

## BNP programme on Ekushey begins today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

a cultural programme.

On Feb 20, BNP central committee will arrange a discussion meeting at Ramna Batamul at 4pm. There will be a musical soiree also after the discussion.

On Feb 21, the BNP will hoist national and party flags at half-mast in the early morning and hoist black flag at the party central office. Leaders and workers of BNP will assemble in front of Balaka Cinema Hall at Nilkhel at 6am, wear black badges and march towards Azimpur graveyard to place wreaths at the graves of the Language martyrs and then go to the Central Shaheed Minar to place wreaths there.

At 4pm on the Amar Ekushey Day, Jaspas will arrange a discussion meeting on 'Our Mother Language and Our Culture' at the Central Shaheed Minar at 4pm tomorrow. A musical soiree will follow the discussion.

On Feb 18, the Zia Shishu-Kishore Sangathan will arrange a prize distribution for children's painting competition at Shishu Academy premises at 4pm. The function will be followed by a cultural evening. On the same day, Jaspas will arrange a musical programme at the Central Shaheed Minar.

On Feb 19, Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal will hold a discussion meeting at Ramna Batamul at 4pm followed by

Meanwhile, BNP's district, city and thana committees have also arranged elaborate programmes to observe the Amar Ekushey in a befitting manner. They have also chalked out programmes such as probhat ferry, placing of wreaths, discussion meetings and cultural programmes, said a press release.

## Stop terrorism

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"We are witnessing a maddening scenario of brutality emerged out of politics," Prof BK Jahangir of Dhaka University said in his paper titled "State-sponsored Terror".

Referring to post-election terrorism that forced many to become "refugees in their own country", he said, "This is politics of dispossession from their rights, properties and human dignity."

Describing incidents of alleged rape, torture and arson in different parts of the country that followed the October election, Prof Jahangir said, "These are human rights abuses done by the government against their own people."

"This catalogue of suffering does not deter the government from discriminating systematically against the people ... It means human freedom is at stake," he added.

Calling religion-based nationalism a kind of nihilism, he said such a nationalism does not allow any political debate or movement or alternative political ideas. "Bangladesh State suggests a unity of politics and culture", he said blaming the ruling BNP-Jamaat alliance for instituting ethnic cleansing to delink culture from politics.

In his paper titled "Religion and Politics", Islamic scholar Abdul Awai noted that the nation had to pay dearly due to abuse of religion in the sub-continent.

Listing 66 religion-based organisations in the country, he said, "These organisations not only abuse religion for political ends but

## Afghan Hajj goers

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man for the peacekeepers. He said the civilian area of the airport was under the control of Afghan authorities.

"We lost a good man, an educated man," said a top aide to Rahman, Mohammed Yakkob Nuristani. "He wanted to help rebuild Afghanistan."

"The interim administration is shocked, obviously, and very saddened by this incident," said Foreign Ministry spokesman Omar Samad. "We're looking into the criminal actions that have taken place here."

British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw, who arrived yesterday for talks with the interim government, immediately conveyed his condolences to Abdullah Abdullah, the foreign minister.

The fatal confrontation was sparked when Rahman went to the Kabul airport Thursday afternoon for a flight to New Delhi, according to accounts by government and Afghan airline officials. Hundreds of pilgrims, who had been stranded at the airport awaiting Saudi visas and transport to Mecca, blocked Rahman's plane, beginning a standoff that went on for about five hours, airline and government officials said.

The mob stormed the plane when Rahman emerged to try to talk to the crowd, said Abdul Wahab Nuristani, the deputy chief of a military division in eastern Afghanistan. Rahman was seized, beaten and his body tossed to the tarmac below, he said, citing witness accounts.

"This is so terrible, so illegal," he said.

Dozens of friends, family and government officials gathered at Rahman's Kabul home as word spread of his death. The mourners sat quietly as a mullah read verses from the Quran.

Rahman, 49, was trained as a medical doctor. He fled Afghanistan when the Taliban took over and had been living in exile in New Delhi.

A contingent of British and French peacekeepers, stationed half a kilometre away in the military part of the airport, were apparently unaware that the situation had flared out of control. Earlier, they had sent food and blankets for the growing crowd.

The security force "knew there was an ongoing incident, but it happened very quickly," said British Capt. Graham Dunlop, a spokesman.



Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, co-convenor of the National Convention on Crime Against Humanity reads out the Dhaka Declaration at its concluding session at the Institution of Engineers in the city yesterday.

## Try offenders in tribunal

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The convention appealed to the international community to express solidarity and share the concern with the victims of the crime against humanity.

Calling for a stiff resistance to such cruelties, it expressed the view that imbedded with the spirit of the liberation war, every one irrespective of political affiliation and belief must get together to uphold democracy, secularism and rule of law for building Bangladesh as a modern country 'keeping with the progressive aspirations of mankind.'

The convention highlighted the 'post-election violence' in which many Hindu women were allegedly raped, their houses were torched and belongings looted. Some of them reportedly fled to India. A large number of opposition activists were allegedly assaulted or killed.

A select group of 'victims' narrated their experience at the opening session on Thursday.

Former Nepalese Speaker Damman Dungana, Nepalese poet Dr Banira Giri, American Jurist William Flora and Belgian minister Dr Morrel addressed the concluding session, chaired by convenor of the national committee Justice KM Sobhan.

The convention called upon the government to 'stop the process of political and religious cleansing' in all its forms and dimensions so that the people can assert their free will and enjoy their freedom of choice on the basis of free flow of information in an atmosphere of peace and democracy.'

**CARE staff assaulted**

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Hafiza, HR and Gender Coordinator of CARE at Shonatola, spoke on the occasion. The victim, Rokeya Begum, Field Officer in Bogra, was also present.

They said Rokeya Begum was physically assaulted and humiliated by local BNP leader Ahsanul Taiyab Zakir on February 10.

Rokeya had gone inside the CARE office parking her motorbike on the roadside at about 10 am.

After about four minutes, she heard a vehicle continuously blaring its loud horn. She came out of the office and found a car stopped there. She apologised to the driver and immediately removed her motorbike, which had blocked the car's passage. But Zakir, who was driving the car, attempted to drive the vehicle onto the motorbike but it stopped automatically. He then came out of the car and started kicking and slapping Rokeya, hurling abuses, they alleged.

Acting chairman of Shonatola upazila Bellal Hossain and some others present there tried to stop Zakir but failed. Rokeya fell on the ground as he kicked her in the thigh. She then ran into the office to escape. Zakir ran after her and tried to force his way into the office.

Just after the incident, Municipal Commissioner ATM Rezaul Karim Manik "forcibly" took Rokeya to the local municipality office. In the presence of a crowd Rokeya was asked to apologise to Zakir. But she refused saying she did not make

The declaration followed a series of plenary sessions on various aspects of alleged violence against the religious minority and opposition activists since the general election in October last. It demanded effective steps to ensure payment of compensation to the victims and their families and for their rehabilitation.

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Foreign participants in the convention expressed 'whole-hearted' support for the declaration, terming it a South Asian declaration for human rights.

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The declaration said similar conventions would be organised in other cities of the country to mobilise public opinion against 'persecution of all kinds under political influence.'

Meanwhile, the ruling coalition announced Thursday that it would organise a convention on March 15-16 to highlight 'political persecution' during the tenure of the immediate past Awami League government.

**CARE staff assaulted**

any mistake. Zakir then said if the vehicle did not stop automatically, he would have crushed her to death, the CARE officials claimed.

They also alleged that some of Zakir's men threatened to rape and kill any talking about the incident any more. Zakir's men also threatened that they will see how NGO activities are conducted in the area if anything more happens centring the incident.

Rokeya was admitted to Bogra General Hospital and released later. A GD (general dairy) was filed with Shonatola police after the incident. None was arrested.

When contacted Thursday night, sources in Bogra told The Daily Star that neither the Deputy Commissioner nor Superintendent of Police of Bogra did pay any attention to the incident. "Zakir is an influential local member of ruling BNP and police will never take any action against him until there is a directive from Dhaka", one source said.

Neither SP Khan Sayeed nor DC Shafiz Uddin Ahmed could be contacted for comments despite repeated attempts.

According to unconfirmed reports from Bogra, Rokeya was so badly assaulted that she had to undergo an abortion following the incident.

## Ten traders

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travelling from Naniarchar to Mahalchhari.

In another incident, two turmeric traders were also abducted at gunpoint while travelling in a bus from Mahalchhari to Rangamati.

The abductors have sent a message to Mahalchhari Bazaar demanding Tk 10 lakh ransom for release of the ten.

The abducted traders were identified as Sujan Dev, 20, Biplob Das, 25, Kajala Biswas, 40, Liton Basak, 22, Ranjir Dev, 45, Pradip Dev, 16, Suranjit Dev, 28, Amir Chand, 20, Badal Biswas, 30, and Anu Mia, 38.

Hearing the news, 200 traders at Mahalchhari upazila headquarters brought out a procession demanding release of their fellow traders.

Sources said armed cadres of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) are allegedly involved in the incidents of kidnapping in different areas of Kaghachari and Rangamati districts.

**Cell phones**

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Secretariat is not entitled to mobile phones under the existing rules.

Currently there is no budget for operating cost and maintenance of these phones, for which request has been made to the finance ministry.

**Rupsha Bridge**

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big amount of toll.

As a result, consultants, engineers and contractors have got frightened to continue work of Tk 582 crore project for construction of 1360-metre long bridge over the river Rupsha which is expected to be completed by November 2004.

According to Mohammad Monirul Huq, Director of the project, the police commissioner has been requested to ensure security of all consultants, engineers and contractors.

Officials of Shimizu-ITD joint venture company have also informed the government of the hurdles being faced by them in doing works due to the terrible situation being created by miscreants. But the Project Director did not mention the names of the miscreants in his official letter to police commissioner.

The police commissioner has already stepped up security measures in the project area and residences of those who are allegedly being threatened by miscreants.

According to people of Rupsha Bridge Project area, the armed miscreants are followers of ward commissioner Mohammad Hossain Mukta. His armed cadres are threatening Shimizu-ITD consultants and local contractors for tolls and employment in the project, people of Labonchora alleged.

**Massive raid**

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day and raided different rooms of the hall.

Students said BDR harassed general students of the hall during the raid and arrested six of the duty employees at the hall.

Dhaka University employees organised a rally yesterday protesting the arrest of their colleagues.

Police sources said the block raid was aimed at arresting extortions, terrorists and murderers from different areas of the city.

Sources said all mobile phone services were shut down during the raid.

**Wetlands**

FROM PAGE 12

ment, effluent from tanneries, municipal wastes and fuel from river transports are polluting the Buriganga and pollution has now reached such proportions that even the fish can no longer survive in the toxic water. That the river is under the process of dying a slow death because of the greed and mindlessness of the people living in the nearby areas is a shocking blow to the environment preservation campaign.

Although the government recently took some measures to clear the riverbanks of all encroachments and bring life to the dying river by taking some remedial steps, the prospect of relief still looks grim.

Unless determined efforts are made by all quarters concerned to redeem the water bodies under threat of extinction including the Buriganga, which is the lifeline for the metropolis, a catastrophe seems imminent. We have all along observed that government decision to improve the water scenario in and around the city are never followed up with timely action due to resource constraints or bureaucratic red-tape. Some really bold steps need to be taken to save the endangered water bodies from extinction, and in turn, the city itself.

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**Iran arrests 150 foreigners**

Iran has arrested 150 foreigners, mostly Arabs, some of them holding French, British, Belgian and Dutch passports, who had infiltrated from Pakistan, state radio announced Thursday.

"Those foreigners, of Arab and African origin, entered Iran illegally after having travelled 750 kilometres from Pakistan," the radio said, quoting an Iranian security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"We have informed the relevant embassies of the illegal entry of these people, some of whom are accompanied by family," the official said.

Referring to her 5-year rule, the former Prime Minister said her government achieved self-sufficiency in food, increased economic growth to 6.5 per cent and brought down inflation to 1.59 per cent.

Besides, she said, socio-economic condition of the people had improved substantially.

Hasina said both Bangladesh and Iran enjoy good ties for a long period. She said the two countries could strengthen economic cooperation and take up joint-venture projects.

Reporting on the arrests, the official state agency IRNA only said the 150 arrestees were "suspected of links to hardline Taliban and al-Qaeda," but also quoted an anonymous source as saying none of them were leading figures of the fundamentalist militia or of chief terror suspect Osama bin Laden's

network.

The Jomhuri Eslami daily, quoting unidentified parliamentary sources, said Thursday morning that Pakistan has pushed back al-Qaeda members into Iran.

Washington alleges that Tehran has allowed al-Qaeda fighters and members of the ousted Taliban regime to enter Iran, which Iranian officials have hotly denied, demanding evidence.

In a BBC interview US President George W. Bush's special envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, said Washington had given Tehran details of alleged Iranian interference in Afghanistan and help to al-Qaeda fugitives.

Britain's Guardian daily quoting sources close to the Taliban said Tuesday that al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters had evaded US forces in Afghanistan or of the al-Qaeda terror

network.

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network.

All major roads Thursday 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 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 Sarak Samity for deployment of 300 volunteers with sticks to ensure that buses stop at proper stoppages, not haphazardly.

Moreover, many students who do not belong to any of the student organisations said they feel insecure on the campus