

The Daily Star

COMMITTED
TO
People's Right to Know

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XI No. 44

DHAKA WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 28, 2001

FALGUN 16, 1407 BS

ZELHAJ 3, 1421 HIJRI

16 PAGES PRICE: Tk 6.00

www.dailystarnews.com



PHOTO: STAR

City petrol pumps keep their sale suspended yesterday, protesting the killing of Shahed Newaz Babla, a filling station owner, by gunmen Friday night.

AL seeks fresh polls, probe into Meghna launch disaster

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday demanded fresh national elections for what they said saving the country from a crisis stemming from failures of the government.

At a press conference at its central office, AL leaders alleged that the government has clearly proved its inability to run the country in the last six months.

Demanding judicial probe into

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BNP moves to talk AL into joining JS

NAZMUL ASHRAF And NAZRUL ISLAM

The ruling BNP yesterday took up a move to talk main opposition Awami League (AL) into joining parliament.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan phoned Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid expressing the desire to have 'initial talks' about opening an official dialogue between the government and the main opposition on the latter's joining the House proceedings.

The AL is yet to join the eighth parliament that came into being in October last year.

Reached by The Daily Star later, Hamid confirmed to have had talks with Bhuiyan at around 1.30pm. But Bhuiyan was not available for comments.

"I would like to talk with you (Hamid) personally before inviting your party to a formal dialogue," Hamid quoted Bhuiyan as saying.

Hamid told Bhuiyan that he would need to consult AL chief Sheikh Hasina or the acting party chief Abdus Samad Azad before proceeding further.

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina is now on a private visit to the United States and is expected to return home on May 23.

The two leaders agreed to have follow-up talks soon in a bid to do the spadework for the planned talks, sources close to them said.

Commenting on the government move, Hamid told the Star that his party would like to discuss everything -- from 'political persecution' to 'misrule' by the coalition government and the conditions of the AL to join the parlia

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Altaf 's boomer

ZAYADUL AHSAN

Some outrageous and callous comments by the home minister in recent times have prompted the public to question the government's intent to curb crime.

In the last four days, as many as 10 persons -- from a ward commissioner to a top criminal and from a young woman to a tiny tot -- were killed in the capital alone. Police could not arrest any prime suspects of the killings. And to rub salt in the wounds of the aggrieved families, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury came up with insensible remarks.

"It is not possible to prevent crimes including murders since criminals do not announce beforehand that they are going to kill someone," said the home minister on more than one occasion, the latest being at the Badda residence of 20-month old Naushin who was killed last week. He however added

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Gas committee for careful Indian market tapping

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ensuring energy security, more oil and gas exploration and a cautious approach toward tapping the Indian market are some of the recommendations being considered by the National Gas Utilisation Committee.

The committee headed by former secretary Azimuddin Ahmed held a meeting yesterday to draw the conclusion of its upcoming report.

The report, now being drafted, is likely to be submitted to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia within the next two weeks, committee sources said.

"We are not yet to write down the recommendations," said a committee member.

In the context of widespread debates on gas reserves and export issues, two national committees on gas resources and utilisation were set up in January.

The committee members observed that export of raw gas was the best option followed by electric

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Restored rice supply eases prices

REAZ AHMAD

With supply line restored, traders in Dhaka said yesterday rice price has come down immediately, dispelling widespread fear of an unusual price hike in the peak Boro season.

The coarse rice price that started going up during suspension of rice supply from Naogaon to Dhaka on Friday and Saturday came down to normal yesterday again, as the suspension was withdrawn, market sources said.

Coarse variety that was priced around Tk 430 to Tk 450 per maund prior to the supply suspension rose by Tk 15 to Tk 20 in some areas in the capital.

Traders at Mohammadpur Krishi Market, one of the biggest rice wholesale market in the city, told The Daily Star that loading of rice on trucks resumed in Naogaon from yesterday morning and fresh supplies were supposed to arrive in Dhaka from last night.

The resumption was an outcome of the government's renewed assurance to the rice traders and truckers that rice-laden trucks would get police escort on Naogaon-Dhaka

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Hospital watch

Smoky hospitals spew health hazard

NAIMUL HAQ

Incinerators of the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) and the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) release highly toxic substances, putting public health at a high risk.

Smoke from the incinerator-burnt plastic materials causes cancer, as researches show.

Worse, the two hospitals are using the incinerators without the permission of the Department of Environment (DoE).

It is mandatory to seek approval for the use of incinerators before they are commissioned. The devices are categorised as 'red' by the DoE because they are highly polluting.

Three incinerators at the DMCH were officially commissioned with former health minister Sheikh Selim inaugurating them on March 31 last year. The devices have since been used at least thrice a day, exposing the environment and a large number of residences in the area to deadly toxic fumes.

The incinerators at the DMCH were installed in October 1998 and two at the CMCH almost simultaneously.

Recent visits to the DMCH have revealed that the devices burn plastic or polyvinyl chloride (PVC)

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PHOTO: STAR

Md Shah Alam, an incinerator operator at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital, removes the burnt remains of hospital waste.

Govt budges from its pledge on women's reserved seats

NAZMUL ASHRAF

The BNP-led coalition government is going back on its election commitment to a direct election to women's reserved seats in the Jatiya Sangsad, as it plans to restore the previous constitutional provision on the crucial issue.

It is likely to introduce a bill seeking revival of the reserved seats for women in the House during its forthcoming session beginning on June 4, the law ministry sources said. Still, officials are examining alternative options.

The planned bill suggests a return to the previous arrangement - election of the MPs from women's

quota by the House, which lapsed due to the BNP's non-cooperation. The bill may also follow the old orders on the number of such lawmakers and the tenure of reserved seats in parliament. The last parliament had 30 reserved seats and their latest ten-year tenure expired last year.

The BNP's election manifesto pledged a direct election to the reserved seats and an increase in the number.

Sources said the ruling coalition now finds it "very difficult" to implement its election commitment, given the country's socio-political reality.

A series of consultations at different levels in the ruling alliance

failed to find out a realistic and an amicable formula on the BNP's poll pledge about women's quota in parliament, they explained.

"A direct election to the reserved seats sounds impractical whatever the number is...because it will involve the entire electorate -- a giant task which is not desirable in the existing political situation," said an influential BNP leader.

Direct election of women MPs is a sort of general election involving huge expenditures, he argued.

Under such an arrangement, he pointed out, the constituency of a woman MP would be so large that

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See the rules and coupon of

The Daily Star

RANGS TOSHIBA

WORLD CUP QUIZ

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Husband allegedly kills wife, 2 sons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A husband allegedly strangled his wife and two sons.

The horrifying incident took place at their residence at Uttar Badda in the city at night on Thursday and the partially decomposed bodies were recovered yesterday.

Badda police said they suspect that Rokeya Begum, 30 and her sons Fahim Hassan, 11 and seven-month-old Saem Hossain were strangled by her husband Hafizur Rahman, a driver by profession.

They said last night that family

feud could be the reason for the killings. Rahman is being interrogated by senior police officials at the police station, they said.

Rahman's neighbours got curious yesterday morning as foul order was coming out of the tin-shed house, locked from outside. They peeped through the window saw three bodies on the floor.

They informed police who broke the door and recovered the bodies.

As police recovered the bodies, Rahman appeared there and told

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Internal feud JCD leader gunned down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader was gunned down over internal feud in the city yesterday.

Pintu, former vice-president of the Dhaka College unit of the JCD, was taken to a lane close to the campus and shot dead point-blank by some unidentified youths, 50 feet off the Mirpur Road at about 2:30pm. Police said JCD activists killed him.

"Three to four youths killed him

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