

## Hasina for dialogue

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It cannot even be imagined where and when this black episode will end."

She also appealed to the international community to help prevent "political and religious persecution" in the country.

The opposition leader accused the BNP-led ruling coalition of creating a "dangerous" situation and warned that its consequence would be terrible.

"Let the humanity raise their voice for the tortured people of my country, for the sake of humanity, and for preservation and protection of human rights, peace and security," she said.

The convention being held at the Engineers' Institution has been organised to highlight 'post-election violence' against the country's religious minority and the opposition activists. As many as 150 victims of 'such violence' also attended the convention and some of them narrated their experience.

A Dhaka Declaration seeking a way-out to the alleged 'persecution' is likely to be adopted at the end of the convention today.

Foreign participants in the convention include President of the North American Jurist Association, Canadian chapter, William Sloan; former Belgian minister for international cooperation Dr Reginald Morrels, former speaker of Nepalese parliament Dr Daman Nath Dungana and poet Banira Giri of Nepal.

But a number of human rights activists from India, Pakistan and the Maldives, including Asma Jahangir and Urdu writer Ahmed Faraz, were reportedly debarred by the Bangladeshi authorities from attending it.

Intellectuals, academics, journalists, politicians, lawyers, other professionals and cultural activists attended the opening session. Thousands of invited guests and the AL activists from across the country were present at the more than four-hour session.

Hasina said the government is harassing its political opponents and religious minorities since coming to office last year.

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its allies, led by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, defeated in the October general election its arch-rival Awami League, which held office for the last five years.

The Khaleda government continues to deny the AL charges, although it has admitted there were 'some isolated incidents of violence' against the Hindu community immediately after the election.

A documentary-- Bangladesh Burning-- showing victims of 'post-polls violence' telling their stories was screened at the convention.

Meanwhile, Information Minister Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan said there is little impact of the opposition-backed convention. Talking to newsmen, he said the Awami League organised the convention despite the fact that while in power, it had tortured thousands of opposition activists.

The former prime minister said the people have become victims of torture and repression for the 'offence' of casting vote in the October 1 election. "particularly, the victims were the leaders, workers, voters and supporters of Awami League. The minority community was subjected to brutal torture."

She recalled that the role of the caretaker government in 1996 was 'absolutely neutral'. But the role of caretaker government in 2001 came under question within an hour of

## 4 killed in city

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from near Pongu Hospital at Agargaon on Wednesday night. The victim, aged about 25, was shot in the head.

Hands and legs of the victim were tied up with ropes.

A housewife, identified as Shilpi, was slaughtered in her Muggdapara residence Wednesday night.

Sabujbagh police recovered the body from the residence. Police arrested the alleged killer husband, Swapon.

Separate cases were filed with police station concerned in this regard.

oath-taking by the chief advisor of the non-party administration.

"Soon after the swearing-in, the chief advisor violated Article 58 of the Constitution," alleged Hasina. The steps taken by the caretaker administration one after another were designed to 'victimise' the Awami League. "The caretaker government considered Awami League as its opponent since the party was in power in the immediate past and consequently it could not maintain neutrality."

"She said torture was launched during the caretaker government's tenure and intensified after the election so that the people cannot raise their voice against the 'massive rigging and fraud in the election.'

A total of 900 people were killed during the 87-day tenure of the caretaker government as the BNP-Jamaat alliance pounced on AL leaders and workers.

Narrating the torture and repression, rape, killing, looting, arson, capture of MP hostel, bus terminals etc, extortion and attacks on police stations and courts, Hasina asked, 'How to get rid of crimes against humanity?'

"The sky of Bangladesh is overcast with wailing of (the) father and mother who lost their children, son who lost his father, husband who lost his wife and wife who lost her husband," she said.

Had the BNP-Jamaat alliance come to power through genuine polls, they would not have resorted to 'brutality,' said Hasina.

"They know how they have come to power. That is why they are out to destroy the opposition through repression," the Opposition Leader said. The BNP-Jamaat alliance is pursuing 'politics of fanaticism and terrorism' which undermines the country's image, she felt.

Presided over by Chairman of the National Committee Justice KM Sobhan, the inaugural session was also addressed by, among others, National Professor Kabir Chowdhury, Poet Shamsur Rahman, politician Hasanul Haq Inu, President of Ganatantri Party Ahmedul Kabir, journalist Shahriar Kabir and the foreign guests.

American Jurist William Sloan said he had been following the situation in Bangladesh for long. "Now today, I understood why the government has been denying what is happening here."

Termining the torture, rape and killing as 'barbaric', he said he would appeal to the international community to "see and understand what is happening here."

Dr Dungana said, "This is more than the worst done by the party in power." He suggested formation of an international tribunal to investigate allegations of atrocity here.

## BMP decries

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year.

It said 179 women were raped during these four months, of them 43 were gang raped and 19 were killed after rape. Some 61 women sustained acid burns and seven succumbed to their injuries.

The statement said 25 women were tortured and 25 others were killed in incidents relating to dowry.

The BMP data showed that the tendency of suicide has alarmingly increased. The number of suicide cases was 28 in September, 19 in October, 29 in November and 22 in December last.

Against the backdrop of deteriorating law and order, the BMP has so far posted 2,835 letters to the prime minister, home minister, inspector general of police (IGP) and others.

It also placed a 12-point demand to the government including full implementation of Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 2000, formation of special tribunal at district level and empowering district judge court as special tribunal court.

It also demanded treatment assistance for women victims, setting up of a hospital for treatment of acid burn victims and their rehabilitation, implementation of strict laws against criminals.

They also demanded formation of a South Asian network to prevent women and child trafficking.



A colourful rally organised by Sports Zone parades different city thoroughfares to celebrate the Valentine's Day yesterday.

## Blame crime against humanity on failure to try war criminals

### AL convention told

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Failure to bring war criminals and perpetrators of the genocide of 1971 to justice has set the dangerous trend of crimes against humanity to be committed with impunity in different phases during last 31 years since independence.

This was the essence of the papers presented in yesterday's national convention on 'Crime Against Humanity'.

Speakers and discussants at the plenary session on the first day of a two-day convention yesterday also urged all democratic as well as humanitarian forces to put in concerted efforts to combat the evil force that has long been committing such violence in the country.

Two keynote papers were presented in the session, chaired by renowned economist and Chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Professor Rehman Sobhan at the Engineers' Institute auditorium.

Barrister Amirul Islam presented a paper on 'Crimes Against Humanity: Bangladesh Experience' while Professor Anisuzzaman presented his paper on 'Recent Repression on the Minorities in Bangladesh.'

Genocide in 1971, killing of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and his family in 1975, killing of four leaders inside jail in 1975, attack on minorities in 2001 and the ongoing repression on Awami League leaders and activists

are all part of a planned persecution of pro-liberation forces, Barrister Islam said.

"These killings, which added a black and shameful chapter in the otherwise glorious history of the Bengali nation, were not isolated events", he said.

In his keynote paper, Barrister Islam said patronisation of the self-confessed killers of Bangabandhu by the government was part of the process how crime against humanity was perpetrated by the government "that usurped power by force."

Failure to bring the collaborators of 1971 to justice have encouraged growth of a culture of impunity in Bangladesh, he said, adding that the country has thus become a safe haven for criminals violating human rights and continuing their political and religious persecution."

Barrister Islam termed the atrocities and violence committed on the minority community and political activists of Awami League, which started before the October 1 election, as 'a third phase of crimes against humanity in the country.'

Continuation of such criminal acts was hostile to the growth of a democratic polity, in which fundamental rights could be guaranteed and an independent judiciary function as custodian of the constitution, he observed.

Referring to press reports regarding tortures on minorities before and after the October 1 election, a participant said, "The government's denial of the atrocities

alleging exaggeration is very dangerous; also at the same time it is not taking any steps to arrest the culprits."

In his paper on 'Recent Repression on the Minorities in Bangladesh', Professor Anisuzzaman said the degree of repression on the minorities in 2001 was comparable to the onslaught of the marauding Pakistan army in 1971.

At that time, Hindus became targets due to the Pakistani Army's general hatred for the Bangalees and its initiation into the politics of revenge, he said. "But what happened to the Hindus after thirty years later in an independent Bangladesh was beyond comprehension."

Although many participants observed that the minorities became victims of atrocities and violence before and after the October 1 election, as they were perceived as supporters of Awami League, Professor Anisuzzaman offered a different view in his paper.

He said the immediate cause of the attacks on minorities appeared to be political, but it was essentially communal, for even those Hindus known to have voted for BNP were not spared.

"I can only call upon the civil society to wake up from its slumber, and join hands to ensure that the incidents of 2001 are never repeated in Bangladesh", he urged.

## Bangabandhu

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the Appellate Division to have the hearing before a three-member bench.

But, as the Appellate Division did not have more than two judges for the bench for this case, Chief Justice Mahmud Amin Chowdhury asked the government in October to appoint a judge on ad-hoc basis.

The government however ignored the request and the three-member bench then ceased to function.

Rabbi meantime went into retirement in last month, prompting the government to appoint a judge in his place. But, the newly appointed judge is not in a position to hear the Bangabandhu Murder Case since he is a close relative of two of the convicts.

Filed on October 2, 1996, the trial court gave the verdict of Bangabandhu murder case on November 8, 1998. Fifteen persons were given capital punishment. Afterwards, the High Court upheld capital punishment of 12 of those 15.

Meanwhile, the government repeatedly had the hearing schedule of the case shifted instead of restructuring the bench. When the government once again sought a fresh date for the hearing on January 19, Chief Justice Mahmud Amin Chowdhury had to the attorney general, "...I don't want to continue with the case, then please let us know."

"...I do not understand why all governments want to shoot their preys keeping their guns on the court's shoulder."

## Municipal polls

**FROM PAGE 1**  
(Rajshahi), Advocate Ashraf Ali Biswas of Chuadanga Sadar (Chuadanga), Abdus Sattar Khan of Mulahi (Barisal), Abdul Shukur Mulkai of Boalmari (Faridpur), Hazi Mohammad Saidur Rahman (Molla) of Sonargaon (Narayanganj), Mohammad Nurul Huq Bhuiyan of Akhaura (Brahmanbaria), Abu Taleb of Parshuram (Feni), Mohammad Akbar Hossain of Daganbhuiyan (Feni), Mohammad Jalaluddin of Baruihat (Chittagong), Mohammad Nurul Amin of Rangunia (Chittagong), Abdur Rahim Advocate of Choumohoni (Noakhali) and Sarwar Azam of Moheskhal in Cox's Bazar.

## Akij Group

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in the case.

Sources in the finance ministry said a former influential student leader worked in favour of Akij Group of Companies and convinced the previous Awami League government to shelve the case.

After coming to power, the BNP-led coalition government revived the case, and the FIRs were lodged following the directives from the higher authorities of the government.

According to the FIRs, Dhaka Tobacco and Asia Tobacco marketed their cigarette products with brand names such as Navy, Surma and Five Star without paying value-added tax (VAT) and other duties.

The companies also evaded government duty and tax through forged documents and money receipts in connivance with some tax officials.

The amount of evaded taxes will stand at around Tk 569 crore, as the primary estimate showed.

The accused are the former commissioner of customs, excise and VAT, Dhaka North Commissionerate, Tajul Islam, Additional Commissioner Sheikh Hafizul Kabir and Shahdat Hossain.

The accused directors of the two companies are Sheikh Akij Uddin, Sheikh Mohiuddin, Sheikh Mominuddin, Sheikh Amin Uddin, Sheikh Azimuddin, Sheikh Nasiruddin, Sheikh Basir Uddin, Sheikh Jamal Uddin, Sheikh Jasim Uddin and Sheikh Kafil Uddin.

## Stuck again

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the crackdown till the Eid on humanitarian grounds" because the authorities do not want these poor people to be deprived of their earning prior to the festival, sources said.

They mentioned that the ruling party or its allies are 'illegally' organising rallies and processions on busy city streets at rush hours every day, defying the existing ban and ignoring sufferings of people. On Wednesday, there were three rallies and processions on busy intersections. One rally held at Malibagh crossing was attended by Works Minister Mirza Abbas. Jamaat-e-Islami's convention recently saw a crowd of about 10,000 people.

"We immediately need a political decision to ban totally such gatherings in the city on working days. Otherwise, traffic situation cannot be improved, no matter how many thousands of traffic policemen are deployed," said a senior official of Traffic Department.

All major roads yesterday became clogged with traffic till late in the evening. Roads where rickshaws are allowed to ply witnessed persistent congestion throughout the day. In many areas, noise and air pollution rose to unbearable levels.

Traffic Department sources said that on the eve of the Eid, many of the policemen now engaged in managing traffic would be deployed at shopping centers and markets, resulting in further shortage of the men on the streets. At present, 550 Ansars have been deployed to assist 1,900 traffic policemen in two shifts for managing traffic in the city.

Besides, arrangement has been made with Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Malik Samity and Sramik Samity for deployment of 300 volunteers with sticks to ensure that buses stop at proper stoppages, not haphazardly.

They also referred to the "retirement benefit" for non-government teachers and employees reintroduced by the present government.

## Directive to take adequate security measures in city

**BSS, Dhaka**

The law and order committee for Dhaka city and district yesterday directed the law enforcing agencies to ensure adequate security in the capital and elsewhere in the greater district ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha.

The committee in a meeting also directed the Dhaka Metropolitan and district police authorities to ensure patrol of police to check robberies on highways and river routes, toll collections from trucks and trawlers carrying cattle, snatching and extortion in the city.

Chairman of the committee Communications Minister Barrister Nazmul Huda presided over the meeting. The committee also

asked the police to ensure security of the home-bound people to celebrate the Eid.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Major (Rtd.) Kamrul Islam, Advocate Khandaker Mahub Uddin MP, Salahuddin Ahmed, MP, Abdul Mannan, MP, President of the National Press Club Khodaker Manirul Alam, and high officials of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, Department of Narcotics Control, district administration and district police attended the meeting.

Barrister Huda cautioned the members of the law enforcing agencies that any negligence to curbing crime would not be tolerated.

## Situation in Patiya still tense

**UNB, Ctg**

Tension is still prevailing in Patiya upazila after the bloody clash between the villagers and madrasah students at Baghuli on Wednesday that left a college student killed and 100 others injured.

BDR and police were deployed in the area and Patiya Jamia Al Islamia Madrasah campus to fend off further violence.

Section 144 imposed in the area for an indefinite period. Shops and other establishment remained closed yesterday.

Madrasah authorities asked the students to vacate the hostels yesterday, but the students did not leave the campus "in fear of attacks by the villagers", madrasah sources said.

Meanwhile, OC of the Patiya thana filed a case against 21 people, including poura Awami League president Noor Mohammad Siddiqi and two ex-municipal members Jane Alam and Shamsul Alam.

On the other hand, madrasah authorities, at a press conference yesterday, said college student Fariduddin was killed by police firing not by the madrasah students.

It also demanded exemplary punishment to those involved in damaging madrasah property and torching two of its hostels.

## IMF loans

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Yesterday was the concluding day of the three-day seminar on 'PRSP: Designing a poverty reduction strategy in Bangladesh' jointly organised by the Government of Bangladesh, World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) at Sonargaon Hotel in the city.

Anisul Huq Chowdhury said the donors conceived the PRSP concept two years ago and it will become one of the requirements of donors for allowing concessionary loans.

He said as the country is going to adopt PRSP, the poverty issue will be more focussed in future and that the country should keep up constant review of its poverty reduction strategy, he said adding that Bangladesh is now at the last stage of preparing the PRSP.

Views of opposition political parties, representatives from private sector and civil society all will be included before finalising the PRSP and the Official Secrecy Act will not be applicable in this case, he mentioned.

The government is going to integrate the PRSP into the next five-year plan and it should be country-owned rather than government-owned, he said, adding that participation of the private sector has not been strong so far but it will be ensured before the draft is

## 2 Bosnian Muslims convicted for Bosnian killing

**AFP, Sarajevo**

Two Bosnian Muslims were sentenced Thursday to 15 years in jail each for the murder of a Bosnian Serb family in besieged Sarajevo at the outbreak of the country's 1992-95 war, court officials said.

Osman Hodzic and Meho Ibrisevic were found guilty of the mid-1992 murder of six members of the Ristic family, including a child and three women, Sarajevo county court judge Goran Orasinin said.

The two have the right to appeal to a higher court.

At the time of the murder, the two were members of the Bosnian armed forces, but the murder was not defined as a war crime.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had previously confirmed the definition of the offence, Nedžad Corovic, deputy prosecutor, said, without elaborating.

## BNP men clash

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The trouble ensued when a worker of Islam-Alim group was assaulted by the supporters of Akhter-Alauddin group.

In retaliation, more than 200 workers of neighbouring Olympia and Jeenat Textile Mills headed by a labour leader of Tongi attacked supporters of Akhter-Alauddin supporters with stick and iron rod. They beat their rivals and ransacked TSS canteen and offices.

Tension was prevailing in the area.

Earlier, Yawer Sayeed, Managing Director of AIMS, Bangladesh and a private sector representative, while presenting the report of a 'break-out group', said a much wider participation of the private sector is essential for PRSP and there should be transparency all through during its preparation.

Private sector is a key agent in achieving these gains, has greater resources and faster capacity for change but little consultation was made so far with the private sector, he added.

Meanwhile, other participants at the seminar yesterday questioned the accountability of the donors themselves saying that the World Bank, IMF and WTO should ensure their own accountability and transparency at the local and international levels before prescribing them for others.

One participant cited the example of frequent road-digging in the city as being totally unplanned and extremely counterproductive to the development process.

Another participant mentioned the present situation in the public sector saying the sector is currently incurring an annual loss of Tk 18,000 crore.

"If we can stop these inefficiencies and misuse, we will not need aid from donors."

## Coalition convention

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held either at Paltan Maidan or at the Institution of Engineers in the city.

A certain quarter conspired to subvert the convention immediately after its announcement by the prime minister, he alleged.

"Besides, the quarter called for a convention like ours and spread propaganda against a four-month old government."

Bhuiyan told newsmen that Khaleda Zia in her address to the nation on October 19 last year announced a national convention on human rights violation and terrorist activities by the AL. "We have prepared for the convention and chalked out an elaborate programme," he said.

Describing AL's repression in brief, the BNP leader said the nation had turned into a killing field. "The country became a virtual jail between June 12, 1996 and July 15, 2001."

"The quarter termed religious and patriotic countrymen Taliban,

but the world considers Bangladesh a modern democratic country," Bhuiyan continued.

The quarter tried to create a situation of confrontation between the Muslims and the religious minorities after the election.

"We delayed taking over power for two days and the caretaker government became a bit weak at the time, which led to a volatile situation on which the quarter cashed in. But we tackled the situation soon after our assumption of power," the NP leader said.

Asked about features of the convention, he said victims will describe their sufferings and the 'AL-misrule'-detailing photographs printed in different dailies will be put on display at the convention.

Minister for Public Works Mirza Abbas, Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mujahidin, Bangladesh Jatiya Party Secretary General Kazi Firoj Rashid and Islami Oikya Jote Secretary General ARM Motin, among others, addressed the press briefing.

## Duty-free access

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and the South Asia, he said.

Foreign Minister Morshed Khan said both he and his visiting counterpart shared common views on the regional situation and said, "We want that the Indian Ocean should be a nuclear-free zone."

"We also discussed regional security, sub-regional cooperation and matters of common international concern," he said.

Dr Kharazi said great opportunity exists for South-South cooperation for which the developing countries should work together.

Bangladesh asked for joint venture investments in railway, construction, ceramics, tiles and sanitary ware items. It also sought Iran's participation in agriculture, transportation and road communication sectors. A specific proposal was given for Iran's participation in the Chittagong Central Railway Workshop and the BISF in Dhaka.

The Iranian side said it was still considering a plan to set up an oil

refinery in Chittagong. It also offered US\$ 20 million in loans for the railway sector.

At the official talks, it was decided that the next meeting of the Bangladesh-Iran Joint Economic Cooperation would be held in July.

Dhaka also requested that legal status be given to some 6,000 Bangladeshis working in Iran without proper documents.

The Bangladesh side at the talks included Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Reaz Rahman, State Minister for Expatriate Affairs Qamrul Islam, State Minister for Commerce Barkatullah Bhulu, Commerce Secretary Sohel Ahmed, Acting Foreign Secretary Anwarul Alam and Director General Masud Aziz.

The Iranian side included Deputy Minister for Posts and Telecommunications Karim Sarraf, Fatemeh Rakeel, MP and Iranian Ambassador to Bangladesh Mohammad Rezaei.

## PM: Befitting education system

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was still lagging behind in literacy rate and the institutional education had failed to provide livelihood and guarantee employment.

The Prime Minister advocated expansion of education, devotion and responsibility of teachers, congenial atmosphere in the educational institutions, and accountability and monitoring of the education administration.

The concluding function was also addressed by Education Minister Dr M Osman Faruk, State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Huq, Deputy Minister for Education M Abdus Salam Pinto and Education Secretary Mohammad Shahidul Islam.

Teachers, students, guardians, ministers and senior civil and military officials attended the function.

Some 254 teachers and students were awarded medals and certificates at the function for their

remarkable performances in education and extra-curricular activities.

The Prime Minister also mentioned some allegations against the teachers. The allegations include not paying proper attention to the students and trying to seek financial benefits.

She urged the teachers to maintain proper standard in the private coaching centres, colleges and universities.

Retraining the need for computer education to meet the challenge of globalisation, Khaleda said her government has decided to provide 10,000 computers to secondary schools.

She said proper training for teachers to enhance their skills is also an important side of the education system.

Referring to women who constitute nearly half of the population, she said national progress is not

possible keeping them uneducated.

She mentioned the fulfilment of the present government's election pledge of making education free for girls up to higher secondary level and providing a monthly stipend of Taka 65 to talented girl students.

She also mentioned other programmes including monthly incentive of Taka 100 for each poor student. In case of more than one child from a family, the stipend will be Taka 125, she said.

Stressing the importance of improving teacher-student relationship for congenial academic atmosphere, the Prime Minister said January 19 will now be observed as "National Teachers Day" for the students to show their respect to the teachers.