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FFs vow to free nation of razakars

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred freedom fighters took an oath yesterday to build a country free from razakars as the nation celebrated its 38th Independence Day.

"Joy Bangla" and other slogans used by freedom fighters during the liberation war echoed through Suhrawardy Udyan as they took their vows in front of the Shikha Chironon.

The freedom fighters also demanded trial of all war criminals and vowed to resist all anti-liberation forces in the country.

The ceremony was organised by Muktiyoddha Oikya Parishad, a platform of different organisations of freedom fighters, to observe the 38th Independence Day of the country and pay homage to martyrs who laid down their lives to liberate the nation.

The freedom fighters carrying national flag, banners and placards thronged Suhrawardy Udyan at 12:01 noon and placed wreaths at the Shikha Chironon.

They stood in silence for one minute to pay respect to the liberation war heroes.

Col (ret'd) Shakat Ali, Shajahan Kabir, Momtaz Begum, advocate Shamsul Alam Dudu, Abul Hossein, Muhammad Ali Chowdhury, advocate Dhali Moazzem Hossein, Abdul Matin, Alamgir Hossein were among those

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Clarification

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) has sent a clarification on a report headlined "10 Indian Generals to Join Party" published in The Daily Star yesterday. The story erroneously stated the 10 Indian army generals would be awarded medals. The clarification states "Army Headquarters has no such plan or has any information of awarding war medals to the war veterans now visiting Bangladesh." We regret the error.

Gen Jacob happy to join Dhaka's celebration

BSS, Dhaka

Former chief of staff of the eastern command of the Indian army Lt Gen (ret'd) JFR Jacob yesterday expressed his pleasure of being invited by the Bangladesh government to witness the Independence and National Day programmes.

"I feel proud of visiting Bangladesh on its 37th anniversary of the Independence and National Day," he said in a brief reaction to the press at National Parade Square in the morning.

Gen Jacob and some other former Indian army officers and their spouses were witnessing the Independence and National Day parade at the square from the gallery.

Recollecting the memories for the War of Liberation, he said, "We, the Indian army and the Muktiyoddha (freedom fighters) fought shoulder to shoulder in 1971."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Nizami, Mojahid not invited to Bangabhaban reception

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangabhaban this year did not invite Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Mottur Rahman Nizami and Secretary General Ali Ahsan Muhammad Mojahid to the Independence Day reception hosted yesterday by President Iajuddin Ahmed and his wife.

But Nizami and Mojahid, who are widely criticised for their anti-liberation role, were invited to the Independence Day parade at the National Parade Square in the capital.

Bangabhaban, however, invited other Jamaat leaders to the reception.

Jamaat sources said none of their leaders attended the Bangabhaban reception as the two top party leaders were not invited "properly".

Meanwhile, major political parties, socio-cultural organisations and war heroes also boycotted the Bangabhaban function in protest against invitation to the anti-liberation forces.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1



Scores of people gather at the National Memorial in Savar on Independence Day yesterday to pay homage to the liberation war martyrs.

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATED

Fresh vow to try war criminals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The country echoed with the demand for the trial of war criminals once again yesterday as the nation celebrated its 38th Independence Day through paying tribute to the Liberation War martyrs and vowing to bring the war criminals to book.

Hundreds of thousands of people belonging to different generations led by freedom fighters stood before war memorials across the country and took the oath to free Bangladesh of Razakars.

The celebration of Independence Day this year had a new perspective as the nation is struggling to restore democracy and introduce a healthy political practice through reforms ensuring people's rights.

People expressed their desire and demand for bringing back democracy through a free, fair and impartial national election which is expected to be held by this year end as pledged by both the government and Election Commission.

Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the country's founding leader, formally declared the independence of Bangladesh on this day in 1971. The declaration led to the nine-month long Liberation War against the Pakistani occupation forces, culminating in the emergence of a sovereign state on the global map.

The much-cherished trial of the war criminals in special tribunal has not been met in the last 37 years since independence.

People took a fresh vow of bringing the war criminals to justice at a time when the war criminals have begun denying the very existence of any anti-liberation force during the country's Liberation War in 1971.

The demand for the trial of war criminals was raised by national and international communities immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh on December 16, 1971.

Families and relatives of martyrs, victims of war crimes, freedom fighters, socio-political and cultural organisations, human rights bodies, leading professionals and eminent citizens of the country waged movements for the war criminals' trial on numerous occasions. But due attention was never paid to the demand.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

DHAKA-KOLKATA TRAIN WB govt for delaying inauguration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The launching of Dhaka-Kolkata passenger train service from April 14 might be delayed as the West Bengal authorities have requested the central government to re-fix the date considering the upcoming state panchayat elections.

The state government fears that the programme for launching the service may violate the code of conduct for the panchayat elections scheduled in May.

BBC Bangla Service yesterday reported quoting government sources that the Chief Secretary of West Bengal AK Deb in a letter to the central government asked for refixing the date in the last week of May.

The West Bengal government wants the train service not to be

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

SSC, Dakhil exams begin today

48pc registered students drop out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 48 percent of the registered students are not taking this year's Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and equivalent examinations beginning today.

A total of 12,59,105 students were registered in class IX as regular students under the nine education boards, but only 6,52,899 will sit for the examinations, according to a statistics prepared by the authorities.

Of the dropouts, 42.64 are male while 53.42 percent are female, the statistics showed.

Prof Manirul Islam, chairman of Dhaka Education Board, said at a

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Inhaling poisonous air every day

PINAKI ROY

Although the city dwellers are breathing severely polluted air for long with many suffering from different diseases, the government has yet to make any visible intervention to control the pollution.

The gaseous pollutants in city air decreased significantly in the wake of banning two-stroke engines half a decade ago. But now the quantity of floating dust and other smaller particles has reached an alarming level again.

According to data from Air Quality Monitoring Project (AQMP), floating particles in city

air both smaller (PM 2.5) and bigger (PM 10) are several times higher than the EPA (Environment Protection Agency) standard.

The United States EPA guidelines say presence of particulate matters (PM) 10 and PM 2.5 should remain within 150 and 65 microgram per cubic metre (mg/m3) of air within 24 hours.

But in December last year floating PM 10 were recorded 487 mg/m3 and PM 2.5 rose to 298. Earlier in 2002, PM 10 stood at 543 and PM 2.5 reached up to 423.

The amount of these particles remains within the EPA standard for two to three months round the

year. Apart from that, the city people live in highly polluted air.

John E Core from Portland, one of the cleanest cities in the USA, is now staying in Dhaka as an AQMP consultant.

Asked about Dhaka's air quality, he said: "The city dwellers should feel ashamed as they have been living in such polluted air."

"It's not a matter of poverty but consciousness. If everyone is aware, citizens can bring a lot of change," he added.

Experts say both particulate matters 10 and 2.5 cause serious health hazards.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



Dense smoke of dust particles turns even a day with bright sunshine into a dull and gloomy one. The photo was taken from Shyampur in the capital yesterday.

Duta poll deferred on police pressure

Teachers concerned at visit of colleague's house by joint forces

A CORRESPONDENT

Election to the executive committee of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) was deferred for 15 days yesterday following a written request from the police department on the eve of its previously scheduled date of today.

The Duta executive committee yesterday rescheduled its election for April 12, while expressing deep concern over an incident of four members of the joint forces entering the election commissioner's residence in the early hours of the day, asking him to resign from the post.

At a news briefing following an urgent meeting of the association at the Duta Club yesterday evening, the association's General Secretary

Professor Anwar Hossain said, "We are concerned over the matter that four members of the joint forces entered Election Commissioner Professor Dalem Chandra Barman's residence creating a situation of panic."

The joint forces personnel asked Prof Dalem to postpone the election or to resign from the post of the election commissioner, Prof Anwar said.

Prof Dalem Chandra responded to them by saying only the Duta executive committee can postpone the election, not the election commissioner, Prof Anwar added.

"The meeting of Duta executive committee condemned the conduct of the joint forces personnel and decided to ask the university

SEE PAGE 15 COL 2

Division cancelled in jail for 5 bigwigs

SQ Chy, Huda, Sigma, Altaf, MK Alamgir face the action; Falu, Pintu lose right to meet visitors

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The jail authorities yesterday suspended for three months the division in jail accorded to five high-profile detainees as they breached the jail code by using mobile phones inside jail.

Ex-BNP lawmakers Mosaddek Ali Falu and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu also lost their right to meet visitors for the same offence.

The prisoners whose division in jail was put on hold are former BNP ministers Nazmul Huda and Altaf Hossain Choudhury, former BNP lawmaker and political adviser to BNP chairperson Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, former Awami League state minister Mohiuddin

Khan Alamgir and Nazmul Huda's wife Sigma Huda.

Deputy Inspector General (Prisons) Maj Shamsul Haider Siddique told The Daily Star that Sigma Huda was given division in jail following court orders even though she was not a lawmaker.

A division holder is entitled to a small cot, newspapers and other facilities.

"The punitive measures were taken against them for their breaking the jail code two months ago. The jail authorities had filed cases against them for this but the court did not take cognisance of it. So the jail authorities took the actions that fall within their jurisdiction",

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Escap sees 7pc GDP growth unlikely

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh may miss its target of achieving 7 percent GDP growth in 2008 because of continuing political uncertainty and its budget deficit during the period is expected to rise to 5.6 percent of GDP, said a survey of Escap.

But it expected that the caretaker government's anti-corruption drive will improve the country's business environment in the coming years, attracting foreign direct investments and helping the country's economy to grow.

"The Bangladesh government's target is to raise GDP growth to 7 percent in 2008. But with continuing political uncertainty, this target may prove elusive and GDP growth may remain at about 6.5 percent," said Escap's Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2008.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap) conducted the survey, the report of which was

launched globally yesterday. The survey report said budget deficit in 2008 is expected to rise to 5.6 percent of GDP mostly because the country's liabilities for accumulated fuel subsidies are to be included in the 2008 budget.

"In addition, the 2007 cyclone and floods will require the government to spend heavily on restoring health, sanitation and water and rehabilitating the damaged infrastructure. The budget deficit for 2009, however, is expected to revert to a normal level of 3.8 percent," it said.

Stating that public debt remains a "serious problem" in the South Asian region, the report said public debt in Bangladesh has stabilised below 50 percent of GDP in recent years.

"The real burden of public debt in the country is in its servicing. In Bangladesh, interest payments alone consumed about 18 percent of government revenue in 2006,

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

No AL movement now to free Hasina

HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Central Awami League (AL) leaders have ruled out the possibility of going for any movement right now to get party chief Sheikh Hasina released despite immense pressure from grassroots level leaders.

Top AL leaders believe that they would be able to get Hasina released within a few weeks through negotiation with the government.

AL Presidium member Suranjit

Sengupta said they would not object to any decision the party president makes about her.

Leaders of metropolitan, district, and upazila units of AL and its front organisations have been putting immense pressure on the AL central committee for the last few months to go for movements to free former premier Hasina, who has been kept behind bars since July 16 last year.

But the central leaders are

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4



President Iajuddin Ahmed and Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed pay tribute to the liberation war martyrs at the National Memorial in Savar on Independence Day yesterday.

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