

Take a new year vow for people's welfare: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for taking a New Year resolution to ensure people's welfare and refrain from doing anything that goes against the interest of the country and the people.

"If we can remain firm in our resolution and if we are sincere about implementing it, I am sure, we will present the nation a New Year full of success," she told a function at the Prime Minister's Bhaban, marking Pahela Baishakh, the first day of Bangla New Year 1409.

Ministers, MPs, political leaders, diplomats, journalists, cultural personalities and senior civil and military bureaucrats attended the function.

"The sense of oneness of our nation has to be consolidated through universal festivity of the Bengali New Year," the prime minister said calling upon all to work toward materialising the dreams of national life.

She urged upon all to look forward shrugging off the natural tendency of looking back in order to achieve peace, progress and prosperity of the nation.

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Activists of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon rally on the second Buriganga Bridge yesterday with a slogan to save the Buriganga River, the lifeline of the capital.

Graft charges against minister shameful for country: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said within six months of its rule, the present government has been branded as a terrorist and corrupt government.

She said on the first day of the Bangla New Year, people learnt from newspapers that a minister of a donor country brought corruption charges against a government minister and announced withdrawal of Tk 250-crore fund.

"What a shame this government has earned for the citizens of this country," Hasina said and hoped that people would get rid of corruption, misrule and terrorism by ousting the government.

The Awami president was addressing a discussion meeting near Bangabandhu Bhaban, organised by the Dhaka City unit of Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote on the occasion of Pahela Baishakh.

The former prime minister said Awami League, during its five-year rule, brightened the image of the country to the outside world as a

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Powell gets cold response from Syria, Lebanon

AFP, Damascus

US Secretary of State Colin Powell met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad yesterday for talks on Middle East peace efforts, as the Damascus official press hit out at alleged US bias in favour of Israel.

The two men spoke for 90 minutes, a US official said, but there was no immediate indication of the tenor of their meeting.

Powell was subjected earlier the same day to tough talks in neighbouring Lebanon, which Syria dominates, before he was due to return to Israel to press ahead with mediation efforts between the Jewish state and the Palestinians.

Official Damascus Radio, meanwhile, said a proposal from Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to hold an international conference on the Middle East was nothing more than an exercise in "deception".

In Beirut, Powell's warning against "aggressive actions" from southern Lebanon was strongly rejected by a government for which anti-Israeli guerrilla attacks are legitimate resistance operations

against occupation.

Lebanese President Emile Lahoud called on Washington "not to be affected by Israeli pressures and positions that present the Lebanese resistance in Shebaa Farms as terrorist acts," Lebanon's Foreign Minister Mahmud Hammud said.

Lebanese Hezbollah guerrillas backed by Damascus and Tehran are fighting Israeli troops holding the Shebaa Farms area seized from Syria in 1967 and now claimed by Beirut with Damascus' consent.

Hezbollah attacks have escalated since Israel mounted its invasion of the West Bank on March 29 to demolish Palestinian "terrorist" infrastructure."

Lahoud also told Powell that the escalation on the Israel-Lebanon border was the fault of Israel's military operations that have enraged the Arab world, according to Hammud.

Powell, who was greeted at Damascus airport by Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shara, said he wanted to "to brief them on my efforts to bring an end to the violence..."

...and hear from my Syrian colleagues their assessment."

"The situation in the southern part of Lebanon and some of the dangers with respect to firing over the Blue Line," the Lebanese-Israeli border marked by the United Nations, were also on the agenda, he told journalists.

Syria has not commented on the recent upsurge in Hezbollah attacks, but political sources here stressed that Damascus views such attacks as aimed at "liberating land and defending against Israeli aggression."

On a visit to northern Israel on Friday, Powell said, "I call upon nations who have influence over Hezbollah, especially Syria, to do everything in their power to restrain Hezbollah and to stop this kind of activity before it widens the conflict in the region."

In addition hardline Palestinian groups, which Lebanon says it does not support and is trying to curb, have fired rockets across the border into northern Israel.

Just hours before Powell arrived,

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KCC polls Khulna BNP showcauses 38 candidates

BSS, Khulna

Khulna City BNP has issued show cause notices to its 38 commissioner candidates including female candidates for submitting nominations for the forthcoming city corporation election overriding the party decision, says a press release issued by the General Secretary of City BNP Nazrul Islam on April 13.

The candidates are Mohiuddin and Akbar Hossain Mridha (ward No-1), Abdul Halim (ward No-3), Babar Ali Sarder (ward No-5), Minarul Islam and Saowket Ali (ward No-6), Fazley Bari (ward No-9), Airul Alam Akkas (ward No-10), Principal Shadul Alam (ward No-11), Shahidur Rahman (ward No-12), Mosaddek Hossain (ward No-13), Zafirul Alam (ward No-16), Ashraf Chowdhury and Monira Lavu (ward No-18), Ashrafur Rahman Kakon

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Alamgir again not produced in court for 'security reason'

Relieved of charges under Sec 54

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka will pass an order on the petition, seeking judicial inquiry into the Simi suicide case today.

Magistrate Mohammad Abul Kashem fixed the date upon a petition submitted by the victim's father, seeking judicial inquiry into the matter.

Mohammad Ali Imdad, victim's father, submitted a petition before the court yesterday against the charge sheet submitted by the Investigation Officer (IO).

He stated that the IO did not interrogate the main witnesses including wife and son of the petitioner. Moreover, the IO did not go to the house of victim's father to record statements of his wife and son. So,

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During the hearing of bail petition on March 24, Alamgir alleged that he was kept in custody for more than four days after expiry of remand. He further said he was not given any bed sheet or pillow or even the diabetic medicine kept in his brief case.

Alamgir also alleged that some masked policemen abused him severely and tortured him physically.

Earlier, police sent Alamgir to the Dhaka Central Jail without producing him before the court on expiry of remand period, although the law does not support it. Moreover, the Investigation Officer (IO) of the case violated the court order, although the magistrate directed the IO to produce Alamgir on expiry of remand period.

Alamgir was arrested on charge of instigating the government officials.

Prayer for return of Shahriar's video cassettes rejected

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday rejected the petition, seeking return of video cassettes, seized from Shahriar Kabir by Special Branch (SB) of Police, in connection with the sedition case.

Magistrate Jagannath Das Khokon passed the order upon a petition submitted by the defence lawyers seeking return of video cassettes.

The defence lawyers Advocate Zead-al-Malum and Khondaker Abdul Mannan submitted the petition before the court saying the video cassettes, seized from Shahriar Kabir, were made on communal harmony and these are to be kept in a air conditioned room. So, due to negligence of keeping these in a proper place, these will be damaged, the petition said.

The prosecution side opposed the petition for seeking return of video cassettes.

After hearing both sides, the court rejected the petition.

Meanwhile, the same court also fixed May 15 for next hearing of the case.

The court passed the order following an appearance sheet submitted by the defence lawyers on behalf of the accused Shahriar Kabir. Shahriar Kabir, along with his

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Prayer Timings

Apr 16

Sun Rises 6-20 pm

Apr 17 5-36 am

Sun Sets

Source: Islamic Foundation

Uproar in parliament for ouster of Gujarat CM

AP, New Delhi

Opposition parties stalled work in India's Parliament yesterday, demanding the ouster of the chief minister of Gujarat state for failing to stop recent Hindu-Muslim violence.

The national Intelligence Bureau said yesterday that 833 people were killed in the western state. Most of the victims were Muslim.

As Parliament reopened after a three-week recess, opposition lawmakers from more than a dozen political parties rushed to the well of the lower house shouting slogans, blaming Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's party for the carnage in Gujarat. The western state's chief minister belongs to Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Deputy speaker PM Sayeed adjourned the house until the afternoon. However, the raucousness in the house continued after lawmakers reassembled and Sayeed had to adjourn until Tuesday. Opposition parties also forced a similar adjournment in Parliament's upper house.

The main opposition Congress Party has already threatened that it would block proceedings in Parliament until Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was dismissed. The party wants Parliament to suspend all other work and debate the violence in Gujarat and the role of Modi's administration.

Human rights groups and opposition parties have accused Modi and his administration of doing little to stop Hindu rioters from killing hundreds of Muslims, destroying their businesses and leaving tens of thousands of them homeless. Hindu militants went on a retaliatory rampage after a Muslim crowd set a train on fire on Feb 27, killing 60 Hindu activists.

Two key allies of Vajpayee the Telugu Desam Party and the Trinamool Congress have also demanded Modi's dismissal. Vajpayee, however, rejected the demand last week, risking a crisis for his 22-party coalition.

The governing coalition's survival in the 545-seat lower house of Parliament depends on the support of these two parties, who together have 37 lawmakers. However, the parties have not said they would withdraw from Vajpayee's National Democratic Alliance.

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Abductors free housewife

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Housewife Asma Mukta, kidnapped on March 31, returned to her parents at Fatullah at about 8:30 last night.

Her father said the kidnappers left her at Shapla Square at Motijheel in Dhaka at around 7:30 pm. Then she came back to his house. She was brought to the Shapla Square blindfolded in a microbus.

Soon after she reached home, Fatullah police took her into 'safe custody'.

Mukta's father Nazrul Islam Bhuiyan said the kidnappers led by one Dipu released Mukta out of fear following a number of newspaper reports in this regard.

Mukta in her statement to police said, after abduction, the criminals made her unconscious using chloroform. When she regained sense, she found herself in a garments factory godown. Next day, she was taken to a house

in Dhaka.

She was kept in a room there with its doors and windows closed all the time. Only Dipu entered the room at times. She was beaten by him several times.

She was given only dry food, she said.

Mukta was married to one Alamgir, a Bangladeshi immigrant in Canada, about seven months ago.

A graduate from Narayanganj Government College, she had gone to her sister's house at Masdar in the town on March 31. When she was returning to her parents the same day, Dipu along with some other youths kidnapped her at gun point.

Sources in the area claimed that Dipu, allegedly a BNP activist, used to tease her often. All her papers for going to Canada were ready. Knowing this, Dipu became desperate and kidnapped her, the sources said.

5 murdered in city, Tongi since Sunday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, yesterday dismissed the case against Proshika deputy director Omar Tarek Chowdhury and messenger Azharul Haque, a press release issued by the NGO said.

The two persons were arrested on March 11 under Section 54 of the CrPC. They were charged with anti-state activity and given one month's detention.

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After hearing both the sides, the court dismissed the case as the government could not prove the charges, the press release said.

Advocate Ila Chanda appeared for the defendants in the court.

They died on way while the driver, who was unhurt, was taking them to DMCH, sources at the hospital said.

The gang looted some money and two cell phones from the microbus.

Narayan Chandra Bhowmik, one

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Detention of Mockbul illegal: HC

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday declared the detention of Awami Shechchhasebok League leader Al-Haj Mockbul Hossain as illegal.

Al-Haj Mockbul Hossain was arrested on December 4 last year and detained for 30 days under Special Powers Act.

A division bench had earlier declared its detention valid rejecting a writ petition filed challenging the extension.

Yesterday, a larger bench comprising Justice Shah Abu Nayem, Justice B K Das and Justice Khademul Islam Chowdhury declared the detention illegal and without lawful authority upon hearing the petition.

Dr M Zahir was the counsel of the petitioner while Assistant Attorney General Mukhlesur Rahman stood for the state.

Hearing on graft cases against Altaf adjourned till May 30

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Dhaka Division yesterday adjourned the hearing on three graft cases against Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury till May 30.

Judge MA Shahidur Rahman adjourned the hearing following time petitions by the defence lawyers.

Advocate Masud Ahmed Talukder submitted three separate petitions, seeking adjournment of the hearing. He said Altaf Hossain Chowdhury could not appear in the court due to pre-occupations.

The prosecution side did not oppose the petitions for time.

After hearing both sides, the court granted the petitions.

In the first case, the accused was charged with misusing his official position by flying to his village by a helicopter in 1994 which cost the government Tk 12,54,822. He had

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