

DEMAND FOR REFORMS 14-party to stage demonstrations today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 14-party opposition combine observes today "reform proposals implementation day" in a bid to put pressure on the government before the final round of talks between the ruling BNP and the Awami League (AL) tomorrow.

The opposition is set to stage countrywide demonstrations today to observe the day. They will hold a massive rally on Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital and bring out a procession to press home their demands for electoral reforms.

The opposition top brass will instruct their activists today to go for all-out demonstrations with sticks, oars and poles to put up strong resistance and paralyse the city if the government hands over power to "BNP-partisan" Justice KM Hasan.

The top district level leaders will also direct local leaders to make preparations for keeping the streets under control if the situation so develops.

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Hasan's security upped as eyes fixed on him

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid heightened anxiety in the people's minds with the ruling and opposition alliances preparing to face off in the streets, it now depends on Justice KM Hasan where the country's politics will be heading for from next week.

In the wake of the opposition combine's threat to launch agitation against Justice Hasan's assuming office as the chief adviser to the next caretaker government on expiry of the present government's tenure next Friday, the government yesterday beefed up security for the former chief justice.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police yesterday deployed 12 personnel of the armed police battalion at Hasan's residence in addition to eight policemen stationed earlier. Different intelligence agencies are also maintaining close vigilance, police administration sources said.

The possibility of forging a consensus in the ongoing dialogue

between the ruling BNP and main opposition Awami League (AL) over Justice Hasan is diminishing fast due to the rigid stances of the two parties.

Meanwhile, the Bangabhaban, office and residence of the president, and the cabinet division are preparing for administering the oath of the next caretaker government.

Although the date for oath-taking is yet to be fixed, sources in the Bangabhaban and cabinet division said it will take place any day of the next week after the president invites Justice Hasan to take oath as the chief of the interim government.

But nothing is certain about the formation of the caretaker government as the ruling BNP is still favouring Justice Hasan to be its chief while the AL-led opposition combine has been vehemently opposing his appointment.

The position of Justice Hasan, who has maintained silence over

the controversy, is expected to become clear only after the president invites him to take oath as the chief adviser.

Speculations, however, are mounting over whether he will accept the post or not.

Some eminent persons from political and cultural arena, who have been trying to convince Justice Hasan not to accept the post of the caretaker government chief, have failed to guess his next course of action, sources said.

Many political analysts believe that Justice Hasan will not accept the offer sensing an imminent political confrontation, but others think that he might take the job as a challenge to prove his capability and neutrality.

"I do not see any ray of hope in the prevailing volatile political situation as both BNP and Awami League are preparing to confront each other. Everything now depends on Justice Hasan," former

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City abuzz with Eid shoppers

MOON MOON SULTANA

Shopping centres as well as the footpath shops of the capital are buzzing with shoppers as Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest festival of the Muslims, is only one or two days ahead.

"Many things are yet to be bought and the time is very short. So I am buying anything I find in front," said housewife Mina, who came to Gawsia Market from Mirpur yesterday.

On a footpath shop beside the Gawsia Market, she was choosing sandal-shoes for his two sons.

She will also go to the Priyangan Shopping Centre to buy ready-made shirts and pants for his sons after shopping at Gawsia, she said.

Footpath shops that sell cheap cosmetics and imitation jewellery are popular to the low-income customers.

Oxidised and golden earrings and chains costing Tk 50 to 200 are selling very well, said Rakibul, a footpath hawker.

Footpath shops selling ladies' bags and plastic products were also seen busy with customers.

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9 killed in stampede during zakat clothes distribution

STAR REPORT

At least nine people died and 35 others were injured in two incidents of stampede during handing out clothes of zakat among the destitute people in Mymensingh and Patuakhali yesterday.

At least six people including five women were killed and 15 others were injured yesterday morning when several thousand people gathered in front of a house at Aatami Bazar in Muktagachha upazilla, our correspondent in Mymensingh reports.

The dead are Fazila Khatun, 25, Hasen Khatun, 45, Khaleda Begum, 35, Noor Jahan Begum, 45, Rahima Khatun, 25 and Rahim Uddin, 45.

Of the injured, four were taken to Muktagachha Health Complex and later shifted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH)

as their condition deteriorated. The critically injured were Chhurat Begum, 50, Abdul Mannan, 42, Rajib, 12 and Noor Jahan. Noor Jahan succumbed to her injuries later.

Local and police sources said around five to six thousand people gathered before the main gate of the house of late Nabab Ali at Aatami Bazar around 6:00am to collect zakat clothes. A number of the people were allowed to enter the house to collect the clothes while others were impatiently waiting outside pressing against the gate. The gate eventually collapsed triggering the stampede.

Police rushed to the spot and recovered the bodies. The bodies were sent to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Sheikh Mahbubur Rahman, SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Govt bodies, Beximco among top defaulters

Sonali Bank sues 8, in talks with 12 others to recover 53pc bad loans

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

In a bid to recover its bad loans, Sonali Bank has sued eight of its top 20 loan defaulters who owe 53 per cent of the bank's defaulted loans.

The 12 other top defaulters include four government bodies and the bank authorities are trying to recover the amount from them through negotiations with the government.

The remaining eight defaulters, including a concern of the Beximco group, have taken initiative for rescheduling their loans soon, sources said.

Sonali Bank's total classified loans up to June 30 this year is Tk 9,701 crore of which Tk 5,120 crore lies with the top 20 defaulters.

The four state-owned enterprises--Bangladesh Petroleum

Corporation (BPC), Bangladesh Textile Mills Corporation (BTMC), Chittagong Jute Mills, and Khulna Newspaper Mills--owe the bank Tk 4,381 crore while the 16 private business entities owe Sonali Bank Tk 739 crore.

Bank sources said the BPC's total outstanding loan to the bank is Tk 4,490 crore, of which Tk 4,130 crore is classified.

A top official of Sonali Bank said the government recently paved the way for BPC to reschedule its more than 12-year-old loans without any down payment.

"But it might not bring any positive result since there are doubts over whether the BPC will be able to pay the instalments in time," said the official. "So, it is unlikely that the banks concerned

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Jute mill workers block Dhaka-Ctg highway

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Thousands of people travelling to the port city and the capital ahead of Eid, faced untold sufferings yesterday as agitating jute mill workers blockaded the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway to press home their demands for payment of arrears and bonuses.

Hundreds of buses, trucks and other vehicles were stuck in a severe traffic gridlock for over three hours as the angry workers of Anwara Jute Mill laid the barricades in front of the mill gate at Barabkunda under Sitakunda upazilla at around 10:00am.

The snarl-up stretched to around 30 kilometres, police and witnesses said.

At around 1:15pm, the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Sitakunda Jalaluddin Ahmed along with the police officials negotiated with the CBA leaders of the mill and assured them of payment of 10-days' arrear

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A launch leaves Dhaka yesterday with passengers occupying every bit of floor-space on the vessel ahead of the Eid holiday. Despite mobile courts' warnings of stern actions against such overloading, vessels carry on their malpractice.

Dissident BNP leaders may join new party of Oli, B Chy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of dissident leaders of ruling BNP is trying to create a common platform soon under the leadership of former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and BNP Standing Committee Member Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmed.

Badruddoza Chowdhury, also Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB), and Oli have already agreed in principle to form a new political party, sources said, adding that they will clarify their positions on this soon.

Sources said primary discussion between the BDB and Oli has completed and they are now trying to persuade BNP leaders at the district levels to join them to form the party.

"Bikalpa Dhara President Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury is a very good person. He is my friend and a senior leader. I want to make our relation stronger," Oli told reporters yesterday.

"I have talked to Badruddoza Chowdhury about the political situation," he said.

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Alliance's last day at office likely today

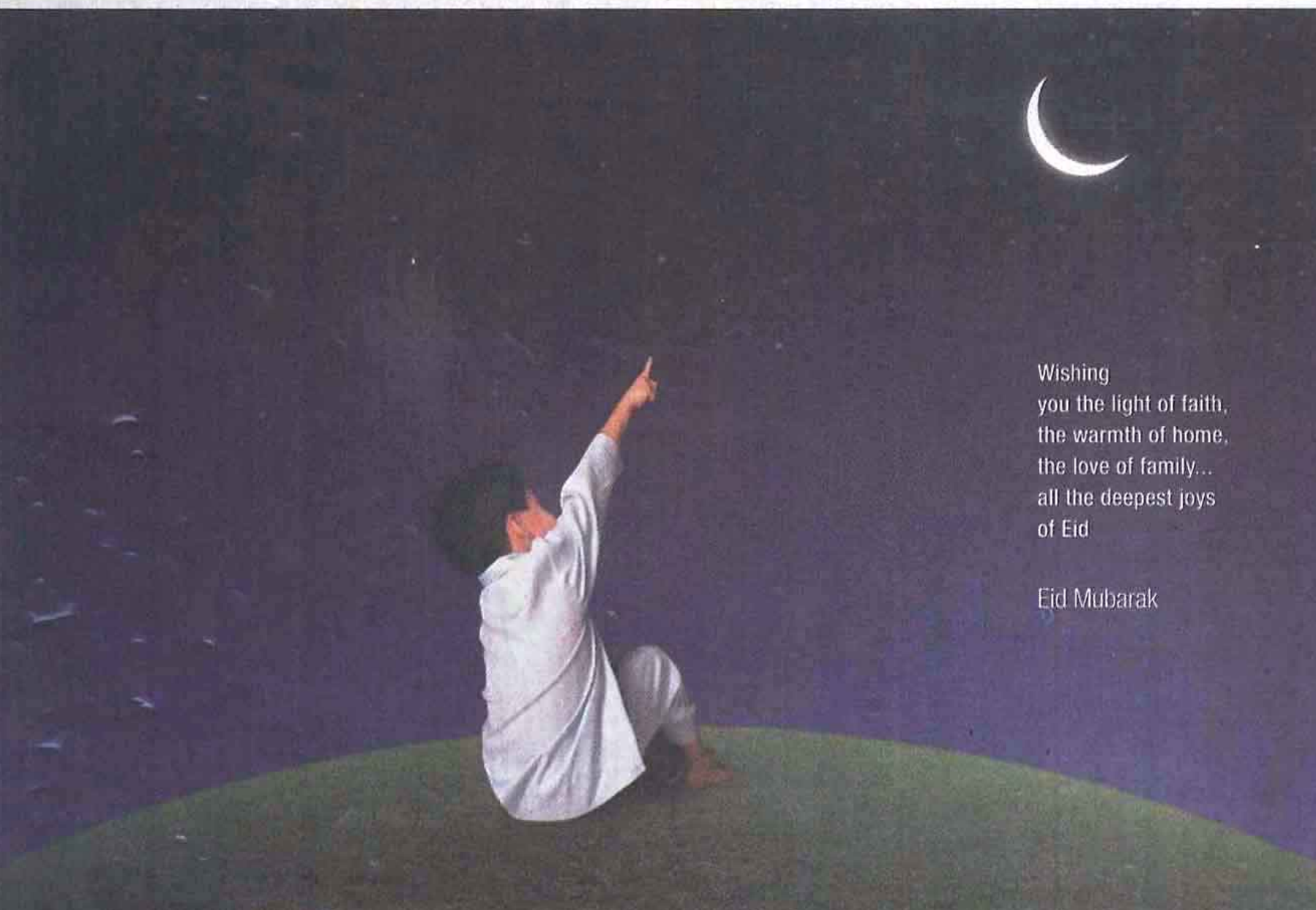
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ministers, state ministers and deputy ministers may attend their office at the ministries today for the last workday although the five-year tenure of the present four-party coalition government is scheduled to complete on October 27.

After the October 23-25 Eid vacation, the ministers can attend the office only for a day, as October 27 is Friday, a weekly holiday.

But due to the political preoccupations and the preparation for power handover, it will be tough for the ministers to attend the office on Thursday, the last working day for

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Wishing
you the light of faith,
the warmth of home,
the love of family...
all the deepest joys
of Eid

Eid Mubarak

Time is broken into transient moments. A blink can capture one precious moment from the fleeting passage of time. Memory can make it eternal. Sharing the memory gives it the name of knowledge.

Let us celebrate the eternity of happy moments picked from such momentous occasions and let us share the happiness around.



Congratulations to Dr M Yunus and Grameen Bank on attaining the Nobel Peace Prize - 2006

Many congratulations on receiving the highly coveted Nobel Peace Prize. Over here in the UK, our British friends and fellow Bangladeshis are thrilled to hear this fantastic news. It is a tremendous achievement not only for you and the Grameen Bank, but also for Bangladesh and all Bangladeshis living abroad. Your honest perseverance and dedication has brought us self respect and made us, and especially our nation, very proud.

It appears from the media coverage in Bangladesh that receiving your Nobel Peace Prize is already having a unifying effect on the whole country. This is a very good sign and has now inspired the whole nation. You have become a symbol for our nation internationally.

We pray that your hopes and aspirations for our country are allowed to materialise and that this coming effect will spill over and benefit the present political process in our country at this critical juncture.

We wish you a happy and long life.

With our warm regards

From all of us at

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