

PM tells SC Bar members
People have rejected
Opposition movement

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday people rejected with hatred the movement of BNP-led four-party alliance and supported the Awami League government in establishing a poverty-free Bangladesh.

Addressing the newly elected office-bearers and members of Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association (BSCBA) at her Ganobhaban official residence, the prime minister said the people have started enjoying the fruits of various socio-economic programmes implemented by the present government.

Dismissing opposition criticism on the recent border skirmishes, the prime minister said though the leader of the opposition was speaking against India, but when in power they followed an appeasement policy. They sold out the national interest. But the present government upheld the country's interest, she said.

Sheikh Hasina said the government had successfully resolved the recent border situation with India through diplomatic farsightedness. But the opposition was trying to make it an issue to derive political benefit.

"Nowhere in the world could be any question of the government or

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SAARC
foreign
seccys to meet
in Colombo
next month

AFP, Colombo

South Asian foreign secretaries are due to meet in Colombo, Sri Lanka next month in a bid to revive their seven-member regional grouping fractured by Indo-Pakistan bickering, officials said yesterday.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told US Secretary of State Colin Powell that an official meeting of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) will be held next month, but did not give dates.

A foreign ministry statement here said Kadirgamar briefed the US on the 'current situation' in SAARC from its 'vantage point' as chairman of the fledgling grouping.

Kadirgamar had said that Sri Lanka, as the chairman of the grouping, was keen to ensure the continuity of the movement begun in 1985 and was hopeful of getting at least a foreign secretary-level meeting off the ground.

"In the past two years there had been no high-level meeting of SAARC," an official in Colombo said as smaller members of SAARC Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives and Nepal pushed for a summit which has been delayed by over a year.

The summit due in Nepal in 1999 was scuppered by India's reluctance to go into a meeting with Pakistan's military ruler General Pervez Musharraf.

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Sun Rises **Sun Sets**

May 7 6:30 pm

May 8 5:20 am

Prayer Timings

May 7

Azan Jamaat

Fazr 4:30 5:00

Zohr 12:45 1:15

Asr 4:45 5:00

Maghrib 6:30 6:35

Esha 8:00 8:30

Source: Islamic Foundation

Cabinet may okay draft law for autonomy of Betar, BTV today

REAZ AHMAD

At long last, the government has decided to give autonomy to the state-owned Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television.

The Cabinet at its regular weekly meeting today is likely to approve in principle a draft law in this regard, official sources confirmed yesterday.

Granting autonomy to Betar and BTV was Awami League's election pledge in 1996.

After Cabinet approval, the draft law will be sent to the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs for vetting, sources in the Cabinet Division and the Information Ministry told The Daily Star.

Then it would be tabled in the coming budget session of the Jatiya Sangsad and sent to the Parliamentary Standing Committee for scrutiny. A bill will then be passed by the parliament granting autonomy.

After several foreign trips by its members and a series of discussions, the Commission submitted its

report to the Prime Minister in August 1997, recommending "full autonomy" for Betar and BTV.

It recommended that the Ministry of Information should no longer guide Betar and BTV. Instead, a seven-member National Broadcasting Commission could be formed by the President to run those.

The Commission also prepared a 'code of conduct' and 'news value guideline' for Betar and BTV suiting their autonomous status.

Since its submission to the government, the Commission's report was kept secret as a 'classified document'. There was little progress in implementation of the report till recently when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that her government

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governed

Vajpayee rules out deployment of army along border

AP, Gauhati

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said on Saturday that an armed intrusion by Bangladeshi troops across the country's northeastern frontier last month caught his government by surprise.

"We have begun a probe to fix responsibility on the authorities manning the border for lapses, if any," Vajpayee told reporters after addressing an election rally in Gauhati, capital of the northeastern state of Assam.

One of five Indian states scheduled to hold elections next week, Assam is located 1,500 kilometers northeast of New Delhi. It shares a border with Bangladesh.

"What happened (on the border with Bangladesh) was so sudden, our forces were taken by surprise," Vajpayee said.

Skirmishes between Indian and Bangladeshi border guards on April 18 over a disputed village escalated into the worst border clashes in

three decades. Sixteen Indian and three Bangladeshi guard were killed.

Vajpayee, however, ruled out the immediate deployment of the army along Assam's border with Bangladesh.

"The border is looked after by the

Miscreants sever tendons of police informer in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miscreants cut the tendons of a police informer at Golapgah City Palli Slum in the city's Demra Thana yesterday.

A gang of eleven led by one Nur and ten others dragged Nazim Uddin inside the slum and cut the tendons of his right hand and both legs, hospital sources said.

He was brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

Border Security Force. Whenever the Army is needed, we do call them in. But, so far, the BSF is doing its job well," he said.

A powerful student group in Assam, the All Assam Students Union, enforced a statewide general strike on Wednesday to press New Delhi to deploy the army along the border with Bangladesh.

Vajpayee, who visited Assam to campaign for the polls, accused the opposition Congress party of taking the help of insurgent groups like the United Liberation Front of Assam to "terrorise" the people and win the May 10 polls.

The ULFA rebels are fighting for a sovereign, socialist Assam. They accuse the federal government of exploiting the state's rich oil, timber and mineral resources and neglecting the local economy.

More than 10,000 people have died in violence in Assam over the past decade.

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Some unscrupulous people recently built tin-shed houses on Rajuk plots at Uttara Model Town in the hope of realising high compensation from the city development authorities for land acquisition. These houses remain empty all the time.

More land for 'landlords' A good number of allottees in Uttara Model Town own one or more residential plots in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A good number of the 2,687 Uttara Model Town allottees are believed to be direct or indirect owners of one or more residential plots in the city.

According to sources in Rajuk and the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the list contains some people, widely known as 'landlords' in the city. A ministerial source cited several hundred names of such 'landlords' who have benefited from the recent Rajuk allocation of residential plots in Uttara. Although these people own properties, in most cases they use names of next of kin in documents of ownership making it difficult for legal action, he added.

As per Rajuk rule an applicant for a plot, which is several hundred times cheaper than market price, must submit an 'officially authenticated' declaration saying that he or she does not own any piece of land within 590 kilometre radius of Rajuk jurisdiction.

Rajuk claims to have no mechanism to detect false declarations but officials say if they receive a complaint of false declaration they take action. However, there has never been a single case of cancellation of allotment by Rajuk on the basis of false declaration by a so-called beneficiary, sources said.

An official at the public works and housing ministry told The Daily Star that the way adopted by Rajuk to

allocate the plots grossly violated the concept of the Uttara Model Town (third phase) Project. He said the whole concept was to offer plots to middle- and lower-middle class sections of the society on priority basis.

"But what we see here is a mockery of the concept. Rich bureaucrats, tested sympathisers of the government, ruling party activists, leaders and their followers top the list of beneficiaries, there is no respect for the landless commoners whatsoever," the official said requesting anonymity.

He added that they had analysed the list of beneficiaries and discovered that several hundred of them are well-known 'landlords' who even earn revenues from house rents in the city.

Moreover, many genuine beneficiaries of Rajuk plots in Uttara believe that they would face prolonged delay in taking charge of their coveted piece of land. Most of the 2,099.56-acre project areas in Nalbhog, Bhatulia, Dia Bari, Deul, Barakakor, Digun, Chak Digun, Chakulli, Baulia, Bailjuri and Chandalgobog are yet to be developed.

Under the current phase, the process of paying a compensation of TK 148 crore to affected families over 693 acres of land and acquiring the vast stretch of the low-lying land and then earth filling it remains to be completed.

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Jubo Dal leader shot dead in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

A Jubo Dal leader was shot dead allegedly by rival ruling Juba League activists at village Uttar Mongal Kandi under Sonagazi upazila in Feni district yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as Ahmed Karim, 32, son of Nadu Mia of the village and secretary of Mongal Kandi Union Jubo Dal.

A group of gunmen raided the house of his father-in-law where Karim was sleeping. They stormed into the house and picked Karim up. They beat him mercilessly in front of the house and then shot him at about 3 am yesterday.

The injured Karim was lying for about two hours in serious condition but none came to rescue him.

He succumbed to his injuries at about 5 am.

Police recovered Karim's body at

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Police 'don't see' big encroachers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A contingent of riot police, headed by a sub-inspector, tried to evict illegal makeshift shops in Karwan Bazar area in the city for the fourth day yesterday without touching the big encroachers there.

Police cleared some illegal shops from pavements, mysteriously ignoring those who extended their activities on the main roads in the area.

When some angry occupants challenged the eviction, a policeman pointed his finger at a recently completed tall building, saying the order to evict the 'poor' came from the boss inside the building.

Within minutes after the police contingent left, the occupants returned to set up their shops again.

For years, authorities sat idle to witness at least five major thoroughfares at Karwan Bazar fall into the hands of the developed countries.

Hasina leaves for Brussels on

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Opposition's Countrywide procession today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led opposition alliance will bring out mass processions in all cities and district headquarters across the country today demanding immediate resignation of the Awami League government.

In Daka, the alliance will hold a public rally at Muktangan at 3:30 pm and then bring out a mass procession. Secretaries general of BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Okya Jote will lead the procession.

City BNP president and convenor of the All-Party Action Council (APAC) Sadeque Hossain Khoka MP will preside over the meeting.

BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan will announce fresh programme at the rally.

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We'll remove causes of calling hartal if voted to power

Khaleda tells businessmen

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has said if her party is voted to power, opposition parties will enjoy full democratic rights so that they do not get any scope to call hartal.

"We will first remove the causes of calling hartal... As in the past, we will allow opposition parties to fully exercise democratic rights so that they do not get any scope to call hartal," she said.

The Leader of the Opposition in Parliament was talking to a big delegation of business leaders who called on her to discuss the current political situation in the country, especially the issue of hartal. Yusuf Abdullah Harun, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI), led the delegation.

Law and order, terrorism, extortion and snatching of tender etc. were also discussed, BNP Chairperson's Advisor M Morshed Khan MP said briefing newsmen later.

Khaleda Zia told them that BNP was always against hartal because it seriously harms the economy and normal life. "I am dead against hartal and I

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LDCs to seek elimination of trade discrimination

Hasina spokesperson at May 14-20 Brussels confce

M ANWARUL HAQ

The least developed countries, including Bangladesh, will seek elimination of duty- and quota-free restrictions on their goods for greater access to the markets of the developed world at a conference in Brussels. The weeklong conference begins on May 14 and runs through May 20.

Forty-nine members of the LDC group will renew their call for a level-playing field with more opportunities and initiatives for their socio-economic uplift. The LDCs represent over 630 million people or more than ten per cent of the world population.

The Brussels conference, expected to attract several heads of