

Khaleda asks Hasina to give up hartal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to give up what she said was the path of hartal, violence and destruction and asked the people to resist the politics of

destruction.

Addressing a mammoth public meeting at Azad office ground in Lalbagh, she said people did not want mindless hartals and already expressed no confidence to the politics that hindered development. Referring to her arch-rival and

Awami League President Hasina's commitment of not calling hartal even when in opposition, she said: "You made many promises to the nation, but you did not keep any. This time I urge you to keep only one promise - the promise of not calling

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia addresses a public rally at Azad office ground in Lalbagh yesterday where she called upon Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina to give up hartal.



PHOTO: STAR

Historic March 7 today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the historic March 7, the day when Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman called upon Bangladeshis to wage a decisive struggle against the Pakistan junta, setting the tone for the 1971 War of Liberation.

On this day in 1971, Bangabandhu delivered his historic speech before a capacity crowd at Dhaka's Suhrawardy Uddan (the then Race Course Maidan).

In a thunderous voice, he declared 'Ebarer Sangram Amader Mukti Sangram, Ebarer Sangram Swadhinatar Sangram' (this struggle is for our freedom, this struggle is for independence), inspiring people from all walks of life to prepare for the war that the Pakistani regime would inflict upon the unarmed Bangladeshis 18 days later, committing one of the worst genocide in history.

To mark the day, the Awami League (AL) has chalked out various programmes while Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina issued a message recalling the significance of the day.

In her message, Hasina urged the countrymen to build a poverty- and exploitation-free 'Sonar Bangla',

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Gulshan-Banani plot allocation mired in 'political subterfuge'

Most lands are allegedly set aside for ruling coalition men

PINAKI ROY

A move is allegedly underway to award most of the land under the Gulshan-Banani Plot Allocation Project to a group of ruling coalition policymakers, although Rajuk (Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakkha) has invited applications from the public.

Since January 10, the city developer has sold hundreds of application forms, each costing Tk 1,500. The original January 31 deadline for application was also extended to February 15.

While most Rajuk officials are

tight-lipped about the project, a few decided to talk. They said all these application procedures are nothing but a 'whitewash' to justify allocation to the chosen politicians. "It is already decided who are going to get the land," said a top Rajuk official requesting anonymity.

Till the closing date, some 2,400 aspirants applied without knowing they are being taken for a ride.

Sources said some senior ministers, prominent lawmakers of the ruling alliance, and some influential government officials and judges who do not own any land in Dhaka are among the privileged group set

to be awarded the prime real estate. The remaining comparatively small number of plots will be distributed among the general public, mostly foreign wage earners.

Some top ministers and coalition lawmakers have already put in their applications for the plots, official sources said.

A powerful minister who also holds a top position in the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party is so certain to win a plot that he has already surrendered his Nikunja land he was awarded before.

"Nomination for allotment of the

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Hartal passes off without major incidents

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal enforced by main opposition Awami League (AL) and six left-leaning political parties yesterday to protest the attack on eminent writer Humayun Azad and demand the BNP-led coalition government's resignation passed off without major incidents of violence.

At least 20 opposition activists were injured in the capital when police clubbed a procession of Shyampur thana unit of the AL in Dholapara area in the capital in the morning. Police also picked up nine AL activists from the spot to cap the number of arrests in the capital. Elsewhere, at least 48 people were injured.

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Benapole land port stops on Indian C&F agent strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Export-import activities between Bangladesh and India through Benapole land port remained suspended since Thursday due to an indefinite strike enforced by Indian C&F Agents' Association.

The association began the strike protesting a restriction imposed by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) on the movement of C&F agents of both the countries without multiple visa. So long, the C&F agents used tokens to cross borders of both the countries whenever needed.

Benapole C&F agents said their officials go to Petrapole of India everyday showing token given by customs. On the other hand, the officials of Indian C&F agents'

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Baby food prices skyrocket

STAR REPORT

The prices of baby foods, specially milk powder, have suddenly soared Tk 45 a kg in the city markets.

The worst however is yet to come as consumers are bracing for another round of price spiral in a couple of days, according to market sources.

Traders said they are being forced to pay more to the distributors, who, in turn, put the sudden rise in the prices down to a rise in import cost due to currency fluctuation.

The prices of Nido, a leading powdered milk brand, are on a steep rise -- a 900-gram tin-packed Nido was being sold at Tk 405 yesterday, which was Tk 365 three days ago.

A 400-gram Nido carton was selling at Tk 137 on Friday and the price of the same in the city's Karwan Bazar market ranged between Tk 150 and Tk 160 yesterday.

day.

The 400-gram paper-packed Dano, another leading milk powder brand, was selling at Tk 111 two weeks ago against yesterday's price of Tk 117.

An official of Nestlé Bangladesh Limited said the prices of raw materials of Nido that come from Australia have risen.

"The increase in raw materials prices, a strengthened Australian dollar against taka and related duty impact are the main reasons for the hike," said M. Zulfikar Hussain, human resources and corporate affairs director of Nestlé Bangladesh Limited.

"The price of Nido is comparatively higher than other available milk powders in the world market because of its premium quality. This increase has been made to adjust with our cost structure," Zulfikar said.

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JS BOYCOTT

AL MPs risk membership

ALPP brings matter to Hasina's notice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The political scenario may lurch into uncertainty if the lawmakers of the main opposition Awami League (AL) lose their Jatiya Sangsad membership sticking to the parliament boycott decision well into the next budget session.

AL lawmakers' absence in parliament is likely to be 60 days in the current session and may rise to more than 90 days during the budget session.

The parliamentary party of the AL has already brought the prospect of losing membership to the notice

of Sheikh Hasina and sought her decision on the issue.

According to the constitution, if lawmakers absent themselves 90 consecutive days from parliament without a leave, they lose membership of the Jatiya Sangsad.

If the 60 AL seats fall vacant, by-elections in the constituencies must take place in next 90 days. Political analysts say if such a situation arises, the main opposition will take a hard line as part of their anti-government movement and try to resist the polls, sparking a chaotic face-off.

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VAT on rod raw materials goes

Duty on finished products halved

UNB, Dhaka

To cool down an overheated market of MS rod the government withdrew the 15 percent VAT on raw material and halved the import duty on finished products of meltable steel.

The contingency measure could relax the import of MS rods for catering immediate needs of the country's burgeoning construction

industry in the current season, as the government reduced the import duty from 15 percent to 7.5 percent.

An official announcement yesterday said that the step was taken for the sake "continuity of the development process in the country" as price of MS products continued to rise on the domestic market.

With the VAT waived, the tax incidence on all kinds of raw mate-

rial of MS items would further come down to 7.5 percent from the existing 23.63 percent, said the National Board of Revenue.

The raw materials include sponge iron, meltable and re-rollable scrap, powder of pig iron and steel, iron ingot, billet and scrap vessel.

To keep the construction

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Mixed bag over CPJ observation

Govt rejects statement as 'motivated'

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK

The statement of the New York-based media watchdog the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), terming Bangladesh the 'most violent country in Asia for news-men', triggered mixed reactions among the government and journalists who agreed journalists in Bangladesh are indeed exposed to high risks.

The government and the leaders of pro-government journalists' unions, aggrieved at the report, questioned the rationale for CPJ's observation as it did not cite how such a conclusion was made.

A number of leaders of pro-opposition journalists' unions, on

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4 opposition parties observe demonstration day March 9

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four opposition parties will observe March 9 as demonstration day across the country to protest police bars to opposition activities, arrests, and attack on eminent writer Humayun Azad.

The Awami League (AL), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Workers Party and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD)-Inu after yesterday's shutdown declared the new programme.

The main opposition AL will bring out a mass procession in the city today demanding immediate resignation of the 30-month BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government for, what the opposition said, absolute failure to rule the country.

Beginning from the AL central

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