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Curbing graft top priority, free anti-graft body soon

PM tells BDF meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said the government has given top priority to curbing corruption and steps are underway to make the Independent Anti-corruption Commission operational soon.

"The commission will be vested with adequate financial, administrative and legal authority to carry out its functions independently," she said while inaugurating the three-day Bangladesh Development Forum meeting at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka.

The process of separating the judiciary from the executive has also started and Judicial Service Commission has been constituted to recruit judicial officers, the prime minister mentioned.

"I would like to reaffirm our commitment to establishing an accountable government. In pursuance of this commitment we have

already implemented various reforms for improving governance, law and order and investment climate," she said.

Enactment of Speedy Trial Law and setting up of speedy trial tribunals have resulted in rapid disposal of a good number of heinous criminal cases, Khaleda said, adding these measures have brought noticeable qualitative changes in the criminal justice delivery system.

"We have made good progress in protecting and ensuring children's rights. We are now taking steps to create the office of Independent Children's Commissioner to further uphold the cause of our children."

She said, "We recognise the role of civil society and NGOs in Bangladesh's development process. Many of our success stories in the areas of health, education, micro-credit, women empowerment etc are the result of government-NGO

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Donors concerned at politically-linked violence, graft

Ordinary citizens need to be reassured as they walk in the street or sit at home with their children, World Bank vice-president says at BDF meet launch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Development partners at the launch of three-day Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting in Dhaka yesterday said dysfunctional politics, politically-linked violence, growing crime and corruption were holding back the nation's growth.

"They referred to Friday's killing of opposition lawmaker Ahsanullah Master in a rally in Tongi, recent mass arrests and the harsh treatment of some lawmakers making a peaceful attempt to set up a new party."

"Several recent murders of businessmen and the seeming protection of the perpetrators have only served to heighten concerns over law and order," said Praful Patel, vice-president of World Bank's South Asia region and head coordinator of the donor community at the BDF

Commenting on the killing of Ahsanullah in his speech to the inaugural session, he said: "It is a loss to the nation."

"Politicians can take care of some of the norms on which a healthy society relies -- personal security, transparency, fair legal protection, a level regulatory playing field. Bangladeshis will do the rest."

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, who opened the BDF meeting at Hotel Sonargaon, and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, who heads the Bangladesh side, explained the government's position on the issues.

"We have taken a number of measures to improve the law and order situation," said Khaleda, adding, "The parliament has recently enacted a law for creating a Rapid Action Battalion in order to curb crimes expeditiously." The Battalion has gone into operation in

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks to Praful Patel, vice-president of World Bank's South Asia region, at the launch of three-day Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) meeting at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

2 extortionists die in Khulna after interrogation by police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Two extortionists injured during interrogation by police died at Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) at noon yesterday.

The two -- Hasib, son of Abdul Jabbar, and Shahidul, son of Amir Ali, -- were arrested from KDA New Market area on Friday night.

They were injured during the interrogation at the KMP headquarters, hospital sources said.

However, police said the two were injured in an attack by a mob. Assistant Commissioner Anisur Rahman said Hasib and Shahidul had a link with the outlawed Purbal Banglar Communist Party. They used to collect tolls from the businessmen and issued death threats to those who refused to pay, he added.

Five more extortionists, arrested by police at Daulatpur on Friday night, are now undergoing treatment at the KMCH.

They fell sick during the interrogation at Daulatpur thana, sources said.

They are Hannan Sarker, 22, Abdul Halim, 23, Monir Hossain, 24, Monirul, 23, and Jahangir, 26.

Police said they exploded two powerful bombs at Daulatpur Bazar in a bid to loot the shops.



Fury rages in Dhaka, Tongi as AL MP laid to rest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) protesters went on the rampage yesterday in Gulistan and adjoining areas, damaging over 100 vehicles after the namaz-e-janaza of slain AL lawmaker Ahsanullah Master at Paltan Maidan.

Police chased the agitators and fired tear-gas canisters to disperse them and picked up a number of people from the troubled spots.

Earlier, thousands of mourners including frontline leaders of the AL and its different fronts and other political parties thronged Paltan Maidan in the morning to attend the namaz-e-janaza of Ahsanullah Master, also former president of AL's labour front Jatiya Sramik League. A group of about 15 assailants

gunned down Ahsanullah and schoolboy Omar Faruk Ratan and wounded five others in a burst of gunfire at the ward-level conference of AL's volunteers' wing Shechchhasebak League at 12:30pm Friday.

Large numbers of people also attended the janaza. However, none of the leaders of ruling BNP took part in it. Violence flared up at around 11:30am when angry opposition activists started damaging the rush-hour vehicles at random at Bangabandhu Square, Golap Shah Mazar, Noor Hossain Square, Baitul Mokarram (north gate) and Paltan intersection areas.

The vandalism prompted police to fire tear shells, forcing bus drivers and conductors and passengers and

pedestrians to run for cover. Shop-owners shut up their shops and street hawkers fled, leaving Gulistan area almost deserted for about half an hour.

The body of Ahsanullah Master MP draped in the national flag and flags of Awami League and Sramik League, was brought to AL headquarters on Bangabandhu Avenue from Dhaka Medical College Hospital in the morning.

Party leaders and workers placed wreaths on the coffin of the slain labour leader there. The coffin was then taken to Paltan Maidan for the first janaza at around 11:00am.

Top political leaders and hundreds of leaders and workers of different organisations turned up at Paltan Maidan and along with com

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4TH DAY OF MUNICIPAL POLLS AL edges over BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The municipality elections roll into the fourth day with holding of polls in 14 municipalities today.

Elections in 24 municipalities across the country ended quietly yesterday, and Brotee, an election watchdog, reported incidents of false voting in almost all centres.

The unofficial results in 16 out of 24 municipalities could be obtained till the filing of this report. BNP-backed candidates won seven posts and AL-backed ones won in eight posts while one went to JP (E).

Secretary of the Election Commission Secretariat SM Zakaria meanwhile told journalists, "The election is being conducted fairly."

In Moulvibazar, the ruling alliance supporters ejected the polling agents of three opposition candidates, including the AL-backed

candidate, from the Kashinath-Alauddin High School centre.

The three aggrieved candidates then boycotted the polls, sparking a series of clashes between AL supporters and police.

Meanwhile, 30 people were arrested, including a polling agent and six women voters, for false voting in the Chakhtil area.

Following is the list of chairmen unofficially elected: Bakerganj: Ratna Amin, JP (E); Chakhtil: Mustafa Kamal, BNP dissident; Raipur: ABM Jilani, BNP; Moreganj: Advocate Monirul Haq, AL; Nalitabari: Abdul Halim Ukil, AL; Natore: Kazi Shag Alam, BNP; Matlab: Enamul Haq Badal, BNP; dissident; Gouripur: Shaiful Islam Hoby, AL dissident; Ullaparua: Maruf bin Habib, AL; Shantabar: Qamrul Hasan, BNP;

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PHOTO: STAR

(Top) Over 50,000 people turn up at the Ijtema ground in Tongi yesterday to offer janaza prayers for Awami League lawmaker Ahsanullah Master gunned down Friday. (Bottom) Smokes spew out of readymade garment worth \$38,000 after angry supporters of the slain leader set fire to the Inland Container Depot-bound covered van in Gazipur.

AL mulls hard line again

Hasina cuts short US visit to announce fresh agitation

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The killing of Awami League (AL) lawmaker Ahsanullah Master has once again raised the spectre of violent political confrontation with Sheikh Hasina cutting short her US visit to announce fresh agitation programmes.

The party is now rethinking its decision for a return to parliament shelving street agitation for the time being, which it had taken apparently being frustrated with the failure of the deadline, party sources said. The AL is now highly likely to take

a tough line against the BNP-led coalition government after the assassination of its lawmaker.

It has called countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal for today and more programmes will be declared after tomorrow when Hasina returns home, party sources hinted.

"We are already in touch with the party chief and have informed her of the latest development. Tough programmes would be declared after the return of the leader," said a senior AL lawmaker, asking for anonymity.

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British troops face Shia wrath

AGENCIES, Najaf/Miari

Gunmen loyal to radical Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr yesterday rampaged through Basra and another southern Iraq city, attacking British patrols and government buildings a day after a Sadr aide offered worshippers money for capturing or killing coalition soldiers.

At least two Iraqis were killed and three British soldiers were wounded in the fighting, a British military spokeswoman said.

Hundreds of Sadr's Mehdi Army militiamen armed with assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades took over several areas of Iraq's second-biggest city and set up checkpoints on the streets.

Bursts of gunfire and explosions

echoed through the city. The British military reported some exchanges of fire between soldiers and gunmen. Also yesterday, attackers set off a bomb outside the house of a police official in the town of Habhab, 35 miles north of Baghdad. The blast killed two women and a man from the official's family, doctors said.

Sadr's top aide, Sheikh Abdulsattar al-Bahadli, offered the rewards in response to the mistreatment and humiliation of Iraqi prisoners by US guards -- a sign that the abuse scandal at the Abu Ghraib prison was spilling over into the confrontation between US troops and Sadr's militia.

He displayed documents and photos he claimed showed three

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AL enforces dawn-to-dusk hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) enforces a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today protesting the killing of its lawmaker Ahsanullah Master in Gazipur.

Blaming the 'government high-ups' for the killing, an emergency meeting of the AL central working committee Friday evening called the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown. However, the pourashabhas where elections are scheduled for today remain out of the purview of hartal.

The AL and its front organisations have taken all-out preparations to make today's strike a success while the government has assigned 6,000 law enforcers to the job of keeping order at city's 280

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B'Chy launches political party

Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh to 'unite nation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury yesterday formally launched his political party, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB), aimed at offering an alternative platform to unite the nation and ensure democracy in all spheres of life.

"We have come up with an alternative with the launch of the Bikalpa Dhara as corruption has emerged as an epidemic when most government decisions are taken for either personal, family or party benefits,"

Chowdhury told reporters at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity (DRU).

There remains no future for a country if a ruling party becomes corrupt and economic corruption gets an institutional shape, he told the press conference from where the BDB was launched.

Soon after the announcement of the party's name, his son and former lawmaker Mahi B Chowdhury proposed Chowdhury as the founding president and retired army

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