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Cabinet decides to display PM's portrait in govt offices

UNB, Dhaka

The cabinet on Sunday decided to hang the portrait of the prime minister as head of the government in offices of the heads of government organisations and Bangladesh missions abroad.

The decision was taken at a regular meeting of the Council of Ministers at the PM office with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The meeting decided that the portrait of the prime minister would be hung in offices of ministers, state ministers, deputy ministers, secretaries of different ministries, departments, heads of government and autonomous organisations and offices, Bangladeshi missions abroad and government auditoriums.

At the meeting, a committee was formed with LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan as its convenor to reach a consensus on hanging the portraits of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and late president Ziaur Rahman alongside the portrait of the head of the government.

The meeting cancelled the decision taken at another cabinet meeting on June 24, 1996 on hanging the

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Steps soon for speedy trial of Shazneen, Rubel & Bushra murder cases

UNB, Dhaka

The government will soon assign two or three courts in consultation with the chief justice for speedy trial of some sensational cases.

The sensational cases, pending for the last few years, include a murder case against former minister ASM Abdur Rab and cases of the murder of Rubel, Shazneen, Bushra and journalist Shamsur Rahman.

A high-powered cell has been formed with State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar as its head to coordinate and monitor proceedings of the cases and complete the trials by three months, said Law Minister Moudud Ahmed.

Moudud told the news agency yesterday that a list of some sensational cases had been prepared and steps were being taken to give top priority to finishing the trials.

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HC declares ETV's licence illegal

Channel given 10 days to appeal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ekushey Television (ETV), the country's first private terrestrial TV channel, faces possible shutdown as the High Court (HC) yesterday declared its operating licence illegal and void.

The court however issued a stay of execution of its verdict for 10 days following a prayer by ETV's counsel so that the channel authorities could prepare for an appeal against the verdict with the Supreme Court.

The court also upheld an earlier HC rule that also declared ETV's licence illegal and void. "The rule is made absolute," said Justice Hamidul Huq in his yesterday's verdict.

AHC division bench comprising Justice Hamidul Huq and Justice Nazmun Ara Sultan sat at 11:55am for delivery of judgement on the case. The judgement was finally handed out at 5:20pm.

The verdict came in connection with a writ filed by two teachers of the Dhaka University and a journalist in September last, questioning the legality of the licence of the ETV and its contract with the state-run BTV for technical support signed during the AL regime.

In its judgement, the court said that the ETV licence was declared void because it was a disqualified party that was made eligible for the licence through non-transparent procedures.

"Transparency and accountability were not maintained in the procedures for awarding the licence," said Justice Hamidul Huq as he read the verdict in the much-

talked about ETV case in a crowded courtroom of the High Court yesterday evening.

The court said that the papers provided by the government did not explain how and on what basis the ETV was selected. It said that despite repeated reminders, the government did not provide the court with the required documents related to the licence awarding procedures.

With the 10-day stay order, the ETV has until April 6 to prepare for filing an appeal with the Supreme Court, sources said.

"In light of the stay order, Ekushey Television will continue its usual broadcast to the nation and to its millions of loyal viewers," ETV said in a statement.

ETV's transmission would continue till April 4 and might continue further if it was granted a further stay order, legal experts said.

Attorney General AF Hassan Arif and Additional Attorney General Adilur Rahman Khan moved the case on behalf of the government.

Barrister Abdur Razzaq, Advocate Mohammad Hossain, Advocate Tajul Islam and Advocate Jasimuddin Sarkar moved on behalf of the petitioners.

ETV was represented by Barrister Ishaq Ahmed, Barrister Rafiqul Huq and Barrister Moniruzzaman.

Explaining how he perceived the court verdict yesterday, ETV's lawyer Barrister Rafiqul Huq told the BBC, "The court found that the licence awarded to Abu Sayed

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Graft cases against Hasina, Kibria, Tofail, Motia, others

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) yesterday filed three more graft cases against former prime minister and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, six ex-ministers of her cabinet and five government officials.

The ministers charged with graft are former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria, former industries minister Tofail Ahmed, former agriculture minister Motia Chowdhury, former education minister AHSM Sadique, former state minister for science and technology Nooruddin Khan and former state minister for planning Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir.

The BNP-led coalition government earlier had filed two graft cases and a murder case against Hasina.

Hasina and the six former ministers have been accused of embezzling Tk 21,57,050 by appointing consultants for the Bangabandhu Novo Theatre without inviting bids. BAC also pressed charges against former additional secretary to the Ministry for Science and Technology and former project director of the theatre Maruf Morshed.

The same persons were also accused of embezzling Tk 4,52,65,646 in the purchase of equipment for the theatre from the second lowest bidder. In this case, the BAC alleged that Hasina and others had given the contract to the second lowest bidder, Goto Optical Manufacturer of Japan, ignoring the lowest bidder.

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50 hurt in clash
Alleged BNP men attack Fatullah Thana to snatch terrorists

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

At least 50 people, including ten policemen, were injured in a gunfight between police and alleged BNP activists at Fatullah on Tuesday.

The BNP men attacked Fatullah Police Station in a bid to snatch some terrorists, including Juba Dal leader Farid, who were arrested at 6.30 Tuesday at Panchabati, police said.

The activists also vandalised roadside shops and cars, set fire to some rickshaws and put up roadblocks on the old Dhaka-Narayanganj Highway.

Farid, nephew of FBCCI Vice-President and BNP leader Mohammad Ali, is accused in 11 cases, including murder and extortion, police added.

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Independence Day celebrated

UNB, Dhaka

The nation on Tuesday celebrated the 31st anniversary of its independence with a renewed pledge to attain economic emancipation and consolidate the hard-earned sovereignty in fulfilling dreams of the martyrs.

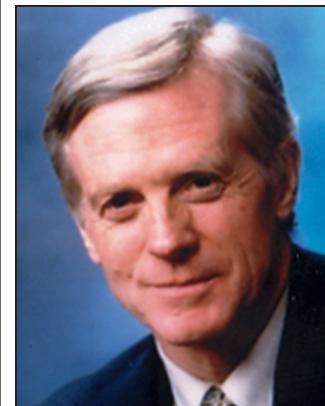
Country's independence was declared on this day and the nation achieved final freedom on December 16, 1971 after a nine-month bloody war in which an estimated three million people lost their lives and two lakh women were violated.

The Independence and National Day dawned with a 31-run salute booming in the air, setting off the celebrations as well as remembrances.

Reports reaching here said Bangladeshi community in different countries and Bangladesh missions abroad observed the day with patriotic zeal.

President AQM Badruddouja

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Bangabandhu murder case seems uncertain Two 'embarrassed' judges stay out of hearing

STAR REPORT

The disposal of the Bangabandhu Murder Case has become altogether uncertain as two judges of an exclusive bench of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court have expressed their embarrassment to hear it.

During the hearing on the Leave to Appeal petition in the case yesterday, Chief Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury told Special Public Prosecutor (SPP) in the Bangabandhu Murder Case Anisul Haq that the case cannot be heard as two of the judges have already said as two of the judges have already said they have been embarrassed to hear the case.

Justice Abu Sayeed Ahmed and Justice Syed JR Modassir Hossain are the judges who have felt embarrassed to hear the matter. The reason for their embarrassment

was not disclosed however and the two judges were absent yesterday.

Both of them were recently appointed to the Appellate Division.

This would mean the case is locked up in a cold storage until these two judges retire and are replaced by new judges or the president appoints at least one judge on an ad-hoc basis against a recommendation by the chief justice as per Article 98 of the constitution.

Giving his reaction to The Daily Star yesterday, Anisul Haq said, "I am frustrated and sorry." He noted that only the president could now appoint a judge to give the case a new lease of life. "There is no other option now than to wait for such a move."

A few days back, the chief justice formed a four-member bench for the hearing of the Leave to Appeal for the Bangabandhu Murder Case.

The members were Chief Justice himself and Justices Mainur Reza Chowdhury, Syed JR Modassir Hossain and Abu Sayeed Ahmed.

Last year, the previous Awami League government had appointed two junior judges to the Appellate Division by superseding Abu Sayeed Ahmed and Syed JR Modassir Hossain.

The case remained suspended since August last as the Appellate Division ran short of judges. Back then, the five-member Appellate Division had two judges who had heard the case at the Supreme Court and so, were not suited for hearing the same at the Appellate Division.

A third judge, being a relative of two of the convicts in the case, has already

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1000 killed as quake jolts northern Afghanistan

AP, Nahrin (Afghanistan)

Townpeople buried their dead and searched through the rubble of their homes yesterday, two days after a powerful earthquake jolted northern Afghanistan. The United Nations said the death toll appeared less than first feared.

Interim Afghan leader Hamid Karzai

flew to the stricken region about 170 kilometers north of Kabul and said about 1,000 people had been killed in Monday's tremor, the second in the area this month.

However, Reena Ghelani of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said an onsite investigation of 42 villages indicated the death toll was probably under

800. No foreigners were believed among the dead.

Afghan officials initially estimated up to 1,800 people had died. In Kabul, Red Cross spokeswoman Caroline Douillet said about 730 bodies had been recovered from the wreckage, and that 500 of them had already been buried.

Aid workers estimated up to 30,000 people were homeless, as aftershocks continued to jolt the majestic Hindu Kush mountains that tower above Kabul and separate the capital from the extreme north of the country.

The quake struck in a desperately poor region already suffering the effects of years of drought and war. Aid workers said they had not managed to reach some isolated villages because access was blocked by minefields left over from the war between the Taliban and the opposition northern alliance.

Journalists flying in Afghan army helicopters from Kabul could see clusters of villagers, standing before wrecked houses, waving frantically at the aircraft, motioning it to land.

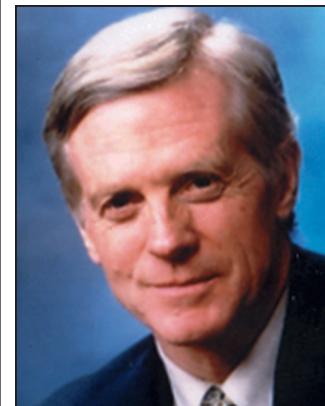
Addressing a crowd of several hundred survivors and aid workers, Karzai said that "all the people of Afghanistan share your pain." He told the crowd that the people of Nahrin were "very, very brave. They haven't asked for much."

However, villagers interrupted, shouting that they had no water or electricity and were in dire need of help.

Throughout the day, residents crawled over the ruins of the town of Nahrin, pulling out the dead and burying them. As many as 700 volunteers dug with simple shovels through mounds of dirt, mud and debris, government officials said.

Survivors pulled belongings out of their destroyed homes, some reduced to piles of dust.

Aid began pouring in Wednesday, with the Red Cross sending 400 first



Canadian minister due Mar 31

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Canadian Secretary of State for Asia Pacific David Kilgour will arrive in the city on March 31 on a three-day visit to Bangladesh.

He will be joined by a 7-member Canadian business delegation, said a press release.

During his visit, Kilgour will call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, hold

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Phase out all 2-stroke vehicles from city streets by December

High Court asks govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday directed the government to phase out all two-stroke vehicles plying the city roads by December 2002.

All petrol and diesel-fuelled government vehicles have to be converted into Compressed Natural Gas (CNG)-powered within six months and pneumatic horns be discarded within 30 days, the HC also said.

It asked the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) to check fitness of vehicles, using computerised system with immediate effect.

The court also asked the government to ensure international standard of fuel by reducing or eliminating toxic elements.

A division of the HC passed the orders following a writ filed by the Bangladesh Environment Lawyers Association (BELA) and the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST).

The division bench comprising Justice M N Ruhul Amin and Justice Khademul Islam Choudhury passed the verdict.

The HC further directed the government to set up adequate number of CNG filling stations within six months and to ensure that all cars imported since July 2001 be fitted with catalytic converter.

The court also asked the government to strictly comply with its decision to ban two-stroke vehicles of over nine years old.

Founder secretary general of BELA Dr Mohiuddin Farooque filed the writ in 1995, seeking redress against environmental pollution caused by vehicles.

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Decision to overhaul 3 intelligence outfits

UNB, Dhaka

The government has decided to reorganise all three police intelligence outfits -- DB, CID and SB -- to make them capable of effectively implementing its anti-terrorism drives.

An official announcement said the decision to overhaul the Detective Branch, Criminal Investigation Department and Special Branch was taken at a meeting of the cabinet committee on law and order yesterday. LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan presided.

The meeting discussed overall performance of the police and also decided to raise skill of the force, especially DB and SB, giving them "intensive training for improving law and order."

It further decided to involve all political parties at local levels in the campaign for improving law and order across the country.

The 19th meeting of the commit

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Announcement

Due to unavoidable circumstances, Star Weekend Magazine will come out on Sunday instead of Friday. We regret inconvenience to our readers.

INSIDE TODAY

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