

10 PPP MPs-elect defect to pro-Musharraf party

AFP, Islamabad

Ten members of former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's opposition party have broken ranks on the eve of the inauguration of the first parliament in three years, declaring their support for the chief pro-military party, Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q).

ment that resulted from last month's elections. The PML-Q and smaller parties supporting military ruler President Pervez Musharraf failed to muster the 172-seat majority needed to form government. Having failed so far to cement a coalition deal with Islamic parties, they require the support of at least 21 MPs from other parties. The PPP dissenters said they were backing a "government of national consensus," the term used here for a proposed coalition between the PML-Q and Benazir's PPP. Musharraf, the army chief who stole power in a 1999 coup and pledged to restore civilian rule within

three years, is said to have favoured a joint PML-Q and PPP government, on condition that the self-exiled Bhutto stay out of Pakistan. PML-Q's intensive efforts to woo an Islamic party alliance, which holds the balance of power with a surprise 59 seats, appear to have failed after the latest round of talks broke down late Thursday, just before the PPP dissenters' went public with their decision. PPP's parliamentary leader Makhdoom Amin Fahim had lobbied for a coalition with the PML-Q, but hardliners in the party were opposed to joining hands with Musharraf's allies. Bhutto herself had been seeking commitments that some one dozen

graft charges against her and her jailed husband Asif Ali Zardari would be dropped and he would be released, PPP members and officials involved in private negotiations have said. PML-Q, the largest parliamentary party, won 103 of the assembly's 342 seats, and some 15 to 20 independent seat-holders have since joined the party. PPP, which campaigned vigorously against PML-Q, holds 81 seats, the second largest after PML-Q. Leading the PPP dissenters, Makhdoom Faisal Saleh Hayat said their move was "in the larger national interest" and aimed at

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'Stop dumping garbage into rivers'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Inhabitants of 36 villages under Khilgaon Police Station have threatened to seal off the downstream meeting point of three rivers -- Narai, Debdholai and Balu -- unless the government takes immediate steps to end acute pollution. The villagers asked the government to end dumping of garbage into the rivers so that they can get pure water for household use. Some 800 demonstrators brought out a 'pitcher procession' in the city yesterday, demanding pure water. The Barogram Unnayan Sangstha, the Hunger Project-Bangladesh and Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon organised the programme. The two-hour demonstration beginning at 10:00am ended on the Rampura Bridge in front of the Bangladesh Television (BTV) SEE PAGE 11 COL 6



Demonstrators from 36 villages under the Khilgaon Police Station parade down the city streets in a procession yesterday, demanding an end to severe water pollution in the Narai, Debdholai and Balu rivers. PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: STAR

The banks of the Khowai river (left) in Habiganj are paved up with concrete blocks and boulders; and embankment construction is going on yesterday at the site of the project that could not be completed even in 28 years.

Drug trader dies of heart attack during army raid

UNB, Jhenidah

An alleged drug trader, who was a heart patient, died Wednesday night apparently for fear of army raid. The dead was identified as Anwar Ali of village Jholapara in Kotchandpur upazila. Army camp sources said they recovered 1.6 kgs of ganja and 32 bottles of phensidyl from the house of Anwar Ali during a raid at the upazila town and in adjacent areas at 7:30pm on the day.

At one stage, when the army team asked for Anwar's whereabouts, his family members gave misleading information saying that Anwar was not in the house as he is sick and under treatment at a hospital in Khulna. In fact, Anwar, a heart patient, had been admitted to Kotchandpur upazila health complex for treatment. To avoid army raid, he got himself released from the health complex and took shelter at another

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Khowai project limping for last 28 years

IQBAL SIDDIQUEE, Sylhet

The Khowai river project in Habiganj could not be completed even in 28 years while Tk 59 crore has already been spent. The project was launched in 1973 with an estimated cost of Tk 39.41 crore including a foreign currency component of Tk 3.64 crore and was supposed to be completed in 1983. But it could not be completed due to untimely allocation of funds, corruption and misuse of money, sources alleged. The project includes reconstruction of 78 miles embankment, construction of protection wall at six points, excavation or re-excavation of 65 miles channel for flow of flood water and 37 miles irrigation drain, loop cutting and construction of cross dams at six points, reconstruction of bridges at Shayestaganj and installation of two pump stations. But, in the last 26 years, 93 kilometres flood control embank-

ment and 36 kilometres 'submersible embankment' were constructed and loop cutting at eight points done. Besides, construction of two sluice gates and 28 irrigation structures and embankment protection work with concrete blocks and boulders have been done at places. Since the very beginning, the project work suffered greatly almost every year due to delay in allocation of funds. Besides spending Tk 59 crore, huge quantities of wheat were allocated during the last 26 years, large portions of which were allegedly misappropriated, the sources said. The project was designed to bring over 16,000 acres of land under irrigation and protect 63,000 acres from flood for an additional yield of 14,000 tonnes of food grains. In fiscal 1995-96, a Tk 72 crore revised scheme named 'Khowai River Project' was taken up, of which Tk 18 crore was earmarked from government's funds and the rest from donors. But no donor has yet offered funds, the source added. As the first phase of the work

could not be completed after spending Tk 29 crore, the second phase was started in 1995-96, under which Tk 25.40 crore was spent till last year against the targeted expenditure of Tk 33.12 crore. This year, Tk 4.5 crore has been allocated. Of this, Tk 70 lakh will be spent for paying last years' outstanding bills of contractors and Tk 45 lakh to meet the establishment expenditure. The rest Tk 3.35 crore will be spent for construction of two kilometres flood control embankment, two regulators, four pipe sluices and protection of 200 square metre river bank with boulders. Mentionably, for another similar project in the area -- the Second Habiganj Town Protection Project --, the Asian Development Bank provided Tk 16.53 crore, which was spent for protection of river banks along the town with boulders. In the second phase of the Khowai river project, work for con

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AL to expand central body inducting young faces

REAZ AHMAD

The Awami League (AL) is almost certain to expand its central working committee (ALCWC) inducting fresh and young faces into the party leadership, party sources said. The main opposition party is often criticised for its bias towards elderly leaders who have been steering it since the Pakistan period and led the nation in the Liberation War. But the party is now actively considering shifting some of them to its advisory committee from the central committee. The 67-strong ALCWC would be expanded to a 101-member one. Thus there would be more room within it to accommodate relatively young leaders, the sources mentioned. With only a little over a month left for the much-delayed triennial central council of the AL, the party is also planning to have seven organising secretaries for as many organisational divisions. It now has only one organising secretary for the whole country. The organisational divisions are Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet, Barisal and Rangpur. The AL has already decided that unlike previous occasions, this time it would have a fresh central committee directly elected by the councillors representing grassroots units. The party rank and file consider this a major step forward in practising democracy within the organisation. In the previous councils held in 1983, 1987, 1992 and 1997, the

councillors had authorised party chief Sheikh Hasina to choose other leaders including party general secretary. The triennial council, originally scheduled to be held in 2000, was not held. The party rather held a special council in June that year just to extend the tenure of its central committee (formed in 1997) by two years. On expiry of the two-year extended tenure in June this year, the party again extended it by six more months.

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Graft case Charge-framing hearing against Amu adjourned

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Special Court for Dhaka Division on Thursday adjourned till January 5 next year the hearing on charge-framing in two graft cases against former food minister Amir Hossain Amu. Judge Mohammad Azizul Huq passed the order following time petitions by the defence lawyers. In the first case filed with the Ramna Police Station, it is alleged that on July 15 last year the then food minister Amu gave instruction through 'unofficial notes' for issuance of 52 delivery orders for procurement of one lakh tons of rice under his quota as minister. He then

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US executes Pakistani national

AFP, Jarratt, Virginia

Pakistani national Mir Aimal Kasi was executed here late Thursday by lethal injection for the murder of two CIA employees, a Virginia state prison spokesman said, as Washington braced for possible reprisals from Islamist militants. Kasi was pronounced dead at 9:07 pm local time at Greensville Correctional Center, said Larry Traylor, spokesman for the State Department of Corrections. Kasi -- dressed in a blue prison shirt, blue jeans and flip flops, his hands and feet chained -- appeared nervous, his breathing a little labored, as the execution took place, Traylor said. "Accompanied by his spiritual

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13 injured, houses ransacked as AL, BNP clash in Narsingdi

UNB, Narsingdi

At least 13 people were injured in a clash between the supporters of BNP and Awami League at Baroi Charnadua village in Raipura upazila yesterday. Police and local people said the clash erupted when the supporters of Nowab Mia, an Awami League-backed UP chairman candidate, attacked their rivals backing pro-BNP candidate A Awal Talukder at around 7am. The Union Parishad elections across the country are set for January-February. The injured were sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital and some clinics. Houses of Horju Mia, Mongal Mia, Siddik Member, Sentu Mia, Nurul Haque and Abul Hashem -- all supporters of Talukder -- were ransacked during the clash. Both the groups filed cases blaming each other for the violent clash.

Boiler explosion at rice mill in Sylhet: 7 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Seven people were injured in boiler explosion at a rice mill at Alamport on the outskirts of the city yesterday. The incident took place at Shahjalal Automatic Rice Mill at around 5pm. The injured are Rashid Alam, 38, Ranjit Sarker, 29, Johtsna Begum, 30, Suhed, 2, Mahfuza, 35, Shaheda, 27 and Nurjahan, 28. Fire Brigade personnel rushed to the spot, rescued the injured people and sent them to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

Leonid shower to be last meteor fiesta for decades

AFP, Paris

The Leonid shooting stars return next week for what is likely to be their last great fireworks display for three decades, and maybe even as long as a century. The Leonids show up every November when the Earth moves through a narrow trail of rubble left by Comet Tempel-Tuttle in its lonely swing around the Sun, an event that occurs once every 33 years. As the dust and tiny pieces of rock enter the Earth's atmosphere, the speed of that collision -- 71 kilometres per second -- causes them to vaporise and die in a fiery, golden streak. Bigger rocks sizzle up in a fireball, even sometimes leaving a smoke trail. Because they appear in the sickle-shaped constellation of Leo, the Lion, the meteors are known as

the Leonids. In recent years, the Leonids have been magnificent because of the rocky treasure deposited by Tempel-Tuttle during its last flyby, in 1998. This year's meteors have been eagerly awaited because the Earth will plough through two thick trails left in 1767 and in 1866. Cosmic arithmetic means this will be the last time for many years that our planet will traverse such a rich meteor source, and astronomers are hoping for a celestial storm. It will be "the last great storm for 30 years, and the biggest in the 21st century," says the US magazine Astronomy, while its rival Sky et Telescope suggests it could be the last strong Leonid shower for 100 years.

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Magnificent meteor shower

The Leonid shooting stars are visible when the earth moves through clouds of debris left by the Comet Tempel-Tuttle

Tempel-Tuttle's trail

As the rocks and dust enter the earth's atmosphere they burst into flames

Tempel-Tuttle's orbit

November 2002 will see an impressive fireworks display when the earth crosses thick trails of rubble left in 1767 and 1866

Meteor shower appears in the Leo constellation

Best viewing time, Europe: November 19, 0400 GMT

AFP