

Second JS session begins

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 tary officials were present in the VIP galleries to listen to the President's speech that began at around 11:05am with Speaker Barrister Zamiruddin Sircar in the chair.

Scheduled at 10 in the morning, the opening sitting of the winter session began more than half an hour behind schedule. The Leader of the House Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was also late for the first sitting.

However, the number of MPs rose to 219 out of the total 300 at the end of the sitting when the chair announced its adjournment until 4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

The speaker took his seat at 10:35 a.m. and after recitation from the Holy Quran, he formally went into the order of the day at 10:39 am and delivered his welcome speech in the House. In his welcome address, the Speaker mentioned his efforts to make the parliament truly effective and responsible.

He hoped that the opposition political parties would play their part to make the parliament functional. "It is the opposition parties through which constructive criticism could help the government take right decisions."

"I will extend all my co-operation to the opposition," he added.

In his nearly 45-minute address on state of the country, the President touched upon the priority agenda of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's coalition government in political and socioeconomic fields while highlighting failures of the past Awami League government.

"The urgent priority of the present government is to banish the nightmare of terrorism and misrule," he told the House.

Referring to the 100-day start-up agenda of Khaleda Zia, Chowdhury said the government had taken effective measures for "immediate restoration of law and order, ensuring transparency and accountability in administration and restoring economic stability."

For the present spell of terrorism he indirectly blamed the previous Awami League government as he said whenever a particular political party with ideological orientation of one-party rule came to power, the basic human rights of common and helpless people were rudely violated.

"Specially before the formation of caretaker government in the recent past, there was an unprecedented spread of crimes like terrorism, hooliganism, extortion and attacks on innocent people," he said.

Without mentioning the state of law and order during nearly four months under the alliance government, President B Chowdhury said the government had taken "special measures for ensuring human rights and restoring law and order."

About reshuffle in (police) administration by the alliance government, he said, "The administration dealing with law and order which was eroded by nepotism and partisanship has been recast."

Chowdhury said, "Influential criminals were not spared and will not be spared in future. In the police department the system of reward for good service and punishment for failure has been reinstated."

The President said "political prisoners and detainees" held for a long period without trial were released and a judicial committee was appointed to identify the criminals involved in bomb explosion in last five years.

About the scrapping of the Public Safety Act framed by the AL government, he said a bill is likely to be placed in current session to repeal the draconian law. Initiatives have been taken to set up a National Human Rights Commission while effective steps would be taken to separate the judiciary from the executive.

Amidst desk thumping from treasury-bench members, he said that to combat corruption, the government adopted two types of measures. Firstly, a two-volume White Paper has been published outlining the corrupt deals and irregularities by the Awami League government.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption, he said, has filed cases against "corrupt persons at different levels including those at the highest level" and has started the process of investigation.

"The present government is committed to ensuring trial under existing law for all corrupt deals and irregularities," the President told the lawmakers.

Steps are underway to enact laws for establishing an independent Anti-corruption Commission and the Ombudsman Act was made effective from January 6 to appoint an Ombudsman, he said.

The President said effective

President: AL govt

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 remarkable changes in monetary policy, steps to increase remittances and initiatives to boost revenue collection.

"The present government commenced its operations in the context of an ever escalating budget deficit in a fragile economy. So at the outset, the new government had to take the responsibility of consolidating and reorganising financial management," he said.

initiatives have been taken for administrative reforms to establish good governance. Weekly holiday has been reduced from two days to one to infuse momentum in economic activities.

He said high-level committees have been formed to scrutinise and implement the recommendations of the Public Administrative Reforms Commission (PARC) and a decision has been taken to abolish Statistics Division and Jamuna Bridge Division.

Chowdhury said in accordance with election commitment of the present government, two ministries namely Ministry of Liberation War Affairs and Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment have been established by utilising surplus posts. "Such reforms can galvanise the administration without any increase in manpower."

He said primary education will be made accessible to all children to encourage enrolment and regular attendance in primary schools. To reduce dropout rate and discourage child labour, a special programme for providing cash assistance to primary students has been launched by reforming Food for Education Programme.

Special emphasis will be laid on female education, he said, adding that this government for the first time introduced free education and stipend for female students at secondary level.

Chowdhury said in the backdrop of corruption and failure in distributing and printing textbooks in the past, the supply of textbook at the very beginning of the current year has been ensured.

With a view to promoting employment abroad and encouraging transfer of technology, emphasis will be laid on teaching English language along with the mother tongue, he added.

The President said for ensuring healthcare for the people special importance has been laid on provision of proper services in hospitals, clinics and health centres.

He said participation of women along with men in spheres of life including personal, family, social and state affairs and establishment of child right constitute an integral component of human resources development programme of the present government.

Chowdhury said a National Council for Women's Development consisting of 44 members with Prime Minister as chairperson has been formed to formulate and monitor women development policies.

A multi-sector project costing Tk six crore for prevention of violence against women and an integrated programme costing Tk ten crore for prevention of trafficking of children are being implemented, he said.

He said the government is committed to reducing losses in the state-owned enterprises and mentioned that it has intensified the privatisation programme. Privatisation Commission has taken necessary steps for disposal of 42 industrial units.

"All-out efforts will be made to banish the default culture," he said.

About development of physical infrastructure, he said infrastructure is a precondition for economic growth and special importance should be attached to the power and energy sectors.

In the action plan of the present government, he said, priority has been given to meeting the future requirement of gas through the development of energy sector.

"Necessary actions have been taken for strengthening the programmes for exploring and extracting oil and mineral resources. Adequate investment is essential for exploration and production of oil, gas and for overall development of the power sector," he added.

The President said government investment is not enough for this purpose, so reform programmes should be implemented for encouraging participation of private sector and attracting foreign investment.

He said in the interest of economic development, government is determined to extend information technology and telecommunication facilities to all areas of the country. Effective measures have been taken to link up with information highway through submarine cable, he added.

The President said rural development is one of the urgent priorities of the government, special initiatives will be launched in this sector and local government will be strengthened for decentralisation of administration. Gram Sarkar will be the first tier of local government and this structure will be raised up to district level.



A discussion titled "Apartment Culture in Bangladesh: The Future", co-organised by The Daily Star, BUET and Bangladesh Scouts in collaboration with REHAB, is in progress at BRAC Centre Inn in the city yesterday.

PM assures help to revamp livestock, poultry sector

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday assured that her government would take all possible measures to revamp the country's livestock and poultry sector.

"The government will take all possible measures to boost rural economy through expansion and development of the livestock and poultry industry," she said inaugurating the National Livestock Exhibition 2002 at the National Parade Square as part of her government's development plan for the sector.

The prime minister said livestock could be a major instrument for rural poverty alleviation which in turn will help uplift the national economy. "Come, let us all be part of this revolution," she said making a call for all concerned to join a campaign for quick development of the sector.

"We want to inform the world that there is ample scope for investment in this sector," she said inviting local

and foreign entrepreneurs highlighting the significance of such a fair taking place after seven years.

Presided over by the Minister for Livestock and Fisheries Sadek Hossain Khoka, the inaugural function was also addressed by Labour and Manpower Minister Abdullah Al Noman, dairy industry representative and former member of parliament Afzal H Khan poultry industry representative M Akramuzzaman and Secretary for Livestock and Fisheries Dr Zuhurul Karim.

Some 230 stalls of livestock animal feed and medicine have been set up at the three-day fair. More than 530 cattle, goats, poultry birds and elephant are on display at the exhibition.

Police produced them before the court yesterday and prayed for seven-day remand. But the court granted only one day.

Masum, a listed terrorist based in Lalkhan Bazar area, is accused in six criminal cases.

Strikers damage 50 vehicles

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 The agitating auto-rickshaw employees clashed with police when police baton-charged to disperse them, witnesses added.

Besides, Postagola, Dholaipar, Jatrabari, Syedabad, Golapbagh, Khilgaon rail crossing, Mouchak, Malibagh, Rampura, Motijheel, Naya Paltan, Purana Paltan and Shahbagh crossing were the main problem spots where motor vehicles and rickshaws were damaged.

Three rickshaws were set on fire on the road in front of the Rajuk office at around 10:30 a.m., according to witnesses.

Following the incidents, police stopped movement of vehicles for several hours on a number of busy city roads including the road from Shahbagh crossing to Matsha Bhaban crossing, and the roads connected with the Zero Point where vehicular traffic movement was suspended from about 10 a.m. till 12 noon.

Auto-rickshaw employees brought out a procession from Paltan Maidan. Some processionists also damaged a number of vehicles as they moved towards Shahbagh crossing.

Putting a barricade in front of the

Shishu Park, police stopped the procession at about 12:45 p.m. from advancing any further.

Police only allowed a number of leaders of the Oikya Parishad to go to the Prime Minister's Office to submit a memorandum. While several hundred auto-rickshaw and tempo employees were chanting slogans on the other side of the police barricade, some managed to cross the barricade and reach the Shahbagh crossing at 1 p.m., and damaged a number of motor vehicles and rickshaws.

Police picked up three people from the spot. Police also picked up a number of unruly auto-rickshaw employees from different spots but released them later.

The barricade was removed after the leaders came back at about 2:30 p.m. after submitting the memorandum.

The absence of auto-rickshaws and tempos from the road and suspension of vehicular traffic movement at different parts of the city compounded the problems of commuters and many had to walk to their workplace.

Gas gambit

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 "This way, it is very much possible to avoid pressure on foreign currency reserves," said an energy ministry official, who asked not to be named.

Gas fields like the Titas and the one at Habiganj can easily increase their production with necessary investments, he said, but policymakers are hardly interested in such a scheme.

Petrobangla's gas costs as little as 20 cents per mmmcf, according to Shell estimate. But gas purchased from international oil companies under production sharing contracts (PSCs) costs more than \$1.2 per mmmcf on an average.

But during the 1990s, the government spent very little on the gas sector although this natural resource is a major driving force behind the economy.

The government is not even allowing the gas producing companies of Petrobangla to retain their legitimate 10 per cent revenue share from gas selling. As a rule, a gas producing company must keep 10 to 15 per cent of the revenue for its own maintenance.

Among some of the schemes that remain stagnant for years is a proposal by the Bangladesh Gas Fields Limited (BGFL) to conduct three-dimensional and seismic surveys on the Titas Gas Field. This scheme to find out the gas field's actual reserve has been idle for two years.

Petrobangla has also proposed drilling of three more wells in Titas gas field from which an additional 100 mmmcf can be produced. The field now daily produces around 300 mmmcf gas. As Titas is located in the middle of the country, gas production and supply from it would cost much lower than from any other place.

Titas pumped 1.9 trillion cubic

feet of gas into the grid since it went into production in 1968. And yet, it is still considered as the largest gas field in the country. Discovered in the early 1960s, it was initially estimated to have 2.6 TCF gas. But several studies based on gas flow and existing data till 1991 indicated it was the largest field discovered so far.

Two studies, one by Clyde Petroleum and the other by IKM, claim that Titas has a recoverable reserve of between 9.5 TCF and 10.5 TCF -- equal to the country's official proven recoverable gas reserve.

And more interestingly, a new study by the Hydrocarbon Cell of the energy ministry and Norway Petroleum Directorate puts Titas' recoverable reserve at 7.5 TCF. "That too is a conservative estimate," said a source. Given the fact that Titas has already exhausted around 2 TCF gas, it still has 5.5 TCF.

Petrobangla officials, who are typically very cautious about giving out high gas reserve figures, scientifically disagree with this figure. Yet, they agree that Titas reserve would be double the original estimate.

"The bottom line is Titas has a lot (of gas)," said a source. "Now, if we don't focus on development of gas fields like that of Titas or Habiganj, we will be compelled to buy more gas from Sangu."

Titas supplies gas directly to 7.6 lakh domestic users as well as different power, fertiliser, industrial and commercial consumers.

Another stagnant project that can also save a lot of foreign currency in the immediate future is the Srikail gas field development scheme. This BAPEX project can add 60 to 70 mmmcf gas immediately to the grid if implemented. But due to bureaucratic bottlenecks

Shahriar's plea

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 unable to appear in the court on the fixed date.

Court Inspector Abdus Sobhan opposed the petition. He said the case is at a primary stage of investigation. So, there is no scope for granting the petition.

After hearing both sides, the court rejected the petition. Meanwhile, a petition for directing the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan thana to treat a petition as General Diary (GD) regarding threat to Shahriar Kabir over telephone was moved.

The prosecution side did not oppose the petition.

After hearing both sides, the same court directed the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan thana to treat the petition as General Diary (GD) and submit a report within 7 days after an investigation into the matter.

JS business

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 two months ago. Scheduled businesses of the last session suffered heavily owing to quorum crisis despite repeated appeals from the Chair that the MPs come on time. And this time, the House leader herself was late.

After the rituals at the opening sitting nomination of a panel of chairmen and adoption of an obituary reference the new President, AQM Badrudduza Chowdhury, entered the House at 10:57am to deliver his maiden address to parliament.

The Speaker has rescheduled the next sitting. It begins at 4:30 pm on Sunday.

Pilgrims' plight

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 tioned.

Asked about the pilgrims who were given flight schedules on Wednesday, the officials said they were provided seats to fly by other airlines including Bangladesh Biman.

NSI men axed

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 these officials and tagged them "politically appointed", said some officials who were earlier terminated.

However, the official gazette notification that announced the terminations said the performance of the officials in training did not live up to satisfactory standards and their overall performance was also poor.

These 19 officials, one of whom stood first in the recruitment test, were among 65 recruited by the NSI in July last year.

Some alleged that they were fired because they belong to the religious minorities.

Book Fair

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 A 36-member national committee has been formed, headed by the state minister.

Selima Rahman said the UNESCO declaration of February 21 as the International Mother Language Day is the greatest achievement in the 50-year history of the Language Movement.

38 killed

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 but since early this morning the fighting has intensified," said Wali, who is also a son of the newly appointed governor of Gardez, Padshah Khan Zadran. He said the two sides were battling in the town with missiles, mortars and artillery.

Zadran was appointed by the interim government in Kabul but the sources in the town said some tribal leaders and former mujahideen (holy warrior) fighters led by a commander called Haji Saifullah had refused to accept the appointment.

Rule of Allah

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 Jaoyul Abedin, freedom fighter Anwarul Haq and BMWA Advocate S N Goswami, among others, addressed the conference with Advocate Monoranjan Das in the chair.

"Islam is against communalism as it treats communalism as a great offence," Prof Golam Azam said adding, "Islam does not allow to treat the followers of other faiths as 'bad elements'."

He urged all respective of faiths to follow the principles of their own religions in practical life to be an honest person, which the society needs most.

BMWA chairman S N Goswami, who has been in close contact of Golam Azam for the last seven years, said religious people are the real friends of the minority people of this country and the so-called "progressive and secularists" are the enemies of the minority people.

Goswami said the so-called secularist force damaged some 3,000 places of the country, including Ramna Kali Mondir, and used the minority as tools to go to power.

The council put forward a number of demands, including a separate election system and a ministry for the minority people.

CMP lists

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 There are 12 police stations in the port city and the highest of 75 listed extortionists operate in the areas falling under the Kotwali police station.

There are 37 listed terrorists under Pahartoli police station, 33 under Baliz Bostami, 25 under Bakulia, 23 under Chandagoan, 19 under Panchalish, 18 under Doublemooring, 17 under Halishar, 15 under Bandar and four under Kamaphuli police station, according to police sources.

Enact housing policy

FROM PAGE 12
 Scouts and Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB).

It was organised at the BRAC Centre Inn as part of the 'Agenda for Urban Concern' of The Daily Star.

Discussants identified high registration and transfer fees for land, bureaucratic tangles and lack of client awareness as reasons behind the towering cost of apartments.

The housing shortage has exceeded the 5-million-unit mark projected for the year 2000. Housing shortage in 1991 was estimated to be about 3.10 million units, including 2.45 million units in rural areas and 0.95 million in urban areas, Dr. M. Shahidul Ameen of the Department of Architecture of BUET said in his keynote paper.

Ameen quoting a World Bank report said Bangladesh will have to build at least 300,000 housing units a year at an estimated cost of US \$ 1 billion to keep pace with the population surge.

He observed that apartment living has gained tremendous popularity among the urban population but due to lack of proper laws and their implementation as well as bureaucratic tangles, the facility has long been out of reach of the middle and lower middle class.

He said apartment housing is now operating in a narrowly effective market and can only be afforded by the elite. "Until now it has failed to create any positive impact on housing for general people, when the entire urban population is already suffering from a severe housing crisis," he said.

He said it is now extremely important to respond to the housing needs of the middle income and lower income urban population. He suggested some measures taken in neighbouring countries like India and Sri Lanka such as developed land schemes, sites and services schemes, core housing, incremental residential development through transformation and co-operative housing as examples that could be followed.

He criticised the government bodies for not adopting an appropriate housing policy in the wake of the severe housing shortage.

He said after about six years, the National Housing Policy was revised in 1999 and with a view to making housing affordable for all, a law was made effective through the formation of National Housing Authority (NHA) but it is yet to see the light.

Kazi Mohammad Seesh, Chief Engineer of WASA in his speech

underscored the need for vertical growth instead of horizontal growth.

Supplementing his comment, some real estate developers criticised the law restricting residential buildings to six storeys. They said there is no logic behind the restriction and that time and demand would dictate the vertical growth.

Dr. Toufiq M. Seraj, President of REHAB said the building of apartments started in Bangladesh due to economic reasons and would continue until people can afford their own house.

Prof. Khairul Inam of BUET described various problems of apartment living and said developers and builders should consider the elements of better living.

He said if the government adopt Floor Area Ratio (FAR), a common concept for apartment building, then people would be able to live in apartments in peace. "It will also withdraw the restriction on high-rise."

Editor of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam in his welcome speech thanked all participants and expressed his hope that the experts would find a solution to the growing housing problem.

Dr. Nizam Uddin Ahmed, Dean of Faculty of Architecture and Planning of BUET moderated the discussion.

Dr. Salek M. Seraj of the Department of Civil Engineering of BUET called upon the private sector real estate developers to ensure quality of their structure since aesthetic value of a structure is of no value when it does not sustain.

He also proposed formation of an independent body to monitor the structure constructed by private developers to help uninformed customers.

Dr. Golam Rahman, President of Bangladesh Institute of Planners Department of BUET, Dr. Sarwar Jahan, Head of the Department of URP, Dr. Abdur Rouf of Civil Engineering Department, Lt. Col (ret'd) Mahtabuddin Ahmed, Senior Vice-President of REHAB, Badiur Rahman, Secretary of Planning Division of Physical Infrastructure, SM Shamsul Alam, Chairman of DESA, SM Anwaruzzaman, Managing Director of Titas Gas Ltd, Dr. Khandokar Azharul Hoque and Engr Mahmudul Hassan, General Secretary of REHAB among others took part in the discussion.

Transparent gas policy

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 The paper said Bangladesh will need to stand more on its own feet for financing economic development as the share of grants in the total external assistance is declining. The growth rate of county's export earning is also slowing down due to the global recession.

Against this backdrop, natural gas has a vital role in the economic development of the country. But it is now mainly used for producing urea fertiliser and electricity, they said.

"But its use is limited only to eastern regions of the country and this means there is a huge opportunity of its use in other parts of the country," they added.

In his paper on 'Is Gas Reserve Liability: A note on understanding trap in development disguise', Prof Anu Mahmud discussed political and social aspects of gas export and said most people in the country are still deprived of gas.

The government should give priority to the people's interest, he felt.

Dr Enamul Haque of NSU in a paper on 'Gas export options for Bangladesh' dwelt on the price sensitivity issues.

Organised by Young

Economists' Forum (YEF) of NSU, the seminar was also addressed by Prof Hafiz GA Siddiqi, Pro-Vice Chancellor of NSU; Azim Uddin Ahmed, Chairman of NSU Foundation; Dr Forrest Cookson, former president of AmCham; Dr Habibur Rahman and Dr ANM Meshquat Uddin of NSU, Shell representative Beatrice Prost, Greg Gritters, Vice President, Gas Marketing and External Affairs of Unocal Bangladesh Ltd.

261 killings

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 of human rights bodies, said 14 journalists were injured, one was arrested, four were assaulted, 10 were threatened and 10 other journalists were implicated in different cases last month.

Nine people were killed in incidents of human rights violation in the border areas, eight were injured and 16 others were abducted during the during the period, it said in a survey report.

Odhikar also said 44 people were killed in political violence while 540 were injured and 295 were arrested. Ninety incidents of torture on children took place in the month.

Living death

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 regular toll!

Then there are mosquitoes who reign supreme inside the jailhouse. Those who can afford mosquito coil or repellants can sleep well. Those who cannot are guaranteed virtually sleepless nights. Then they face sexual harassment in its worst conceivable forms.

Some prisoners who had been released recently described the jail life to The Daily Star.

"Any normal healthy human being is bound to become sick, both physically and mentally, if he or she is sent to the central jail," said a prisoner, recently freed from the jail.

Jail sources told The Daily Star that the prison situation has worsened, as some top officials are more interested in making personal fortune there instead of looking after the jail condition. Citing an example, the sources said a jail official, who was stand-released in 1994 on charges of corruption, has been brought back to the jail administration with promotion.

"Those who can make these officials happy stay well. Those who cannot are subjected to inhuman treatment," said a source.

When asked, Dhaka Central Jail Jailer Abdur Razzak refuted the allegations of mismanagement. He claimed that all types of drugs including heroin and marijuana had regularly been smuggled into the jail before he took over in November last. With strict check on drugs, the addicts may have withdrawal symptoms leading to their suicide attempts.

"In addition, psychological stress resulting from family hitches might have also pushed them towards committing suicide," said Razzak. However, jail sources said sui-

cide attempts by prisoners were rare in the past. But in the recent months, more attempts are being reported.

Sources further said drugs are still easily available inside the prison and one has to cough up money to get his hand on them.

Last Tuesday, 30-year old Sultan Kha (prisoner No. 4914/A, son of Jinal Kha of Baukpara, Nagarkanda of Faridpur) tried to commit suicide by hanging himself from a jackfruit tree using a sheet of cloth near the prison's production division. He was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

On January 12, a female prisoner, Nargis (prisoner No. 2037/98, wife of Abul Mia), tried to kill herself. She was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition where she later recovered.