



Participants at the inaugural ceremony of the Tarunner Mela (youth festival) at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday. From right are IRI Resident Country Director Jeff Vanness, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossain, writer Imdadul Haque Milon and Nazia Hasmi.

NATIONAL YOUTH FESTIVAL BEGINS

'Youths have responsibilities to vote right persons to lead the nation'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-day National Youth Festival began yesterday in the capital to uphold the views of the young generation and carry messages of building the nation in participation of all.

The International Republican Institute (IRI) organised the festival in association with USAID at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Around 40 organisations working on promoting democratic practices, development, health, civil and human rights set up stalls at the centre on the occasion of Tarunner Mela (youth festival) and arranged various creative programmes.

"One-third of the country's voters are young and will vote for the first time. They have responsibilities to vote the right persons to lead the nation," IRI Resident Country Director Jeff Vanness said at the inaugural session of the programme.

"They will surely share their ideas and learn through interactions," he said, expressing his hope that Bangladesh this time is going to witness a very good national poll.

The IRI also set up a postbox at

the venue for letters on various issues to be sent to the authorities concerned.

"People write letters to the media and other authorities. But this is a fantastic programme where organisers made it possible for the youths to share their ideas and learn issues of national interests," said Azizur Rahman, a student of Bangladesh Leather Technology College.

Election Working Group (EWG) arranged a mock poll where youths voted on three issues -- reduction in unemployment, corruption and controlling price hike of essentials.

"To me this is a good practice for the next national polls," said Dhaka College student Abdur Rashid, who came to the festival where several thousand youths, mostly from colleges and universities, turned up.

EWG Research Assistant Shafiqul Alam said the issue that gets the most votes will be discussed in a seminar.

Rupantar, an NGO, arranged competitions on drama, painting and traditional pot song on the youths' expected political leaders who will truly work for the welfare of the country.

"This is a very different sort of idea. I liked it. I hope that through such programmes youths will really learn to choose their leaders in the upcoming elections," said Kabi Nazrul College student Johnny who took part in the painting competition.

Besides, organisations arranged question-answer sessions with political leaders, cultural programmes, film shows, debates at mock parliament, formation of political parties and competition among them on political manifestos and facing public questions, youth perception surveys on the country's situation and addressing challenges.

Speaking as the chief guest, Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossain said: "We want to see such leadership through the next elections before this year end that will take the country forward."

Calling for young and energetic leadership in politics, he said Election Commission (EC) is framing laws so that students' politics does not become part of partisan politics. Besides, EC is going to introduce "no vote" allowing voters not to vote for the candidates,

who are not competitive and honest, he added.

The election commissioner said the EC for the first time is going to make arrangements where candidates of city corporation elections can face people and respond to their questions.

Calling for youths' unity to stand against all corrupt practices in politics, novelist Imdadul Haque Milon said many of the corrupt politicians abused the youths, but did not think of their concerns after winning the elections.

Television personality Abdur Noor Tusher said it was the youths who played major roles in the history of Bangladesh -- starting from the Language Movement in 1952 to the Liberation War in 1971.

He said, "The youths should be united and seriously inquire about the election candidates before voting, otherwise they will be responsible if they make mistakes."

Rupantar, Management Resources and Development Initiative, Steps Towards Development, Democracywatch, EWG, Nielsen, e-Zone, CCD, nation pulse and Jubo Nagorik Forum assisted in organising the festival.



A seven-day painting exhibition styled 'Feeling of pain' by Ayan Majumdar began at Zainul Art Gallery at the Institute of Fine Arts yesterday.

Bangladeshi workers to help develop infrastructure in S Arabia

Hopes president during meeting with outgoing Saudi envoy

UNB, Dhaka

President Iajuddin Ahmed hoped that Bangladeshi people would continue to contribute to the infrastructural development of Saudi Arabia.

He expressed the optimism when the outgoing Saudi Ambassador in Dhaka Abdullah M Al-Obeid Al-Namlah paid a farewell call on him at Bangabhaban yesterday.

The president appreciated the successful mission of the Saudi diplomat during his eight-year stint in Dhaka.

He thanked Namlah for playing a useful role in improving the

bilateral relations between the two countries.

The president also expressed his gratitude to Saudi government for recruiting Bangladeshi workers in Saudi Arabia and solving the recent problems with regard to Bangladeshi manpower export to Saudi Arabia.

Presently, around 1.7 million Bangladeshi workers are working in Saudi Arabia.

President Iajuddin also observed that there is a great potential in promoting bilateral cooperation between Dhaka and Riyadh, especially in the economic sector, through enhancing Saudi investment in Bangladesh.

He hoped that the Saudi-Bangladesh joint economic commission meeting scheduled to be held on April 7 and 8 in Dhaka would further strengthen the economic cooperation between the two countries.

He also sought the envoy's cooperation in increasing Saudi food assistance to Bangladesh and expanding education linkage and exchange programmes between the two countries.

The outgoing ambassador thanked the government and the people of Bangladesh for extending cooperation to him in discharging his duties in Dhaka.

Exercise Shanti Doot-2 begins in city

UNB, Dhaka

Exercise Shanti Doot-2, a peace support operations exercise, began at a city hotel yesterday under the framework of Global Peace Operations Initiative Programme.

Hosted by Bangladesh Army and sponsored by United States Pacific Command (USPACOM), the exercise has two packages -- Command Post Exercise (CPX) at Hotel Radisson will be held from April 1 to 20, while the other Field Training Exercise (FTX) will be held at Bangladesh Institute of Peace Support Operation Training (BIPSOT), Rajendrapur Cantonment from April 1 to 20.

Around 360 military personnel from 11 countries are participating in the FTX, while some 120 military and civil personnel from 16 countries -- Australia, host Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Canada, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, South Korea, the UK, Mongolia, Tonga and the US -- are participating in the CPX programme.

Bangladesh is holding 25 key appointments including Exercise Director or UN Force Headquarters Commander and Force Commander in the CPX. Exercise Director or UN Force Headquarters Commander is Brig Gen M Rafiqul Islam and Exercise Force Commander is Brig Gen Mohammad Mahboob Haider Khan.

The CPX will have three segments and those are academic session from April 1 to 4, while mini exercise on April 5 and exercise play from April 7 to 11.

The certificate awarding ceremony of the CPX will be held at the same venue on April 11 at 3:30pm. Chief of Naval Staff of Bangladesh Navy Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam will be present, according to an ISPR press release.



The participants of Peace Support Operations Exercise namely 'Shanti Doot-2' pose for photograph at the inaugural ceremony in the city yesterday.

ACC files case against UP chairman

UNB, Dhaka

The Anti-Corruption Commission has filed a case against Nazim Uddin, chairman of Suvaddya union parishad, Keraniganj for amassing huge wealth disproportionate to his known sources of income and concealing information.

Sources said ACC Assistant Director Sheikh Faiz Alam filed the first information report (FIR) with Ramna police station on Sunday against Nazim for acquiring wealth worth over Tk 13 crore beyond his known sources of income and hiding information of assets worth Tk 4.54 crore.

UNFAIR MEANS IN EXAMS

Action against 3 KU students

UNB, Khulna

Punitive action has been taken against three students of Khulna University (KU) for adopting unfair means in examinations.

According to a KU press release issued yesterday, a meeting of the Disciplinary Committee has decided to cancel the second term examination of Sujit Kanti Roy, a second year student of English department, and all the third year examinations of Golam Mostafizur Rahman, a student of Pharmacy department.

Motia Chy hospitalised

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League presidium member Motia Chowdhury was admitted to Holy Family Red Crescent Hospital with chest pains yesterday morning.

Party sources said her relatives took her to the hospital at about 10:00am after she felt chest pain.

Hospital doctors said the AL leader does not have any cardiac problem.

"She was suffering from severe vertigo problem and nausea, but her condition is quite stable. There is nothing to worry about. We're giving her necessary treatment," said Dr Nusrat Jahan of the Cardiac Department.

"She has been under observation in the CCU (Coronary Care Unit)," she added.

Hold local govt polls before parliamentary election

Speakers demand at BUPOJ meet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Union parishad (UP) chairmen and members at a meeting yesterday demanded holding of upazila and union parishad polls before the parliament election to make them free from the influence of lawmakers.

They said they want to get rid of the lawmakers and hinted that political government might not hold UP election once they are elected.

The UP chairmen also urged the political parties to accept their demand saying that the UP election will not hinder the electoral roadmap.

The regional meeting was organised jointly by Bangladesh Union Parishad Oikya Jote (BUPOJ) comprising Bangladesh Union Parishad Forum, Union Parishad Advocacy Group and Bangladesh Union Parishad Members Organisation at the Engineers' Institute in the capital.

The meeting, which was organised to ensure democracy at field level and to place their 12-point demand in this regard, was

attended by some 1300 UP chairmen and members.

The speakers said local government bodies are the 'pillar of democracy' but these are not functioning properly due to interference by lawmakers and government officials.

They urged the government to empower local government bodies saying that it will help reduce corruption and increase development at grassroots level.

They said the political parties are against the holding of UP election before the national election, as they fear to lose control over UP members and chairmen.

Addressing the meeting as chief guest, Commerce Adviser Hossein Zillur Rahman said local government bodies would have to be strengthened to accelerate social and economic development of the country.

He said the government has formed a local government commission to strengthen the local government bodies.

Inaugurating the meeting Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali, a liberation war veteran, said local gov-

ernment election should be held immediately.

He said it is the UP chairmen and members who can control the politics of the country and not the government.

Former lawmaker of Jatiya Party G M Quader said past political governments did not take any initiative to empower the local government bodies.

He also said local government polls before the national election will not hinder the roadmap.

Former minister and BUPOJ Coordinator Golam Sarwar Milon, Upazila Chairman Association President Fakhru Islam Munshi, Chairman of public administration department at Dhaka University Prof Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, President of Bangladesh Union Parishad Chairman Association Mir Enayet Hossein Montu, and BUPOJ Chairman Mahbubur Rahman Tulu also addressed the meeting.

Earlier, the BUPOJ organised such meetings in 10 areas of the country and yesterday's meeting was the last one.



Participants at the Dhaka Regional Conference of Union Parishad chairmen at Engineers' Institute in the city yesterday. From right are Firoz Siddique, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mir Shawkat Ali, Fakhru Islam Munshi and Golam Sarwar Milon.

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