

11-party team likely to meet President on Mar 27

STAR REPORT

A delegation of the left leaning parties is likely to meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed on March 27 to convey people's growing concern over the politics of confrontation between the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP.

The delegation comprising the leaders of 11-left parties looks forward to receiving an appointment within a day or two, said sources.

At the meeting, the leftist leaders would blame both AL and BNP for their egocentric attitudes towards the next general election, the sources added.

Next to BNP and AL, this delegation would be the third political group to meet the president in the same month on the issue of upcoming polls.

Earlier, a BNP delegation led by Khaleida Zia met the president on March 7 to demand election in May, and a prime minister-led delegation on March 20 to inform her government's willingness to quit power after April 17.

2 looted rifles recovered in Satkhira: One arrested

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Police recovered two of the four looted rifles and four country-made guns from the banana plantation of one Rabiul Islam of village Sultanpur under Sadar Upazila yesterday. One person was arrested in this connection.

Police also seized huge iron and steel materials allegedly used for making guns from the house of one Sukkar of village Fingri in connection with the arms looting.

Earlier a group of miscreants looted four rifles including an SLR from the policemen at Jahanabaj in Satkhira on Wednesday night.

Acting on a tip-off, police yesterday raided the residence of Rabiul Islam Bablu at Palashpole in Satkhira pourasava. Later, Bablu was arrested at Dakatiapota village, 7-km off the town after a three-hour manhunt.

Bablu, son of Ujir Ali of village Kashimpur in Jhenidah district confessed to police that the looted arms were kept in the banana plantation of gang leader Rabiul Islam.

Accordingly, a contingent of armed police led by OC Abdul Kader Beg raided the banana plantation at village Sultanpur. Police recovered six firearms including two looted rifles from the banana plantation. Rabiul, however, managed to escape.

According to the confessional statement of Rabiul, police also raided the house of Sukumar Dhali, son of Anil Dhali of village Fingri South and recovered huge iron and steel materials used for making guns and some explosives and two walki-talki. Sukumar is also absconding.

Police, however, continued operations to recover one SLR and one rifle. Police arrested 18 suspected criminals in this connection.

Aminul Islam, SP, Satkhira said Rabiul is an active member of the outlawed party and involved with the incident.

4 teenagers held with arms, liquor in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested four teenagers, including two sisters who live in Italy, with a firearm and liquor from Badda area in the city on Friday night.

The arrested were identified as Tahmina Helal alias Tuni, 20 and her sister Farah Helal Eto, 18, Saidur Rahman, a resident of Pallabi and Noor-e-Alam alias Palash, a resident of Kuril in the city.

Badda police said they stopped a taxicab as the four were taking liquor in it at about 9:30 pm. They recovered a foreign-made revolver with 20 bullets and a bottle of foreign liquor from their possession.

Police produced them before the CMM's Court yesterday morning, seeking five-day remand. The court however placed the two youths on two-day remand and sent to the two sisters to Dhaka Central Jail.

Sources said the girls came to Dhaka from Italy a few days ago.

An arms case was filed with Badda police station in this connection.

Year-long programme to 'save' rivers

3-day IDEB confce concludes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The three-day national conference of the Institute of Diploma Engineers, Bangladesh (IDEB), ended yesterday taking up a year-long programme to implement its decision to 'Save Rivers Save Bangladesh'.

It also urged the government to form a 'Bangladesh River Authority' to free the country of flood, drought and arsenic problems.

Presided over by IDEB President Rafiqul Islam Bhuiya, the concluding session also took a number of decisions on organisational and professional matters.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the conference on Thursday on the premises of IDEB. She also laid the foundation stone of a multi-storied building of the Institute.

The conference was also marked by seminars on empowerment of women through technical

education to help alleviate poverty and on prospects and problems of information technology in Bangladesh.

In a resolution adopted at the concluding session, emphasis was laid on involving women in technical fields to help eliminate poverty and accelerate national development.

It urged all concerned to identify the impediments to development of information technology and take effective steps to remove those.

The conference adopted 20 resolutions to help develop the country, resolve water and power crises, environmental problem, population problem and help develop preventive healthcare, expand technical education and improve traffic situation in the capital.

The concluding session was also addressed by AKMA Hamid, General Secretary of IDEB and other leaders. About 600 delegates participated in it.

Arsenic mitigation project Task force formed to pinpoint weaknesses

NAIMUL HAQ

A seven-member task force has been formed at the request of the World Bank last week to pinpoint weaknesses of the 44 million dollar Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP).

Dissatisfied at the progress of the BAMWSP, the World Bank, financier of the biggest arsenic project, asked the government to form a task force. The project beginning on February 20, 1999 is also co-financed by the Swiss government.

The taskforce is headed by SA Samad, Principal Secretary at the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Other members are Amiyangshu Sen, Secretary to the Local Government Division (LGD), Dr Mosiur Rahman, Secretary to the Economic Relations Division (ERD), and representatives of the Planning Commission and Ministry of Health.

A World Bank letter read out by Dr S A Samad at the meeting at the PM's secretariat recently pointed out that BAMWSP's performance is all too poor, its management unit is not

functioning well, and the technical assistance has not been utilised at all.

The letter suggested that the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) be restructured, or the BAMWSP be implemented by an independent organisation.

Says a member of the taskforce: "It's more than two and a half years since BAMWSP came into being and things have not lived up to desired goals."

"The bank is not happy with the Local Government Division that deals with implementation of the project," said the member.

However, regarding the bank's views, the LGD Secretary Amiyangshu Sen told the meeting that the government must speak in unison on the issue.

The taskforce would also suggest an alternative implementation procedure for BAMWSP and remedies for the existing problems facing project activities.

Meanwhile, a mid-term review

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The Mukhtangan rally hosted by the BNP-backed Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal turned the stretch of road between Zero Point in the south and Bijoy Nagar in the north into a 'vehicle-free zone' yesterday.

Bangladesh can hold another successful polls, hopes US envoy

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador Mary Ann Peters urged all political parties to take on the responsibility for holding the upcoming general election peacefully and accepting its results gracefully.

Party leaders should also make a commitment that, win or lose, they will participate in the next parliament and use the House to make their political case to the people, she said.

The US ambassador made the suggestions as squabbles between the ruling and opposition camps here handicapped the outgoing parliament and cast a shadow on the forthcoming JS elections.

In an exclusive interview with the UNB, Mary Ann hoped Bangladesh would be able to conduct the third elections under a caretaker government successfully.

The United States, she said, will do everything possible to help, including bringing in election observers.

"The elections are important," she said, adding that the country has had two reasonably free and fair elections, "but everyone recognises that this election will be very hard-fought, and we really hope that Bangladesh will be able to conduct another successful election."

Appreciating people's commitment to democracy she said: "I know people in villages like to vote, the turnout here is higher than the turnout in the United States, which is a good thing for you and something that I wish we could change in our country."

"Of course, once the election is held, and assuming that it is a successful and free and fair election, the important thing is that the party that loses acknowledges defeat and goes to parliament."

Asked about election observers, the US diplomat said international observers can help create confidence in the election, assuming it deserves confidence, but it is really up to Bangladeshis themselves to

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APSU calls hartal on Apr 3

DU CORRESPONDENT

Opposition-backed All Party Students Unity (APSU) yesterday announced a series of programmes including a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on April 3.

The announcement was made at a rally at Mukhtangan. The rally was supposed to be held at Paltan Maidan, but the authorities concerned did not give permission.

The programmes include demonstration in front of National Sports Council on March 27, march towards the parliament and stick procession across the country on March 29, and countrywide demonstration on April 2.

In his speech as chief guest, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu said, "The armed cadres of Chhatra League have destroyed the congenial atmosphere of all educational institutions."

He said the Chhatra League has ousted all the activists of Chhatra Dal from the university dormitories.

The APSU leaders threatened to launch tougher movement if the government does not resign by March 30.

The April 3 programme will bring

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Sector commanders of the Liberation War let fly a national flag, strung to balloons, at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city yesterday to inaugurate the Independence Festival, organised by the Sammilito Sangskritik Jote.

PM inaugurates Cox's Bazar Betar Kendra

UNB, Cox's Bazar

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated Cox's Bazar Betar Kendra, a new radio station, that will help fishermen in deep seas in various ways and minimise adversities of natural disaster.

"This radio station will play a special role during cyclones and natural disasters in the coastal belt and help flourish culture and heritage of this area," she said.

The 10-kilohertz radio station has been built at a cost of Tk 21 crore which will cover 200 kilometre distance over the Bay of Bengal.

State Minister for Information Prof Abu Sayeed and Information Secretary M I Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion.

The prime minister said the government has set up four new radio stations during its four years rule, while in last 21 years not a single radio station was set up.

The government has also taken

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Rupsha Bridge remains a 'political bluff'?

Construction unlikely to start also during the term of this govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Inauguration of construction work of Rupsha bridge is unlikely to take place during the tenure of the present government.

All governments since 1976 made Rupsha bridge 'a hot political issue to get vote in elections'.

But this time the wind will blow otherwise so far as vote is concerned, according to leaders of Khulna Citizens' Committee and Greater Khulna Development Action Committee.

They have threatened to block election campaign of ruling party and Opposition candidates and launch a movement next month to protest the governments' "bluff" to people by making Rupsha bridge a political issue.

Sources said, the work order has not yet been given to the lowest bidder Shimizu company.

The relevant file is awaiting the Prime Minister's approval, which is unlikely soon, as there are a lot of formalities involved, said a high official of Khulna office of RHD.

The file on project proposal (PP) may have been the victim of red tapism, for which the Prime Minister's approval is being delayed, the official said.

All preparations are reportedly complete for formal inauguration of construction work by the Prime Minister. But it is unlikely to take place during the tenure of the present government, said two ruling party MPs.

During a visit to the project site recently, a high official of Shimizu company expressed dissatisfaction seeing many unauthorised structures on both sides of the proposed 17-km Khulna by-pass road which will be linked with the Rupsha bridge.

Japan will provide 80 percent of the cost for the 1,460-metre four-lane bridge which will have provision for gas pipeline.

Two killed as strong tremor jolts Japan

AP, Hiroshima

A strong earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.4 struck a wide area in southwestern Japan yesterday afternoon, killing at least two people and injuring dozens of people.

An 80-year-old woman was killed under a collapsing concrete wall, said Yoshinobu Tanimoto, a fire department official in Hiroshima prefecture (state).

In neighbouring Ehime prefecture (state), a 50-year-old woman fleeing her home died after roof tiles crashed down onto her head, said national Police Agency official Tsuyoshi Iwashita.

Police said at least 61 people suffered injuries in quake-affected areas, including several teenagers who were hit by fragments of a wall that crumbled in a high school gymnasium.

The quake, centered some 60 kilometers below ground, struck at 3:28 pm near Hiroshima prefecture (state), about 687 kilometers southwest of Tokyo, the Meteorological Agency said.