

## Legal steps if AL creates anarchy: PM

UNB, Feni

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday cautioned that legal action would be taken if Awami League resorted to anarchy.

"Instead of coming to parliament conceding election defeat, Awami League, finding no issue, is unleashing chaos blocking roads and putting obstacles to development," she told a public meeting here yesterday afternoon.

"If you have any problem, solve it in parliament through discussion," the prime minister said of the main opposition who stayed out of the inaugural session of parliament and are yet to decide on joining the coming one beginning on January 31.

She categorically said none would be allowed to set off chaos on streets, with a note of warning that action will be taken as per existing laws against those who would put obstacles to development.

Addressing the gathering at Fulgazi Pilot High School ground

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## First direct polls to women's seats in city corpns

NAZRUL ISLAM

The Election Commission (EC) will soon ask the district administrations concerned for fresh delimitation of wards of three city corporations to pave the way for holding their long overdue elections sometime in March.

According to sources, the EC, for the first time, is going to hold direct polls to the women's reserved seats in the city corporations.

It has prepared a letter to the deputy commissioners (DCs) of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna districts asking them to demarcate city wards, including those reserved for women.

"One-third of the total city wards would be kept reserved for women candidates," said an official, quoting the letter to be sent to the DCs. The letter asked the DCs concerned to file reports specifying the radius of the existing wards including those for women candidates within a short time.

The EC would then publish lists of the wards through

official gazette for holding the polls.

The number of reserved seats in Dhaka would be 30 while Khulna and Rajshahi would have 10 wards each, according to the EC sources.

The elections to the three city corporations have long been pending due to some legal complexities over delimitation of wards after the areas under city corporations were expanded during 1994 to 2000. Several ward commissioners filed a number of cases with the High Court challenging the expansion of ward areas by the previous government.

However, to avoid the legal snags, the EC in its letter has asked the DCs to maintain the 1993 status of the city corporations, which would lower the number of the existing wards in all the three bodies.

Earlier, a government notification in November last year nullified the post-1993 developments in the city corporations that lowered the number of wards in Dhaka

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## Dhaka plans to open embassy in Kabul

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government plans to open a diplomatic mission in Kabul shortly.

The opening of an embassy in the Afghan capital has received top priority following Bangladesh's keen interest in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process in the war-ravaged Afghanistan, sources said.

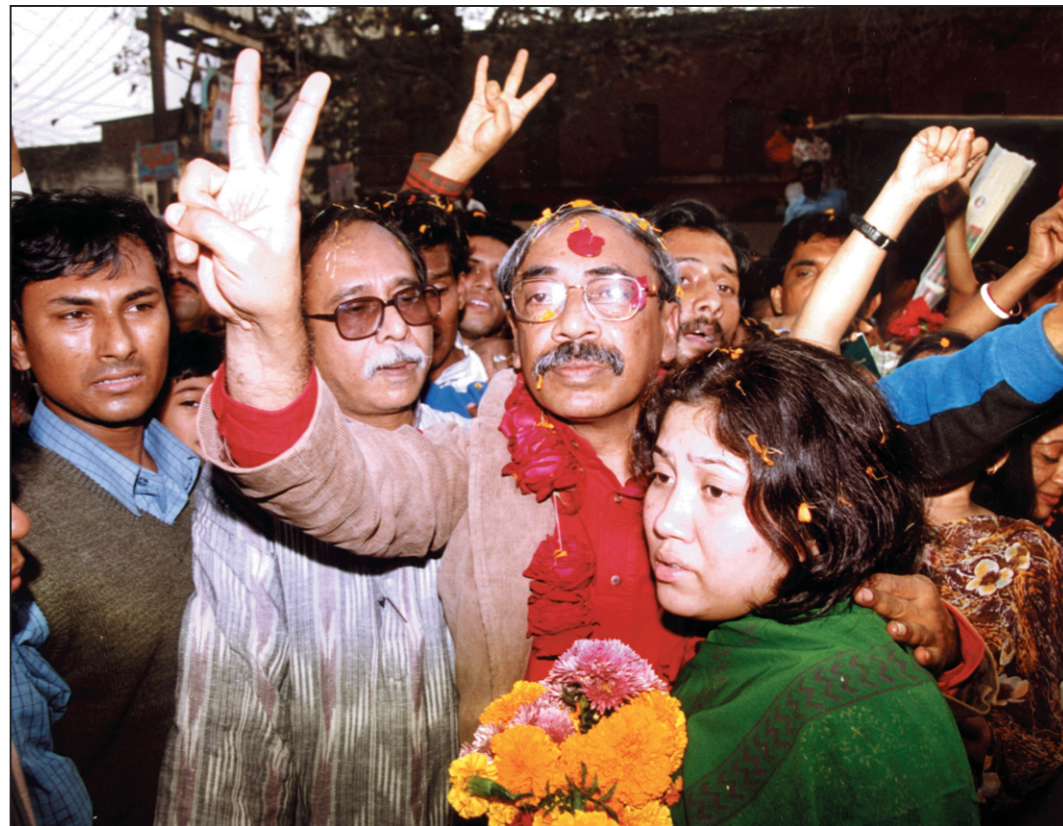
Dhaka had ambassadorial representation in Kabul until 1989, when it closed its mission following the Soviet invasion into and consequent destabilisation of the country.

However, Kabul has maintained diplomatic mission in Dhaka all along.

A growing pressure from the business and NGO circles is out there to open a diplomatic mission in Kabul, who feel that Bangladesh must avail itself of the earliest opportunity to make a "constructive contribution" to Afghanistan.

"There are immense opportunities for local entrepreneurs and firms to participate in infrastruc-

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Relatives and well-wishers garland writer-columnist Shahriar Kabir at the gate of Dhaka Central Jail after he was released on bail in a sedition case yesterday.

## Shahriar released on bail 'A freedom fighter can never be a traitor'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Writer and journalist Shahriar Kabir was released from the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday.

"I am a freedom fighter. A freedom fighter can never be a traitor. Those killers and collaborators (of the War of Liberation) who want to portray me as a traitor are the actual traitors," he told a crowd at the jail gate.

He was released on a six-month interim bail by the High Court in a sedition case.

Shahriar's family members, representatives of different professional bodies, writers, litterateurs, journalists and leaders and workers of Ghatka Dalal Nirmul Committee were present there to welcome him. Among the notable personalities present there were Wahidul Haq, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, Muntasir Mamun, Abed Khan, Barrister Shawkat Ali, Barrister Amirul-Islam.

From the jail gate Shahriar went directly to his Mohakhali residence and held a meeting with the Nirmul Committee. He told the Committee that agitation against the killers and collaborators of '71 would continue. He urged the people of the country to form a communalism-free nation.

Shahriar's release was delayed by a few hours due to some official formalities by the authorities concerned.

Sources said The Deputy Commissioner of Dhaka, whose signature was needed for his release, was not available at his office till 2 pm.

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## 'Process on to revive Gram Sarkar'

UNB, Fulgazi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said her government would revive Gram Sarkar soon to ensure smooth and balanced development in rural areas.

"The process is on, we'll soon pass a law in this regard," she said addressing a gathering of Gram Sarkar representatives and Ansar-VDP at Munshirhat here yesterday afternoon.

About 217 representatives of the defunct Gram Sarkar, founded by late President Ziaur Rahman in the late 70s, joined the programme from different villages of the district.

The Prime Minister said her government, through reactivating the lowest tier of local government, would ensure peace, security and corruption-free environment and maintain law and order in villages.

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## The Daily Star dialogue on '10 years of democracy' told

# Political parties must shed the 'winner takes all' mentality

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leading academicians, economists and members of the civil society yesterday highly criticised the "winner takes all" mentality of our political parties.

Speaking at The Daily Star dialogue on '10 Years of Democracy: Lessons and Way Ahead', held at its office, they also underscored the need for change in our political culture and urged our political leaders to be more tolerant and respectful of each others views and opinions.

Some of the crucial points that came to the fore in the three-hour

brainstorming include internal democracy within political parties, opposition participation in parliament, independence of the judiciary, setting up of local government with limited financial autonomy and greater participation of women in governance process and also ridding our politics of criminal elements.

While mentioning many of the pitfalls that Bangladesh came through over the last one decade, the participants lauded Bangladesh's continuous journey to the path of democracy since 1991. They also praised the holding of three general elections in free

and fair manner and noted that democracy got an institutional shape to a certain extent.

The participants laid special emphasis on maintaining law and order so that private entities could flourish in an enabling atmosphere. They particularly touched upon the issues of transparency in governance, independence of the judiciary and administrative decentralisation.

They underscored the need for registration of political parties and regular election of party leadership as well as transparency in funding source of political parties.

The participants included for-

mer central bank governor Farashuddin, deputy governor Khondakar Ibrahim Khaled, Hafiz Siddiqui of North South University, CPD Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya, economists Hossain Zillur Rahman and Atiar Rahman, Prof Imtiaz Ahmed and Tasnim Siddiqui of Dhaka University, Monowar Islam of East West University, Dilara Chowdhury of Jahangirnagar University, former UNHCR official Shamsul Bari, BRAC Deputy Executive Director Salehuddin Ahmed, The Daily Star Managing Editor Syed Fahim Moniem, Associate Editor Shah

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Devotees at Biswa Ijtima at Tongi take rest after Zohr prayers yesterday. The three-day Ijtima, the second largest congregation of Muslims after Hajj, ends today with Akheri Munajat.

## 40 lakh may join Akheri Munajat today

UNB, Tongi

The three-day Biswa Ijtima, the second largest congregation of Muslims after Hajj, ends today (Monday) with offering of Akheri Munajat, seeking divine blessings for peace, progress and prosperity of the Muslim Ummah.

Eminent Islamic scholar Moulana Muhammad Zubayerul Hasan, son of late Amir of Biswa Tablig Jamaat Moulana Enamul Hasan is likely to lead the munajat, said Ijtima sources.

The organisers expect 40 lakh devotees including 10,000 from 72 foreign countries will take part in the Akheri Munajat.

President Prof A Q M Badruddoza Chowdhury, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina and members of the

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## Teknaf port opens tomorrow to boost trade with Myanmar

M ANWARUL HAQ

Bangladesh will open a river port at Teknaf tomorrow to boost trade with neighbouring Myanmar.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hussain and Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury will inaugurate the port to be located on the banks of the Naaf river that separates the two neighbours. It will act as a major hub for export and import activities between the countries.

The Teknaf river port will provide the shortest river link with Maungdaw on the other side of the Naaf. Initially, traditional water vessels will ferry cargo.

The port will act as a gateway for bulk export and import of commodities. The two countries may consider setting up river ferry services in future and even con-

structing a bridge. Plans are also afoot to construct improved road to access the Teknaf river port.

Myanmar and Bangladesh have a border trade agreement in place for several years, but due to lack of port and other infrastructure facilities, traders prefer to smuggle goods across the border instead of using authorised routes.

To augment bulk cargo handling facilities, the port to be supervised by the Bangladesh Inland Water Trade Authority will make provisions for large-scale warehouse and customs facilities.

Commerce Minister Amir Khasru told The Daily Star that the port would boost the country's trade with Myanmar.

Both Bangladesh and Myanmar are working on a draft agreement to establish a coastal shipping line shortly. The coastal shipping line

will provide sea links between Bangladesh ports -- Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Teknaf and Myanmar ones -- Yangon, Akyub and Maungdaw.

Through these initiatives, local exporters would be able to enter the Myanmar market in a bigger way with products ranging from cosmetics to toiletries, from newsprint to fertilizer, policymakers believe. The country's textile and pharmaceutical products also have a good demand in Myanmar. There is also a demand for cables and bottled juice, ceramic items, leather goods and tobacco.

On the other hand, Bangladesh has a market for Myanmar timber, forest products, bamboo, fresh vegetables, chillies, spices, betel nuts, shrimp and livestock.

A single country Bangladesh export fair will be held in Yangon shortly to explore market.

## Economic reforms and good governance must go together

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Economic reforms need to be accompanied by improvement in the political environment as the growth of financial extortion under political patronage has increased 'the cost of doing business' in the country, Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud, a leading economist, said yesterday.

His observation was supplemented by Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury at a seminar on "Bangladesh's Economic Performances and Prospects in a Nutshell" who said corruption in project preparation and implementation is a major drain on resources that also poses a serious barrier to the country's economic development.

Dr Mahmud presented the keynote paper at the seminar organised by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Bangladesh (ICAB) yesterday at its auditorium.

The commerce minister attended the seminar as chief guest while The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam chaired the session.

Dr Mahmud said, "Lack of good governance is perhaps the major factor inhibiting the response of domestic and foreign investors to policy reforms."

A sinister aspect of the political-economic nexus can be witnessed in the growth of financial extortion, including illegal collection of tolls and protection money, under political patronage. The phenomenon has increasingly become a menace contributing to the 'cost of doing business' in Bangladesh, he said in the keynote paper.

Dr Mahmud said instead of putting too much efforts into drawing up a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper under the World Bank's directives, the policymakers should sit together and write a home-grown strategy

paper.

Khosru however noted that despite all this, the achievement of the country is not so insignificant and reflects the potentiality of the country.

He questioned whether reforms are preconditions for economic development of a country. In this regard, he said many countries, including Japan, Korea and Thailand progressed their economies before going for reforms.

"But international agencies always set reforms on the top of their agenda for economic development of the country", he said.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam said: "We expect the government to give us at least a good start and we also expect that all the members of the cabinet will be honest". He also requested the politicians not

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## WB happy over govt reform steps

UNB, Dhaka

World Bank Vice-President Mieso Nishimizu appreciated the start-up steps of the government as a "great undertaking" for a credible beginning under the leadership of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

The WB Vice-President for South Asia, now here on an appraisal mission, hoped that the programmes initiated by the newly installed BNP government would help attain economic growth and improve people's standard of living.

Mieso Nishimizu expressed her views when she made a courtesy call on the Prime Minister at her Office yesterday Bangladesh Country Director of the World Bank Frederick T Temple accompanied her during the meeting.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman and PM's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui

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## Students unlikely to get textbooks even by Feb

Case against NCTB chairman, 10 other officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Students of primary and secondary levels are unlikely to get board textbooks even in February, with the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) failing to distribute the books till yesterday, according to printers concerned.

Over the years, the non-availability of textbooks at the beginning of the new academic year has become a common phenomenon. Last year, students did not get textbooks even three months into the academic year.

"Only 42 per cent of textbooks of the primary level have been distributed, but whether the remaining 58 per cent would be distributed is uncertain," Mohammad Altaf Hossain, founder of a primary school

at Munia in Pirojpur, complained in a case filed yesterday with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

Altaf Hossain, who came to the capital to collect textbooks for his school, filed the case against 11 high officials of the NCTB, including its chairman, after failing to get books.

The officials have been accused of embezzlement of funds and use of low-quality paper, which delayed printing and distribution of the primary level textbooks, sources said.

In the petition, Hossain said some NCTB officials by preparing forged contract documents in the name of different presses sold printing paper in the market.

Instead of using the prescribed 61-gram paper, they used the low-quality 55-gram paper. The NCTB officials embezzled

about Tk 29 crore, by using low-quality paper for printing.

The complainant said the primary level books did not reach the schools even 20 days into the new academic year, despite a directive from the education ministry.

The ministry directed the NCTB to send books to different districts by December 31 last year.

Donors, including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, which have funded the printing of textbooks, have set a standard for quality.

After hearing, Magistrate Mohammad Emdadul Huq directed the director general of the Bureau of Anti-Corruption to investigate the

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Jan 21	5-40	6-15
Jan 22	6-43 am	

## Prayer Timings

Jan 21		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-40	6-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-15	4-30
Maghrib	5-40	5-45
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation