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PM hands over Independence Day Award 2000

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday accused the opposition of hatching conspiracy to capture power through devious means instead of democracy, understanding or elections.

"They don't want election, democracy or economic freedom of the people. They're trying to divert the country to a different course destroying the democratic process," she said while handing over the prestigious Independence Day Award at Osmany Memorial Hall in the morning.

"We will have to protect democracy and voting rights of the people at any cost," Hasina said calling upon the people to resist all conspiracies for economic uplift of the country.

Without a stable democracy

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Bangladesh turns 30



When dawn breaks today, people in their hundreds of thousands would throng the National Memorial at Savar to pay homage to the martyrs of the glorious War of Independence.

UNB, Dhaka

The nation celebrates its 31st Independence Day today with much enthusiasm and patriotic zeal transcending political unrest centring on the upcoming general elections.

On this day in 1971, the Bengalees embarked upon a war putting up a courageous resistance against the Pakistan occupation army, as Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared independence.

The declaration of independence came after the Pakistan army unleashed one of the history's most gruesome of genocides on innocent Bengalees and arrested Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Before his arrest, Bangabandhu through a wireless message called upon the people to resist the occupation forces.

Later, Awami League leader MA Hannan and Major Ziaur Rahman, who later became president, read out the proclamation of independence which was broadcast from Kalurghat radio station in Chittagong.

President Shahabuddin Ahmad, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia gave separate messages congratulating the people on the occasion of the Independence and National Day.

In his message, Shahabuddin urged all to be tolerant to the opinions of others and desist from confrontation for the sake of flourishing democratic norms and values.

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Nepotism, corruption by NU VC alleged JS body okays steps to prevent cheating in exams

STAR REPORT

Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education yesterday engaged in a heated debate over the alleged nepotism and corruption by the vice-chancellor of the National University (NU).

Some of the members demanded an investigation into the allegations by a high-powered committee, meeting sources said.

The debate ensued when opposition BNP lawmaker Alamgir Kabir questioned whether Dr. Durga Das Bhattachariya has the credentials to be the vice-chancellor of the university.

He said the National University also violated the constitution and rules of procedures of the parliament by advertising in a section of national dailies, criticising reports on the university based on a meeting of the parliamentary

committee.

Kabir said the university wasted a huge amount of money for advertisements to save its face. He also claimed that nepotism played a big part in appointment of some teachers in the university.

Bhattachariya, who attended the meeting, however, refuted the charges and said certain quarters were out to taint the image of the institution.

Committee Chairman Nurul Islam Nahid assured the members that the issue would be discussed at length in the next meeting.

Panchanan Biswas, a committee member, termed the debate on alleged corruption by the NU VC as 'an attack on the minority community'.

Meanwhile, the meeting approved the sub-committee recommendations to check cheating and other unfair means in examinations.

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Cabinet decides in principle to appoint an ombudsman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

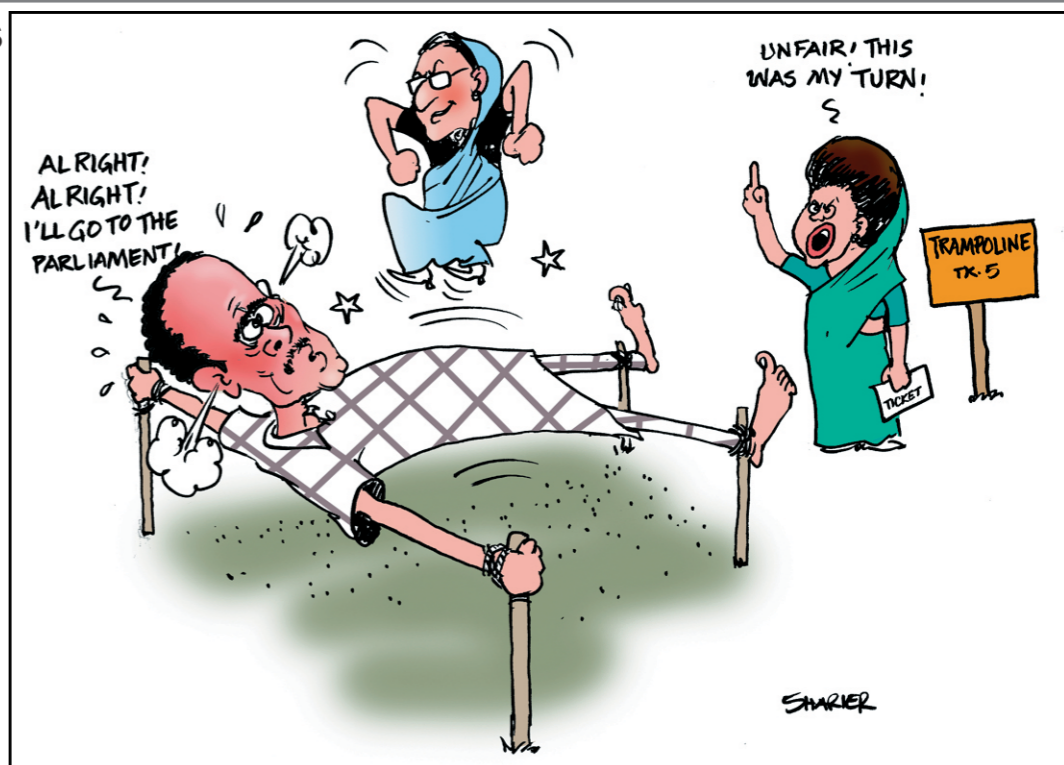
The cabinet yesterday decided in principle to appoint an ombudsman and asked the law ministry to update the 20-year old law relating to powers and functions of his office.

The cabinet's decision came four years and nine months after the Awami League returned to power, although the party pledged the appointment before the last general election in 1996.

Despite a constitutional provision, the nation never saw an ombudsman, the watchdog for democracy, not even after a law was enacted in this regard in 1980.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also reiterated on many occasions

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INSIDE TODAY

Article 4

Electoral reform from the public perspective
Khandakar Qudra-I-Elahi

Focus 5

A sense of history shared

Supplement 17-28

Today's 28-page issue of The Daily Star contains 12 pages special supplement on Independence Day

Holiday Notice

The offices of The Daily Star will remain closed today on the occasion of the Independence and National Day.

Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow.

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 26		6.12 pm
Mar 27	5-56 am	

Prayer Timings

March 26		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-10	5-40
Zohr	12-45	1-30
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-16	6-21
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Commentary

What can the President do?

MAHFUZ ANAM

Today we should have been writing a celebratory piece (see our supplement) on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of our Independence and the 10th year of continued democracy. But instead we are desperately seeking a way out of turmoil and conflict that seems imminent. It is out of a sense of helplessness that we write a second commentary in a row. The nation is being pushed into a totally unnecessary period of political confrontation and violence. We think that the fundamental ingredients for a solution exist and all it needs is some wise counselling and calm thinking. What makes the situation

more frustrating is that substantive offers from the Prime Minister have been on the table which are being subverted by the untenable ultimatum from the opposition and behind the scene machination by a section of ruling party stalwarts.

When a country faces political crisis the most important thing to do is to look into its Constitution for guidance. The Constitution gives the present government the legal, moral and ethical right to continue in office till July 13, 2001, and for a maximum of 15 days more, till the chief advisor of the caretaker government takes office. Therefore, the ultimatum of the opposition that the Awami League government must resign by 30th March has no legal,

moral or ethical basis. The only Constitutional means of toppling a government before the end of its term is through a no-confidence motion in the parliament, the question of which does not arise as the opposition does not have the requisite seats and, more fundamentally, it has been boycotting the parliament itself.

In a parliamentary system there is a provision for early elections, the decision for which rests with the government party alone, which it can bring about by dissolving the parliament. The opposition can at best ask for it, and even agitate for it but does not have any legal authority to force it upon the ruling party.

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Ministry okays Rupsha Bridge project

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The Ministry of Communications has approved the project proposal of Rupsha Bridge and an agreement to this effect between the bidder and the ministry is expected to be signed tomorrow.

The work order will be issued once the agreement is signed, said a source at the Road and Highways Department (RHD).

Japanese company Shimizu, the bidder, is likely to start construction of the bridge by the second week of next month, the source also said. A source at the ministry said Shimizu has been given go-ahead to begin

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Analysis

Opportunism is the name of the game

AL, BNP both out to win Ershad's heart

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Opportunism has become the order of the day in national politics, with both ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP manoeuvring to get Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad on their sides. As the election draws near, it looks set to assume frantic proportions.

Last Tuesday, Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia asked Raushan Ershad, JP Presidium member and wife of the jailed former president, not to join the upcoming parliamentary sessions.

The night before, at a meeting of the party's parliamentary wing, Raushan had decided to take the lawmakers loyal to her husband back to the parliament to save its election symbol "plough," and also to prove that Ershad

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Ershad okays removal of Manzur

STAR REPORT

Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday approved the removal of Nazir Rahman Manzur as party secretary general.

Ershad's wife Raushan Ershad and GM Kader, his brother, yesterday met Ershad now in the prison cell at the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University.

GM Kader later told the journalists that the squabbles created in the four-party alliance hurt Ershad.

"Ershad has said there was unity between JP and the rest of the members in the alliance, and this unity would be there. Ershad has also

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Dhaka wants to set up D-8 forum for shipping

M ANWARUL HAQ

Bangladesh is expected to play a pivotal role in development of a shipping network among the D-8 members and host two major shipping conferences in Dhaka in an effort to boost inter-member trade and commerce. Dhaka has also expressed its desire to set up a D-8 forum for shipping.

The decisions taken at the third D-8 Summit in Cairo held recently are being actively pursued, competent sources said.

The D-8 members at Cairo identified shipping as a thrust sector with "phenomenal growth prospects." As all the member-countries have major seaports, an 'arterial shipping highway,' if established, could generate increased trade among themselves and also attract volume of cargo from other countries in the Asian and African continents, summit leaders observed.

The D-8 Summit in Cairo suggested that two major conferences

on shipping be held as soon as possible. One major meet is planned to be held in Dhaka with participation from shipping lines, port authorities, user of shipping facilities and government authorities. Hosting of another conference with non-governmental agencies involved with shipping has also been suggested.

"The shipping conferences should help solidify inter-state and inter-company relations in the shipping sector involving both government and private sector, make vital decisions on cargo sharing and fix competitive freight rates to attract more trade," said Dr Toufik

Ali, the Bangladesh Commissioner for D-8.

Observers feel the D-8, comprising Bangladesh, Egypt, Iran, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey, has made steady progress since being established in Istanbul in 1997. The group features the eight most populous

nations of the 56-member OIC, constituting half of its total population and commanding around eight per cent of the global GDP.

Trade volume of D-8 countries is around six per cent of total world trade while trade within the forum stands at a little over 3.5 per cent, which is better than that of SAARC.

JP asks EC to increase ceiling of polls expenses to Tk 10 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A seven-member JP delegation led by its presidium member Dr. MA Matin yesterday met Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed and officially proposed some changes in electoral rules as part of the EC's move for electoral reforms.

The Jatiya Party (JP) has proposed to increase the election expenses ceiling to Tk 10 lakh as against the Election Commission's recommendation of Tk five lakh from the existing ceiling of Tk three lakh.

It also proposed a staggered system for holding the coming elections such that elections in six

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