

# JS debates Speaker's taking over as acting President

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A constitutional debate on the Speaker's taking over as acting President in the absence of the President was raised in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

As provided by Article 54 of the Constitution, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar is now acting President since President AQM Badruddoza Choudhury left for Saudi Arabia Tuesday afternoon to perform Hajj.

Article 54 says, "If a vacancy occurs in the office of president or if the President is unable to discharge the functions of his office on account of absence, illness or any other cause, the Speaker shall discharge those functions until a President is elected or until President resumes the functions of his office, as the case may be."

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Siddiqui now chairs the current session of parliament.

On a point of order yesterday, KSJL legislator Abdul Quader Siddiqui asked the Deputy Speaker if he has become acting Speaker following the Speaker's taking over as acting President.

In reply, the Deputy Speaker referred to Article 74(3) of the Constitution that deals with the absence of the Speaker. But he told the House that he needed interpretation of the laws concerned before replying to the question raised by Siddiqui. However, he said he would inform the House of his decision today.

Article 74(3) states, "While the office of the Speaker is vacant or the Speaker is acting as President, or if it is determined by Parliament that

## BNP MP blasts Hasina in JS for remarks on Hawa Bhaban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A treasury bench MP yesterday castigated opposition leader Sheikh Hasina for her reported comment about the Hawa Bhaban, BNP's election office-turned-a-power-seat.

Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui allowed BNP lawmaker Moshir Rahman to blast the immediate-prime minister for 10 minutes without any interruption although Moshir's statement was not covered by the parliamentary rule under which he spoke. In contrast to his usual practice, the Chair neither accepted nor rejected the ruling party lawmaker's statement as a point of order.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and some of her cabinet colleagues listed to the blistering words uttered by a ruling party back-bencher.

Moshir accused Sheikh Hasina of making untrue statements frequently about the PM's elder son, Tarek Rahman, whom he portrayed as the country's future statesman, and asked the opposition leader to apologise for what he said telling fictitious stories about Tarek. "Otherwise, we will be compelled to move a resolution condemning your comment," he said prompting the treasury bench members to thump their desks in approval.

Encouraged by his colleagues in the ruling coalition, the BNP deputy had gone to the extent of accusing the former prime minister of taking kickbacks from all deals made during her tenure and stealing public money. "She had turned the Prime Minister's Office her business chamber and let her son Joy, who is the office of Bangladesh's embassy in the United States for business purpose," Moshir said, calling Hasina a liar and a cheat.

# Gas worth Tk 100cr

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corporations.

With a bid to realise the outstanding bills, the government formed the taskforce and it started work in Narayanganj in view of higher 'system loss' -- euphemistic byword for theft -- in the district.

Although in the modern world technical distribution loss is less than 1 per cent, for Titas it was 10.25 per cent last December and 9.69 per cent in November. During the periods, the system loss in Narayanganj was 20 per cent.

The higher system loss inspired the taskforce, headed by Mollah Mobirul Hossain, a general manager of Petrobangla, to begin its work from the commercial industrial hub.

Sources at Energy Ministry said the taskforce found with a few exceptions most of the salt factories in Narayanganj stealing gas.

It named two salt mills that topped the list in gas stealing.

Sources said the taskforce detected that the two mills for last three years have been sucking gas leaking a 150-PSI (pressure) line.

According to estimation, the two salt mills monthly steal gas worth Tk 6 lakh and Tk 4.5 lakh respectively, meaning they pilfered gas of Tk 3.78 crore in last three years.

Another salt factory at Murapara, Kanchan, area has a different history.

It was fined several years back for stealing gas, but the factory

the Speaker is otherwise unable to perform the functions of his office, those functions shall be performed by the Deputy Speaker or..."

Quader Siddiqui also asked the Chair if the Speaker's performance in the House on Tuesday after his taking over as acting President was permitted by the Constitution. The Deputy Speaker said he would give a ruling on the issue today.

On this, Salahuddin Quader Choudhury quoted Article 74(3) to say that the Deputy Speaker would perform as the Speaker in the latter's absence. "Whoever sits in the Speaker's chair, be it the Deputy Speaker or a Panel Chairman, is deemed to be the Speaker," he said.

## Laser razzmatazz

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the sky looked more like a war-zone skyline with tracer bullets filling it up. Only, it was all fun and joy of unspeakable nature thatfilled the spellbound audience.

As music boomed, the lights danced to the beats, sometimes in slow motion like a troupe of danseurs, and sometimes wildly, almost too fast to follow like gyrating tango dancers. And the night also danced to the rhythm of the show.

The show scheduled for a 7:00pm start began almost one and a half hours late as thousands of curious spectators thronged the security men-swept stadium. Police and para-militia personnel clamped a tight security. Each of the entrances witnessed people bee-lining almost half a kilometre. The presence of a large number of women of all ages and children was remarkable.

Before the start of the show, Microcel recalled the sacrifice of the martyrs of the Language Movement dating 50 years back to 1952 and requested the audience to observe a one-minute silence in their respect.

And then all lights in and around the gallery were switched off to create a natural screen of darkness. Beams co-ordinated by laser technology darted towards the sky above. Rays then cascaded down on the crowds below in synchronisation with the music.

The audience then had a feeling that they are all floating on rainbows, as laser rays danced on their faces. It seemed as if the rays had a feel of physical existence.

As the show came to an end, people came back on the streets still in a trance, but that fantastic feeling somehow subdued, as the spectators had to face the reality of finding a vehicle to go home.

## Spring

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Jatiya Basanta Utsab Udjapan Parishad (JBUIJP) brought out a colourful procession from the Institute of Fine Arts in the morning with a musical theme -- "Ore grihobashi khol dor khol".

The JBUIJP also arranged a daylong programme at Bakul Tala, which opened with instrumental tunes. At the programme, Kazi Ebadul Haq played the sitar, Uttam Chakravarti the flute and Nirmal Kumar Das the ditora (stringed instrument).

Among others, journalist Oahidul Haq, Rabiul Hussain, Poet Shamsur Rahman, Shafuddin Ahmed, Kazi Arif and Arif Hossain Boni took part in a discussion titled "Spring Talks".

Reading out the declaration of the day, Manjarul Islam Sweet said the significance of the day is to bridge the gap between youths and the aged.

Besides, musical soiree, dance and poetry recitation marked the day.

The Ekushey Book Fair at Bangla Academy and the Teachers and Students Centre (TSC) drew hordes of visitors in the afternoon.

owner could bring a stay order in his favour. It barred Titas from cutting off the gas line, but enabled the factory to run operation through a bypass connection.

Not only that, the salt mill is also selling gas to a glass factory through the illegal line.

The net loss of Titas for them is Tk 18 lakh a month.

The taskforce learnt that yet another salt factory, owned by the same owner, is also stealing gas.

Gas connections of Pir Kasim Still Corporation and Alif Steel Industries in Fatullah, owned by the same owner, were cut off in 1999. But they later went for illegal bypass connection that the taskforce disconnected.

Sources close to the taskforce said the two mills stole gas worth about Tk 2.7 crore.

The taskforce detected two dying mills at Jalkuri in Fatullah using gas illegally for last four years. The factories got surreptitious connections from a 150-PSI line.

Sources close to the taskforce said the two factories steal gas worth Tk 10 lakh every month. In last four years, amount of stealing was Tk 4.8 crore.

After cutting off the illegal lines, the taskforce went to Fatullah police for filing an FIR. "Police at first refused to register the FIR. Later it was registered, but no police action took place," the sources alleged.

## 3 Channel 1 men assaulted allegedly by JCD at CMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Three journalists of private television 'Channel I' were manhandled and later confined in a room at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) for sometime allegedly by JCD cadres in the morning yesterday (Wednesday).

The JCD cadres also took away their mobile phones, TV camera, notebooks and three videocassettes, although the items except the videocassettes were later returned.

The incident occurred when 'Channel I' newscaster and reporter Rashed Kanchan, cameraman Fuad Hasan and Chittagong representative Chowdhury Fariduddin went to the CMCH on a professional assignment.

After filming a few shots of different wards at the hospital, they went down to the parking lot to get into their vehicle.

## Gunfight

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Deputy Commissioner of Shariatpur Mushfeka Iffaq told The Daily Star that the rivalry between the two families peaked over theft of date juice.

The gunfight that started at about 7:30am yesterday left Motiur Matbar and Tipu Matbar killed on the spot, she said.

Additional police forces were deployed in the village to avert further clashes.

The injured were first admitted to Shariatpur General Hospital. But with the condition of five of the injured deteriorating, they were shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the evening.

But on-duty doctors at the hospital pronounced Aslam dead. Admitted to the DMCH were Chunnul Matbar, 40, Abbas Matbar, 22, Didar Hossain, 35, and Md Mehedi Hasan, 18.

The injured claimed to be supporters of the ruling BNP and blamed the attack on the AL.

Superintendent of Police Towfiq Uddin Ahmed visited the spot.

## Bill on portrait

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tinued absence of the BNP-led opposition. The law also provides for punishment including imprisonment for undermining the Father of the Nation's portrait and making indecent remarks about him.

This time, ruling BNP lawmaker Shamsul Alam Pramanik has submitted a bill aimed at scrapping the law, terming it a confusing one. The parliament secretariat readied Pramanik's bill for inclusion in the agenda of private member's day today. But it was later dropped from today's order of the day. It may come up on a Thursday, the day for private members' bills and resolutions, after the Eid holidays, sources said.

The proposed bill says the Father of the Nation's Portrait (exhibition and preservation) Act, 2001 had denied contributions of late president Ziaur Rahman and other national leaders to the nation's war of independence. "There is no instance of making law for display of someone's portrait. People have not accepted late Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as father of the nation and his becoming so is still controversial," it said, calling display of Bangabandhu's portrait at government offices illogical.

It also referred to an executive order by the post-independence government making mandatory the display of portraits of the head of state and the head of government only. "The bill aims at freeing the nation from an unexpected compulsion," the treasury bench MP said in his statement on the reasons and objectives of the bill.

# Patiya gunfight

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As the meeting progressed, an understanding was reached and the madarassah authorities agreed to remove the demarcation they had made on the disputed land. But at the fag end of the meeting, another rumour spread that a local man was abducted by madarassah students, and the whole thing was spoiled.

Fierce clashes erupted again at about 4 pm. Shots were traded, killing Farid on the spot and injuring others. The clash continued for about three hours.

Some of the injured were admitted to the local thana health complex.

In the evening, the local people called a dawn to dusk hartal in Patiya today protesting the incident.

UNB adds: The situation worsened yesterday when the madrasa students and locals started blaring out abuses to each other over microphones at 3:00 pm in presence of police.

The two sides also pelted stones at each other. "At one stage, the

students hurled bombs provoking the villagers into setting fire to two madrasa hostels, where nearly 15,000 students reside," said a witness.

Police fired over 100 rounds of teargas shells to disperse the rioters.

Madrasa authorities claimed that property worth Tk 78 lakh was damaged as over 100 rooms were gutted in the fire.

The unruly people also attacked firefighters who tried to douse the blaze, injuring six of them and damaging one of their vehicles.

Police from Boalkhali, Chandanaish and Satkania were sent to the spot at 5:00 pm. Ten platoons of police also came from Chittagong. Villagers also tried to attack the local police station several times amid the violence, but police prevented the onslaughts.

Traffic on Cox's Bazar-Chittagong road halted following the violence. Vehicles were playing an alternative road through Anwara upazila.

## First day of spring

# Ekushey book fair wears festive look

SHAMEEM MAHMUD

The Amar Ekushey Book Fair wore a festive look as city's book enthusiasts thronged the Bangla Academy premises yesterday evening on the first day of the Bengali Season Bashonto (Spring), the Pahela Falgun.

Hundreds of mostly young book lovers hunting for new books flocked to the academy premises, going around bookstalls and enjoying the cultural programmes there along with friends.

In the evening, the fair premises took on an all-pervasive yellow hue as female visitors wore colourful Basanti (yellow) saris with their forehead painted with beautiful decorative patterns and marigold garlands around the neck, symbolising the advent of spring.

A total of 72 new books featured in the fair yesterday, said Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury, an official of the Bangla Academy.

Of them, Anna Prakash published a novel of popular writer Humayun Ahmed titled Aj Ami Kothao Jabo Na.

Maola Brothers published three books yesterday -- Soumitro Chhattyapadhyay, edited by Muhammad Jahangir, Narir Katha edited by Abul Hasnat and Nana Desh Nana Jati, edited by Abul Mal Abdul Muhit.

Jaana, a novel by Imdadul Haq Milon published by Hate Khari was also released in the fair while Shrabon published an interview-based book titled Ahmed Safar Samoy by Nasir Ali Mamun.

Sahitya Prakash issued a collection of stories of Rashid Karim named Prothom Prem.

Jatiya Grantha Prakashana, published two books titled Bangladesh Upannasey Grameen Nimmobargo by Mahibul Aziz and Bigyaner Darshon of Galib Ahsan Khan.

"Sale is comparatively low compared to the visitor turnout," said Sheikh Omar Faruque at the Jatiya Grantha Prakashana, adding that sale is less than last year's and is yet to pick up momentum even after thirteen days since the fair began.

Some booksellers at different stalls however reported yesterday's sale to be better than the previous days but still maintained that overall buying activities were not satisfactory.

Meanwhile, Dr. Mahbul Haq placed an article on 'Fifty Years of Amar Ekushey: Transformation of Language Style in Literature of Bangladesh' at the regular discussion programme held yesterday afternoon at the Bangla Academy premises as part of observing the Amar Ekushey.

Prof. Shantonu Kaiser and Dr. Mahibul Aziz took part in the discussion while Prof. Mohammad Harunur-Rashid chaired the programme.

Speakers at the discussion expressed concern for the future of Bengali in view of the onslaught of the western cultural hegemony in the name of globalisation.

They termed local dialects of Bangla as its main resources and stressed the need for compiling a comprehensive dictionary of the Bengali Language by incorporating all the regional dialects.

Later at a musical soiree, renowned singers of the country rendered songs reflecting spirit of the 1952 Language Movement, enthralling the audience.

Today programme include a discussion titled 'Fifty Years of Amar Ekushey: Children Literature of Bangladesh' at 4:00pm at the Book Fair premises.

Meanwhile, a large number of people also enjoyed cultural programmes at the Central Shaheed Minar premises yesterday evening organised by Sammilito Sangskritik Jote to mark the upcoming golden jubilee of the Language Movement.

The programmes included songs, recitation of poetry, dances and dramas.

## Beaten to death

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the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.

There were marks of injury in his throat. The reason behind the killing of the young man could be known. A case was filed with Gulshan Police Station in this regard.

In another incident, a police source was shot by a gang of hoodlums at West Kazipara in the city yesterday morning.

The victim was identified as Iqbal Chowdhury, 35, son of Abdul Jalil. The hoodlums shot Iqbal in the belly as he was following them at Kazipara at about 10.30 a.m.

## Young man murdered in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A young man, identified as Saiful Islam, 24, was stabbed to death on Tuesday night near Abahani Club under Khulna thana.

According to witnesses, five unidentified armed men chased Saiful from Forest Ghat and caught him near Circuit House at around 9 pm. They stabbed Saiful indiscriminately and left the scene. He died on the spot.

Saiful was an armed cadre of Purbo Banglar Communist Party working as a carpenter in disguise in a furniture shop at Stadium market.

The murder is a sequel to intra-party rivalry, police said quoting some reliable sources. Saiful hailed from Joar-Badal, a PBCP-dominated union of Rupsha upazila, police said.

A case was recorded with Khulna thana in this connection.

## 2 abducted businessmen rescued at N'ganj : 5 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

A group of BNP cadres abducted two businessmen from DIT area yesterday.

Police rescued the victims -- Nur-e-Alam, 25, and Rahim Sharif, 28, -- after an hour and arrested five kidnappers.

According to sources, the BNP cadres abducted the two at gunpoint at around 11 am.

They snatched Tk 8 thousand from them and also demanded Tk. 50 thousand for their release.

The arrested persons are Akter alias Kana Akter, Mosharaf, Russel, Imdad Hossain and Rakib.

Kana Akter is accused in several cases including snatching.

## Ctg Port

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entered the rooms of 12 port officials, including the room of the chairman, manager of Sonali Bank, and deputy engineers of Mechanical, Electrical and Civil engineering sections.

Port authority transferred 25 officials and employees after missing of a number of containers during last several months.

## White papers

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reducing the number of flights in the route to recover loss.

Regarding the purchase of Mig-29 aircraft for the Air Force and frigate for the Navy, she said the Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) has been investigating alleged irregularities in the purchase of those.

She told another questioner that two four-member committees comprising experts from the Air Force and the Navy are also looking into the alleged corruption. "The nation will be informed of the matter after proper investigation."

During the half-an-hour PM's weekly question time, Khaleda replied to four questions and 17 supplementary questions on education sector, women's education, earthquake and the building code, self-employment for the youth and their training.

She said the government plans to set up three more seismic observatories in Dhaka, Rangpur and Sylhet, identified as tremor-risk zone.

She recalled that the past BNP government had taken initiative to enact building code to free the capital city from earthquake risk. She said action would be taken against those who have constructed multi-storied buildings in the city, ignoring the code during the Awami League rule.

In response to a supplementary question from Delwar Hossain Sayeedi of Jamaat-e-Islami, the prime minister said Biman flights in Dhaka-Barisal route would be reintroduced soon.

She alleged the AL government had suspended Biman's Dhaka-Barisal flights in the interest of a private flight operating company owned by the party men.

# Analysis: Judge, jury

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muggers were beaten to death in the first nine days of December with five killed on December 9 alone. Eleven more people would be beaten to death by the end of the month, six of those during the few days of the Eid holidays.

In most cases, bodies of the victims were deformed beyond recognition. On January 28, three muggers were beaten and burnt to death in Motijheel after being released on bail following their arrest in connection with a case of looting Tk 20 lakh from employees of a private company.

Observers attribute this rising incidence of mob beating to a significant rise in crime in recent days and the corresponding steady erosion of people's faith in police as well as on the legal system. As a result, people are taking the law into their hands rather than turning criminals over to the law enforcement.

The home minister recently urged the people to refrain from taking the law into their own hands. The minister tried to inject some confidence into the public saying that his government has put the right police officers in the right places and the people would soon be benefiting from the reshuffle in the administration.

The government in a bid to cleanse the police administration has sent several police officers into forced retirement while putting other officers on special duty.

Observers say people are fed up with the police inaction thanks to their alleged nexus with criminals. Also the public is frustrated with the slow judicial process.

Police also seem very reluctant to bring back people's confidence in them. A police source alleged that senior police officers could change the scene for the better but it is they who are suspected to be the most corrupt.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mohammad Abdul Qayyum told The Daily Star recently that he was very concerned about the incidents of mob beating in the city and had asked the police concerned to take necessary actions against the inhuman behaviour of the mob.

"The police concerned would be responsible for any such incident under their jurisdiction from now on and the policemen responsible would have to face tough action," the commissioner said.

To a question, the commissioner said the police are only a part of the law enforcement. He also said the police have provided the government with some suggestions as to how to better deal with the current situation.

The commissioner also called for the city dwellers to come forward to help the law enforcers and punish culprits.

## 40 pilgrims

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"It has been proved by fair witnesses that the new moon was born during the night on Tuesday, which means that Wednesday is the start of the month of pilgrimage," the council said in a statement carried by the SPA.

On February 21, more than 2.5 million pilgrims are expected to gather on Mount Arafat, a hill some 12 kilometres west of Makkah, where the Prophet Mohammed (SM) delivered his last sermon 14 centuries ago.

Accordingly, the first day of the Muslim holiday of Eid Al-Adha will fall on Friday, February 22, the council added.

More than 945,000 pilgrims from outside of Saudi Arabia have already arrived in the kingdom. Hundreds of thousands more are expected to arrive before the February 17 deadline.

All able-bodied Muslims are required to make the pilgrimage to Makkah, one of the five pillars of Islam, at least once in their lifetime, if they have the means to do so.

## CHT board

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appointed chairman of Khagrachhari Hill District Council while Mohammad Harun, Onimesh Chakma Rinku, Anupam Tripura and Mongpru Chowdhury were made members of the council.

Dr Maniklal Dewan was made chairman of the Rangamati Hill District Council and Md Musa Chowdhury, Sujit Dewan, Ajit Talukdar and Ouala Roaja were appointed members.

The newly appointed chairman of Bandarban Hill District Council is Mrs Mama Ching Chowdhury and the members are Lusuai Mong, Arif Uddin, Ukha Mong and Bishawjit Tanchaga members, the gazette notification said.

With this, the councils have been restructured for the fourth time and their tenure extended for the eighth time.

# Rules of conduct

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shall make any statement in the press or in any other media or, shall print or affix or distribute leaflets, posters, pamphlets anonymously or pseudonymously to embarrass or malign the government."

The existing sub-rule (1) of rule 25 will be replaced by "sub-rule (1) No government servant shall be a member of, or be otherwise associated with, any political party or any organisation affiliated to any political party, nor shall he take part in, subscribe in aid, or assist in any other manner, any political activity in Bangladesh or in abroad or, matters relating to politics in Bangladesh or in abroad."

While sub-rule (4) will be replaced by " (4): If the spouse of a government servant is involved in any political activity in any manner, the government servant concerned shall report the matter in writing to the government (and thereupon the government may take necessary decisions as deemed fit)."

Sub-rule (7) will be replaced by " (7) If any question arises whether a party is a political party or whether any organisation takes part in politics or whether any activity falls within the scope of this rule, the decision of the government thereon shall be final."

Another incorporation will be made as rule 25A regarding demonstration and strikes. "A government servant shall not resort to any activity that hampers normal discipline and functioning of the office and shall not abstain from attending any duty which he is required to perform and, also shall not resort to any sort of coercion, stoppage of work, demonstration, agitation, pen-down, go slow, mass abstention

from work, etc, nor shall he incite/abate others to do so."

Official sources said at least one month's time is required to implement the new rules, as there are some formalities.

## AL Convention

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The seven others who did not get visa are Jahid Hina, Coordinator of Amnesty International in Pakistan, Pakistani writer and President of SAARC Writers Association Ahmed Faraz, former member of Indian parliament Dr Ajeet Cour and three other Indians and writer Ali Sharif of Maldives.

When contacted, immigration officials said they were not aware of any directive regarding non-issuance of visa. High officials of home ministry were available for comment.

The convention will start at the auditorium of the Engineer's Institute at 9:30 am today. Awami League Chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina will address the inaugural session as chief guest.

Barrister Amirul Islam will present a keynote paper on "Crime Against Humanity: Bangladesh Experiences". Prof. Anisuzzaman will present a paper on "Recent Repression on the Minorities in Bangladesh".

There will be six sessions tomorrow. Three sessions will be held at the Ball Room of Hotel Sheraton, two at CIRDAP auditorium while the concluding session will be held at Engineer's Institute auditorium at 5 pm tomorrow.