the Speaker's chair, shouting slogans to force adjournment.

After the resignation Thursday night of Defence Minister George Fernandes, who said the allegations against him were false and designed to undermine national security, the opposition has said it will press for the entire government

to resign.

Fernandes did not appear on any tape released by Tehelka.com, the media company. But the president of his Samata Party, Jaiya Jaitley, was show in his home, talking to the fake dealers about getting approval for their products, as money was handed over for a party conference.

The Defence Ministry on Wednesday had fired a major general and three other officials shown accepting money from the phony arms dealers.

Also on Thursday, Railways

Minister Mamata Banerjee resigned from the Cabinet and withdrew her party from the governing coalition, saying she was taking a stand against corruption.

The most problematic ally in Vajpayee's coalition had announced her resignation several times previously in disputes over policy and Vajpayee had always declined to accept her withdrawal from the Cabinet.

It was accepted today, along with that of Fernandes, whose party remains in Vajpayee's coalition.

The remaining seats in Vajpayee coalition, led by his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), were enough to maintain a majority as Banerjee's party has only nine seats.

Because of the turmoil in

SEE PAGE 12 COL 1



Mother and wife of Mirpur Jubo League leader Munir Hossain (inset) wailing. Munir drowned in a pond in the area while trying to escape a police chase in the early hours of yesterday.

Jubo League leader drowns while escaping police raid

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jubo League leader of Mirpur area in the city, Munir Hossain, drowned in a pond while trying to escape a police chase in the early hours of yesterday, sources concerned said.

The victim, a resident of BADC Staff Quarters, drowned in Toparbagh pond in the area.

This is sixth case of drowning following police chase in the city in the last two years.

Munir, 26, was talking with some friends at a makeshift shop beside Toparbagh pond when a police team from Mirpur thana headed by SI Saidur Rahman and ASI Malinur Rahman went there. Munir and one of his friends suddenly jumped into the pond. Munir drowned but his friend swam to safety, police said.

But family members and local people alleged that the police team prevented Munir from getting up from the pond.

Police denied the allegation and said their team went there with a warrant of arrest.

The victim's body was later recovered from the pond.

Police said none came to the thana to file a case in this regard.

They will file a case if Munir's relatives do not, they added.

Munir was an accused in many

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Abductors free one sick hostage?

SHEHAB AHMED and ABDULLAH AL-MAHMUD from Rangamati

Dipanker Talukder MP and Brigade Commander Golam Robbani went to Kaukhali at 4 pm yesterday following a message from the abductors that Nils Hulgaard would be released as he was sick, officials here said.

But they did not return till 10 last night.

There are rumors here that Nils has been freed, but it could not be officially confirmed.

"We have established contact

with the kidnappers and release of the hostages is a matter of time," a highly placed source told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are expecting a turnaround in talks any moment," Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Mobaiddul Islam told a press briefing at Rangamati Circuit House in the evening. But he did not elaborate.

There has been an increase in the exchange of messages between the kidnappers and the authorities, he said but he dismissed reports that ransom was being negotiated.

"We are not paying any ransom", he said.

Danish citizens Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgaard and British citizen Tim Selby, all working as consultants for reconstruction of a road in Chittagong Hill Tracts, were kidnapped by trial gunmen for ransom on February 16.

On the issue of 'general amnesty' he said, "We have communicated to the kidnappers that they would not be prosecuted." It was conveyed in writing earlier, he added answering a question.

Islam said that Prime Ministers of Britain and Denmark have sent letters to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressing satisfaction over the process of negotiations for their release.

Besides, contacts are being maintained through a network of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

All 4 newly approved banks belong to AL MPs or their supporters

STAR REPORT

Under strict secrecy, the standing committee for approving new banks on Wednesday recommended allowing four new banks in the country.

According to sources, all the four banks belong either to the ruling party MPs or their supporters and there was hardly any merit for recommending these banks.

This government committee recommends names of the proposed banks to the finance ministry for final approval.

The committee meeting discussed applications for 10 new banks and finally recommended four of those. None of the committee members was willing to disclose the names of the banks.

But some other sources said the major consideration for allowing

new banks now is political and nothing else.

"The sponsors have no such business records so as to allow them to set up new banks. They are mostly political elements and moreover, there is no financial logic behind allowing more banks now," said one source.

The 10 applications which the committee discussed include those from proposed Padma Bank Ltd, Unique Bank Ltd, Times Bank Ltd, Continental Bank Ltd, Shah Amanat Islami Bank Ltd, Wage Earners' Bank Ltd, Japan Bangla Bank Ltd and North West Bank Ltd.

The meeting was chaired by Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr M Farashuddin. Committee members including industries secretary, commerce secretary, additional secretary of the finance ministry and a deputy governor of Bangladesh Bank present.

The Daily Star could not contact any of the committee members last night for comments.

Meanwhile, an advertisement by proposed Sundarban Bank International Ltd for recruitment of nine probationer officers and 11 trainee assistant officers has created confusion in the banking circle.

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) in a separate advertisement said it has not given any licence to Sundarban Bank for operation and that a case in this regard has been pending with higher court.

But public attention has been drawn to a condition for applying for the posts of officers in the proposed bank that applicants have to submit stamp worth Tk 200 with their applications.

"This is unjust," said a BB official. "In fact, no bank receives money from one just for applying for a job."

Labour unrest halts activities at Chittagong, Mongla ports

UNB, Dhaka

Activities at Chittagong and Mongla seaports came to a halt yesterday due to labour unrest.

A report from Chittagong said dock workers backed by Bangladesh Master Stevedores Association (BMSA) went on a wildcat strike from 8 last night.

On the other hand, labourers at Mongla port stopped loading and unloading of goods since yesterday morning.

The dock labourers at Chittagong Port went on strike protesting filing of a case against the BMSA chairman

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6