

## All set for sending

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not been fixed yet, but it would be three to four weeks later than October 23, the scheduled date," French Ambassador Jacques-André Costilhes told The Daily Star.

The 187 pieces of artefacts, including 128 life-size statues, terracotta and copper plaques, Pragna Paramita scriptures and coins from the Pal, Sen, Gupta and Maurya dynasties, have been chosen from Bangladesh National Museum, archaeological museums at Mahasthangarh, Paharpur and Mainamati, and Barendra Research Museum.

Earlier, several art connoisseurs filed a writ petition with the High Court against sending of the artefacts to the Paris exhibition, saying the deal was not transparent.

The court issued a two-month stay order on sending of the 187 artefacts to Paris.

The French ambassador later told at a press conference that the exhibition might not be held. A few intellectuals then urged the government to take necessary steps to send the antiquities to Paris as the exhibition would brighten the image of the country and bring them back.

Following a government application, the Supreme Court stayed the High Court order.

"All the artefacts have already been packed and they will be sent on October 13 morning by a special cargo flight," said a high official at the Ministry of Cultural Affairs. The ministry has sought security measure for taking them to the airport today.

Three officials from the Archaeology Department, National Museum and Barendra Research Museum will also fly to Paris by the same flight, the ministry source said, adding, "All of them will not stay in Paris for four months. But at least one of them will be present there during the whole exhibition."

Asked about the insurance money of the artefacts, the joint

secretary for the ministry said representatives of the two governments signed the deal and there is nothing to fear about losing the invaluable artefacts.

Sufi Mustafizur Rahman, chairman of archaeology department of Jahangirnagar University termed the manner of sending the artefacts "casual" without considering the hazards of the long journey.

"All the artefacts are being sent by a single flight. What will happen if the flight meets any accident? We will lose our heritage forever," Sufi said, adding that those should be sent in phases.

He informed that a few artefacts, including terracotta plaques, "Man Fin from behind" and "Peacock", do not have accession numbers, the identity of artefacts.

"Without the accession number it is not possible to identify the whereabouts of the artefacts," Sufi said.

However, an official of the Archaeology Department said all artefacts have their accession numbers.

Sufi also said 50 punch-mark coins, which are 2,500 years old, have only one accession number 95,727, and were insured for only 5,000 euros. A few other coins tagged as "gold and silver coins" were insured for 10,000 euros, but the number of those coins is not mentioned on the list.

The joint secretary for the cultural affairs ministry said they have taken photographs of all the items, which have been counted properly and well known to them. "It will not be a problem," she said.

Barrister Tania Amir, attorney of the petitioner to the High Court, who won the stay order, said they did not want to cancel the exhibition. What they wanted is a fair and transparent deal so that the artefacts get proper treatment and come back safely.

## 3 killed in bomb attack at Ajmer

AFP, Jodhpur, India

The death toll from a blast on one of India's most revered Muslim shrines in the northern state of Rajasthan rose to three yesterday as a worshipper succumbed to his injuries, police said.

Eighteen others have been hospitalised with injuries after the blast outside the Dargah Sharif, or holy Dargah, in the state's pilgrimage town of Ajmer. Police Inspector-General Nand Kishore told AFP.

"Six of them are in critical condition," he said, adding three of the 18 victims rushed to hospitals were children who were accompanying their parents to the ancient shrine.

Kishore said the complex was packed with 500 worshippers when the blast happened, with two Muslim men had died instantly in the blast.

## High-level

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government is carrying out reforms for revamping various sectors.

Yesterday's meeting discussed constituting working committees in different sectors, setting up of the proposed forum's secretariat and formulating recommendations for the forum.

Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam, Law Adviser Mainul Hossain, Communications Adviser Maj Gen (ret) MA Matin, Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed, leaders of top business chambers and high civil and military officials were present at the meeting.

## 8 jute mills

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Secretariat. "Some companies or persons will operate the mills paying rent to the government," he added.

The number of jute mills under the state ownership was 77 until the privatisation started in 1983.

During a deliberation to map out a survival strategy for the jute sector, a meeting in July with Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in chair decided to shut down the non-profitable mills.

The mills had been closed as part of a three-year reform programme to revive the jute sector. Adviser to the Jute and Textiles Ministry Geeteara Safiya Choudhury had said at the time of closure adding that the BJMC would resume operation at the rest 18 mills from July.

Geeteara then also said that 6,000 workers of the closed mills and another 8,000 from the rest 18 mills would be retrenched and required workforce will be recruited on a daily basis to cut back on labour cost.

At the meeting yesterday, the finance adviser said that leasing out mills would ensure jobs for the skilled workers who had lost their jobs after shutting down of the four mills.

"Those interested to take out lease of the mills now in operation will have to keep those working there at present. And the workers of the closed mills who were acceptable to all will also have priority during recruitment," he said.

## Last-minute

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in the capital so that they could do with their last-minute shopping ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

Although a huge number of city dwellers have already left Dhaka, the concrete jungle, to celebrate Eid with their near and dear ones at home, shopping malls are still crowded with shoppers, sellers and hawkers.

As usual, the roadside makeshift shops on the footpath marked the huge crowd compared to the posh shopping centres in the city.

Garment worker Selina was seen bargaining with a seller for a georgette sari on a footpath near Gawsia Market. On her delay in Eid shopping, she said she could not do it earlier for lack of money.

She received her salary on the 27th of Ramadan and went out yesterday to do the shopping. "A lot of things to buy, but the prices are so high. Heaven knows what I'll be able to buy!" she sighed.

On the same footpath housewife Rehana Parvin was looking for a readymade salwar-kamiz dupatta for her domestic help. "Actually, I did not get out of home all these days just to avoid extreme hot weather," she said.

Teenagers and youths were seen busy with buying jewellery matching or contrasting with their outfits in the open space of New Market.

A jeweller said stone-set huge earrings worth Tk 250 to Tk 600 are selling well this season.

Shoe stores were also seen flocked with shoppers. Customers seemed to prefer brand shoes to others for quality.

The salesman of a brand shoe house at Bashundhara City Shopping Mall expressed high hope that sales would be much better today as many people, specially men, get leave from their job.

Owner of 'That's it', a readymade garment shop at the same market, Kazi Badrul Islam said the sale is much better than the previous year.

Children and teenagers preferred the dress 'Gypsy' at his shop and spent Tk 2,000-2,500 for each piece. Italian silk embroidery three-piece for young ladies worth Tk 5,500 also sold well.

Beside the garment shops, crowds were also seen at cellphone shops at Eastern Plaza as many were eager to change the model during the Eid festival.

## Eid tomorrow

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Committee would sit at 6:30pm to scour the sky for the Shawal moon and also to receive information about moon sighting from across the country.

If the moon is not sighted today, the festival will be celebrated on Sunday.

The district-level moon-sighting committees, to be headed by deputy commissioners, will wire the national committee about the spotting of the moon anywhere in the country.

The committee will also collect information on moon sighting from the meteorological department.

President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in separate messages yesterday extended warmest greetings and heartfelt felicitations to the people of the country and to all heads of state and government of Muslim countries on the occasion of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Meanwhile, thousands of people have already left the capital for their village homes to celebrate the Eid with their loved ones.

Trains, launches and buses were crammed yesterday with homebound passengers as was the case the day before.

In Dhaka, shopping centres and malls saw heavy crowds of Eid shoppers yesterday, a common scene for the last few days.

The main Eid congregation will be held at the Jatiya Eidgah on the High Court premises in the morning.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed and other advisers, government high-ups, political leaders and the elite will say their Eid prayers at the Jatiya Eidgah. Several large Eid congregations will also be held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque.

All preparations have been made to hold these congregations in the city as well as elsewhere in the country.

The national flag will be hoisted at government and non-government offices for the Eid. The main streets and road lanes from Dhaka Gate at Banani to Bangabhaban in the city will be decorated with flags imprinted with 'Eid Mubarak' both in Bangla

and Arabic.

Bangabhaban, Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, Chief Adviser's Office, Bangladesh Secretariat, Supreme Court building, Baitul Mukarram Mosque, foreign ministry office and Osmani auditorium will be illuminated.

Eid will also be celebrated in Bangladesh missions abroad.

Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television as well as private television and radio stations will broadcast special programmes on this occasion. Newspapers have brought out special supplements today.

Special diets will be served at hospitals, jails, government-owned children and shelter homes, socially handicapped and vagabond welfare centres and shelter homes for the destitute people.

The Shishu Park will remain open to the underprivileged children on the Eid day.

Cultural functions, friendly football matches and Eid gatherings of children will also be held across the country.

CITY EID CONGREGATIONS  
Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) will arrange the main Eid congregation at the National Eidgah at 8:30am. There will be special arrangement for women at the venue.

In case of inclement weather, the main congregation will be held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at the same time.

Five congregations will be held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 7:30am, 8:30am, 9:30am, 10:30am and 11:30am. Congregations will also be held at all city mosques.

The country's biggest congregation will be held at Sholakia in Kishoreganj, which Channel i, a private television channel, will broadcast live from 9:40am to 10:30am.

Dhakabasi, a capital-based socio-cultural organisation, will bring out traditional procession at 4:00pm on the second day of Eid from Bangladesh Shishu Academy to celebrate the Eid.

Different political and socio-cultural organisations have greeted the countrymen on the occasion.

## AL, BNP trash idea

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brushed off the proposition yesterday while the AL presidium categorically turned it down as "prematuring".

Through her lawyer Khaleda said there is no constitutional crisis and such proposition is embarrassing.

The BNP chairperson, who was arrested on September 3 in a graft case and kept at a special jail set up on the Jatiya Sangsad premises, said the roadmap for the election next year is there and the task for the voter list with photographs is progressing.

"So, under the circumstances, the proposal for formation of a national consensus government is not acceptable," Khaleda said, adding, "The issue of forming this kind of government may come at a time of national crisis. But there is no constitutional crisis now."

AL Acting President Zillur Rahman said the proposal has been made too early. "It is meaningless to discuss the issue now," he said.

"His [Badruddoza] call sounds like putting the cart before the horse... Let the elections be held first and MPs be elected, then it may be given a thought," Zillur told reporters after a meeting of the party presidium.

The AL leader said an elected parliament is first required to have an elected government. "It means the elections have to be held first and then those who will win the elections will decide whether they will form a national consensus government," he added.

Senior leaders of both the AL and BNP have been saying for the last two days that there can be a consensus on some major issues. Political parties could reach a consensus to shun politics of hatred, violence and damage of public property in the name of demonstrations, they said.

But forming a national consensus government comprising all political parties will not be healthy for practising democracy as there will be nobody in parliament to criticise the government's wrongdoings and such an elected government may become autocratic, they argued.

The idea of a national government had also widely been discussed in different arena a few months after the formation of the current caretaker government following declaration of the state of emergency on January 11.

## CPD, Brac for OMS

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executive director of CPD, said if the shortfall in Aman production is not recovered by an abundant production of Boro, the safety level of food stock will fall and that will create further inflationary pressures.

Mahbub Hossain of Brac read out the report of the survey that gathered views from farmers in most areas of seven flood-affected districts including Tangail, Sirajganj, Dhunoi (Bogra), Gaibandha, Rangpur, Kurigram, and Lalmonirhat.

Majority of the farmers in these areas are anxious over the probable shortage of fertiliser in the next few months as the demand for fertiliser is likely to grow substantially by that time, Hossain said quoting the survey.

Most of the farmers surveyed preferred an open market system to the existing card system for purchasing fertiliser. Under the present distribution system, only 60 to 70 per cent of their requirements are fulfilled, said the farmers.

"Farmers do not like the present system of fertiliser distribution through cards as it needs certification from representatives of the local government and the local level extension officials. They would like to get the fertiliser through an open market -- like the system that existed a few years ago," the report said.

To discourage smuggling, it would be appropriate to raise the price of urea to keep it even with that of Indian urea, recommended

ther report.

With this policy change, the government can afford to import more fertilisers to ensure adequate supply in the market, the report said adding that the farmers might not resent such a policy change if the moderate price increase is accompanied by its distribution through the open market.

The report anticipated a high demand for rice and maize seeds this year and recommended the government take a coordinated effort with the help of the private sector to meet the demand.

The report also anticipated a shortage in working capital in the flood-affected areas and urged the government to involve private sector banks along with specialised government banks for an enhanced inflow of credit into the rural areas.

The NGOs with micro credit facilities can play an effective role in this area. However, the usual practice of recovering the credit in weekly instalments, immediately after the disbursement, will not work in the case of agricultural loans, the report pointed out.

"The recent flood was highly localised and for those who have been affected, the damage has been severe. So, it might be better if the government identifies the affected unions (or villages if possible) and target all farm households in those unions for the rehabilitation programme," suggested the survey report.

Dr Uttam Deb, senior research fellow of CPD, was also present at the press conference.

## Khaleda

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graft in giving Global Agro Trade (Pvt) Co Ltd (Gatco) the contract for container management at the Dhaka Inland Container Depot (ICD) and the Chittagong Port ICD yards.

The following day the joint forces arrested the BNP chief and her son at their cantonment residence.

"I was not swayed by anyone and neither did I exert any influence on the purchase committee to award the contract to Gatco," Khaleda said in reply to a query.

The three-member team of the Anti-graft body questioned her for about an hour from different angles to know if she had pulled strings in favour of Gatco, sources said. Earlier, another team had questioned her about the wealth statement to the ACC.

Comprised of investigation officer and ACC Deputy Director Jahurul Huda, taskforce-23 officers Major Mostafa Kamal and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Inspector Nurul Islam, it went to the special prison in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban complex at around noon for interrogation.

They entered the sub-jail through its west gate apparently to avoid the media. Later, talking to reporters at his office, ACC team leader Jahurul Huda said they have recorded Khaleda's statement.

He added, "She explained to us her position with regard to the Gatco case." He however declined to elaborate on the matter.

Accompanied by Ahmed Aazam Khan, Khaleda said that her approval was a mere formality as the then prime minister.

"Gatco files were placed before me for approval after they were okayed by the purchase committee," Aazam quoted Khaleda as saying in defence of her action.

Besides, she said, Arafat never tried to influence the process or recommended anything in this regard.

The ACC had recently taken depositions from seven former ministers, all members of the then purchase committee, six retired secretaries and an incumbent additional secretary of the communications ministry in connection with the graft case.

The ministers questioned are former finance minister Salfur Rahman, former LGD minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, former industries minister Matiar Rahman Nazami, ex-agriculture minister MK Anwar and ex-information minister Shamsul Islam. They said they would come up with any help that the commission might need in the course of the probe.

The investigation had also grilled a number of former and incumbent officials of Chittagong Port Authority.

Meanwhile, Khaleda has urged the caretaker government to allow her to meet her two detained sons - Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman - on the Eid day.

"I will be very happy if the government makes arrangements for my two sons to visit me here at the sub-jail," Aazam quoted the BNP chairperson.

## ACC receives

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routine meeting with newsmen at the ACC head office.

"In case any ministry sends an allegation for investigation to us, we will ask the ministries why they sent it without performing their duties," the secretary added.

Sources in the commission said the ACC from November this year will not work based on zones rather it will work on different issues and allegations, considering their importance and seriousness.

The ACC yesterday also approved two first information reports (FIR) to be submitted against former additional deputy inspector general Shahid Ullah Khan and his wife, and former lawmaker Ali Reza Raju in connection with inconsistency between their wealth and known sources of income.

The ACC secretary said Jatiyatabadi Samik Dal General Secretary Zafur Hasan and former lawmaker Hedayet Ullah submitted their wealth statements on October 9 and yesterday.

The secretary said their work in court would increase in the coming days as the number of cases on trial is increasing.

Meanwhile, at least 10 corruption-suspect forest officials from the posts of deputy forest conservator to the chief forest conservator have so far submitted their wealth statement to the commission. The commission is conducting investigations regarding the statements, including the one submitted by forest boss Osman Ghani.

"There is nothing left in the country which can be called forest. We are dealing with the matter with strong hands," said Mukhles.

"We have issued notices calling for their wealth statement and they are submitting wealth statement in the zonal offices," he added.

## Wages, Eid bonus

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of industries would be forced to close down.

Our Gazipur correspondent adds: workers of UTA Fashion put up roadblocks at Nagpara on Dhaka-Mymensingh Highway in Gazipur to press for payment of due bonus.

The workers alleged that the management paid them a very small amount as bonus.

Law enforcement agencies dispersed several hundred laid-off workers of two Tongi factories -- Six H Garments and Giant Garments -- who gathered in Tongi Bazar area to realise salary and bonus, which the owners promised before shutting down the units a month ago.

## Indian rice issue

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"An apprehension aired in newspaper reports yesterday regarding an adverse effect of the suspension of rice export by India is not based on fact," said the government handout issued by the food and disaster management ministry.

It said around 566,506 tonnes of rice and 141,366 tonnes of wheat have been stored in various government food godowns at present.

The government has also concluded an agreement to increase the stocks of rice and wheat by procuring 143,000 tonnes of rice through tender. Around 62,000 tonnes of rice have already been found in various food godowns under the coverage of the agreement.

Besides, a "notice of award" has been given for 109,000 tonnes of rice. A decision on buying 75,000 tonnes of rice is awaiting approval by the advisory committee on purchase.

Some 23,500 tonnes of rice is being unloaded now at Chittagong port and two ships carrying 21,500 tonnes of rice are waiting at outer anchorage of the seaport for unloading.

Besides, two more ships carrying 30,000 tonnes of rice will reach the port after Eid.

"So, the stock of rice will remain 646,000 tonnes after distribution at the end of this month," said the handout.

Moreover, the requirement for next 10 months can be fulfilled with the amount of stocked wheat.

The government has also given a notice of award to collect 100,000 tonnes of wheat through tender. Of them, agreement has been signed for 67,000 tonnes of wheat. Around 8,000 tonnes of wheat have already been found in government godowns.

Besides, a process is underway to collect 118,000 tonnes of rice and 200,000 tonnes of wheat through international tender.

It further said aman harvest will begin in mid-November this year and the government will collect 200,000 tonnes of aman rice.

Besides, 300,000 tonnes of rice will come through BDR, as the paramilitary force is now engaged in marketing some essentials, including rice.

Giving these figures, the handout said the stock of rice will be at 871,000 tonnes while wheat at 170,000 tonnes at the end of January next year.

"Sufficient stocks of rice and wheat, according to its demand,

will be in the government godowns under government food management in the coming months. Moreover, around 476,867 tonnes of rice and 373,910 tonnes of wheat have been imported under private initiative since last July," it said.

## Bhutto rejects Musharraf request to delay return

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistani premier Benazir Bhutto will return from exile next week to campaign for January elections, despite a call by President Pervez Musharraf to delay her homecoming, her party said yesterday.

Musharraf said this week that two-time premier Bhutto should wait until the Supreme Court rules on the legality of his landslide victory in Saturday's controversial presidential election.

But a spokesman for her Pakistan People's Party, Farhatullah Babar, told AFP that "Benazir Bhutto will return on time. There is no change in her schedule."

Babar also dismissed reports that Bhutto and her aides would discuss Musharraf's request later Thursday in Dubai, where she has lived for much of the time since leaving Pakistan in 1999 to avoid graft charges.

"The meeting in Dubai is a routine matter," Babar said.

Bhutto, the first female prime minister of an Islamic nation, is set to land in the southern city of Karachi on October 18, the day after the court starts hearing challenges against the election.

Musharraf told a private television station late Wednesday that Bhutto should postpone her flight back home until after the court judgement.

"I would say she should not come before, she should come later," Musharraf told ARYONE in an interview.

Musharraf agreed last week to give Bhutto an amnesty on the corruption allegations that drove her into exile, in a prelude to a likely power-sharing deal between the two Western-friendly political leaders.

## AL demands

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arrested university teachers and students before Eid on humanitarian grounds.

"As the current government is not an elected one and the state of emergency is in force, they can do whatever they wish," Zillur told the media after the meeting.

He said the nation is going through a very hard time. He hoped that the government would take measures to make the situation normal as early as possible.

During the briefing AL leader Zahara Tajuddin asked why and under what authority or rules, the government won't allow the party's acting president to meet the detained party chief.

"I've already sought permission twice to meet the leader (Hasina), but the government did not respond," Zillur said.

Terming the health condition of party's detained General Secretary Abdul Jalil critical, Zillur demanded his release before Eid on humanitarian grounds.

Referring to the court verdict against AL leader Mohammad Nasim, Zillur said Nasim had been sentenced in a baseless and false case.

Zillur urged the government to take necessary measures to restore people's confidence in law.

## British writer Doris

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Lessing has covered a multitude of topics.

Although "The Golden Notebook", her best known work, established her as a feminist icon back in 1962, she has consistently refused the label and says her writing does not play a directly political role.

Born Doris May Taylor in Khermanshah, in what is now Iran, on October 22, 1919, Lessing spent her formative years on a farm in Southern Rhodesia, what is now Zimbabwe, where her British parents moved in 1927.

It was, she later reflected, a "hellishly lonely" upbringing. Unsurprisingly, she could not wait to escape and in 1939 married Frank Wisdom, by whom she had two children before their divorce in 1943.

She then married a German political activist called Gottfried Lessing, but divorced again in 1949, when she fled to Britain with her young son and the manuscript of her first novel, "The Grass Is Singing."