

## DEMOCRACY DAY Hasina, Khaleda call for strengthening democracy

Bss, Dhaka

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in separate messages yesterday called for concerted efforts to strengthen democracy.

In a message on the eve of the 'Democracy Day', Hasina said "We must take a fresh vow on this day to free our nation from the clutches of the evil forces to establish the peoples' right to vote and help establish democracy in the country."

On December 6, 1990, she said, the people had freed democracy by forcing the autocratic ruler to step down through a mass-upsurge after relentless struggle, the message said.

Hasina said the victory of Bengali nation has started by forcing the Pakistani occupation forces to surrender after a ninth month bloody War of Liberation in 1971.

In collaboration with a handful of killers, she said, the defeated forces had imposed autocratic rule over the nation by killing the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on August 15, 1975.

Since 1975, Hasina said, the subsequent governments had established terrorism, looting, corruption in society to serve their purpose.

Recalling the contribution of martyrs, including Shaheed Noor Hossain, Selim,

Delwar, Moyezuddin, Dr Milton, Jihad, Fattah and Titas, the AL president expressed her gratitude and paid tributes to the memories of the martyrs for their sacrifices in restoring democracy in the country.

Hasina urged all democracy-loving people to be united to uphold democracy.

In another message, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia greeted the countrymen on the occasion of the 'Democracy Day'.

She said, "December 6 is an extraordinary day in our national history. The new journey of democracy began on this very day in 1990 with the end of an autocratic rule following long nine years of movements and struggles."

Khaleda recalled with profound respect the contribution of the martyrs who made supreme sacrifices in the democratic movement and prayed for eternal peace of their departed souls.

On this occasion, she urged all to work unitedly for democracy and national development.

Though democracy was freed in 1990, it is not yet danger-free, she said, adding that all would have to make pledge afresh to safeguard the country's independence and sovereignty, foiling all evil attempts.

In a separate message, BNP Secretary General Khondaker Delwar Hossain also greeted the people on the occasion of the 'Democracy Day'.

## Free, fair polls will be held

French envoy Hopes French envoy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

French Ambassador Charley Causeret yesterday hoped that a free, fair and credible parliamentary election will be held in the country, with participation of all political parties.

The envoy also hoped that Bangladesh will move forward with its economic progress after the polls.

The envoy said this while talking to reporters after a meeting with BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office in the evening.

During the meeting, they discussed employment, food, economy and energy issues, Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, a member of BNP's Foreign Affairs Advisory Committee, told reporters.

Causeret assured the BNP chief of his government's cooperation in achieving growth in these sectors.

Khaleda told the envoy that if democratic rule continues, the country would achieve economic progress faster.

Meanwhile, Pakistan High Commissioner Alamgir Babar also called on Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office, party sources said.

The Pakistan envoy also held a meeting with the foreign affairs advisory committee of BNP there.

Members of the committee -- former foreign secretary Shamsheer M Chowdhury, former ambassador Sabihuddin Ahmed and Maj Gen (ret'd) Fazle Akbar -- were present at the meeting.



Children take part in the Toyota Dream Car Art Contest '08 at Navana-Toyota showroom at Tejgaon in the city yesterday.

## Oil prices fall to \$42

FROM PAGE 1

employment report could emphasise the focus on bad economic news and resultant lower demand for energy.

The key November non-farm payroll and unemployment report is expected to show the loss of 325,000 jobs in the United States, the world's largest economy and biggest energy consumer.

The US, European Union, Japan and other economies are already in recession, and investors are worried about an increasingly marked decline in demand among the industrialised countries, and a slowdown in emerging countries such as China.

Oil prices have fallen by more than two thirds since reaching record high points above 147 dollars in July, pulled

## No help yet for Lalbagh fire victims

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 700 victims of Thursday's fires at Islambagh in the capital spent a night under the open sky as they after losing almost everything in the fires did not get any aid from any quarters.

Six people including three children were burnt alive and 10 others were injured in the fires that gutted around 50 small plastic factories, 20 warehouses and 100 houses at Islambagh in Lalbagh area.

The fires damaged properties worth over Tk 4 crore while a few opportunists looted valuables from the houses and factories as the victims and fire-fighters were busy trying to put out the fires.

A stunned Mokbul Hussain, 42, who lost three of his family members -- Sharmin, 5, 13-month-old nephew Emon and his sister-in-law Nasrin, 28 -- in one of the fires was walking around the spot yesterday afternoon with an empty stomach.

He said he could not save the three as the wooden ceiling of the house caught fire like matchsticks.

Rickshaw-van puller Babul Mia lost all his belongings and the house in the fire. He said he along with his family of six members spent Thursday night out in the cold. As of last evening he did not get any relief from anybody.

Debris still occupies the spots and smoke was still coming out from places. Victims were seen going through the rubble to salvage whatever they could.

Locals said people wishing to stand in election usually come forward with cash, warm clothes and food in times of need but they have not extended their helping hand yet.

## Oil prices fall to \$42

FROM PAGE 1

employment report could emphasise the focus on bad economic news and resultant lower demand for energy.

The key November non-farm payroll and unemployment report is expected to show the loss of 325,000 jobs in the United States, the world's largest economy and biggest energy consumer.

The US, European Union, Japan and other economies are already in recession, and investors are worried about an increasingly marked decline in demand among the industrialised countries, and a slowdown in emerging countries such as China.

Oil prices have fallen by more than two thirds since reaching record high points above 147 dollars in July, pulled

## 30 win Toyota Dream Car Art Contest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Navana Group awarded 30 winners of its Toyota Dream Car Art Contest '08 at Navana-Toyota showroom at Tejgaon in the city yesterday.

Over 150 children took part in the finale of the contest, says a press release.

Noted artist Hashem Khan selected the best 30 artworks. Some more paintings, including the 30, will be sent to Toyota authorities for judgement at international level.

Navana Group Director Shahedul Islam, General Manager (HR) Aminul Haque and noted artist Uttam Guha were present at the award giving ceremony.

## Bangladesh polls deemed most crucial

FROM PAGE 1

become a model of a relatively prosperous Muslim majority democracy... Or it could return to the winner-take-all obstructionist politics of previous years," he said.

"If Bangladesh stumbles within the coming months, it could become a breeding ground for terrorists and groups wishing to operate in South and Southeast Asia," Moriarty told the US Commission on International Religious Freedom, a government-funded advisory body created in 1998 to monitor religious freedom around the world and make policy recommendations to the US government.

He said the US interest in Bangladesh revolve around three mutually reinforcing principles, which he referred to as the "three D's": democracy, development, and the denial of space to terrorism.

Moriarty said he had no information about any Al-Qaeda links to extremist Islamic groups in Bangladesh but there were "lots of accusations about the Pakistan-based groups' supporting and influencing Bangladeshi militants."

The US envoy said there were "warning signs that extremism could take root in Bangladesh" if militants took advantage of discontent with grinding poverty, weak governance and endemic corruption.

Moriarty said he met major players in this month's vote, former prime ministers whose bitter rivalry has defined recent politics in the country.

Both Khaleda Zia of BNP and Sheikh Hasina of Awami League assured him of understanding the need to improve the political environment in Bangladesh, he said.

Moriarty said corruption is

## CEC tells of problems

FROM PAGE 1

contest the polls. But many other defaulters who did not file such writ petitions will remain out of the electoral race, he told a roundtable on 'Ninth Parliamentary Election and Our Mass Media'.

The Election Commission (EC) and the central bank now have to think of such a situation seriously, the CEC said at the roundtable organised by Mass Communication and Journalism Alumni Association of Dhaka University and held at the DU Senate Bhaban.

"We have provisions in the Representation of People Order to bar loan and bill defaulters from contesting polls. But difficulty arises in implementing those."

The CEC announced that there will be no code of conduct for the mass media to cover the coming elections as they have dropped the idea in the face of difficulties and criticisms. He left the matter to an elected government.

He assured journalists that there would be no problem for them to have access to polling centres for election coverage. "The print and electronic media will cover the election as they did in the past," he said.

Regretting the EC's limitations in implementing the electoral laws regarding

## Mehendi festival begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As part of the celebration of Eid-ul-Azha and 400 years of Dhaka, Dhakabashi and Swadhinata Sangsad, jointly organised a 'Mehendi Festival' and 'Zammani Fashion Competition' at the Public Library seminar room in the city yesterday, says a press release.

Girls from different areas in the city attended the inaugural session of the festival.

The festival will continue till 'Chand-raat' (the night before the Eid day).

## Love-soaked Nurul Islam laid to rest

FROM PAGE 16

contingent presented a guard of honour to the valiant freedom fighter.

Politicians, cultural personalities and activists, teachers and students gathered at the Shaheed Minar in the morning to bid adieu to him.

Nurul Islam, a nominee of the Awami League-led grand alliance for Noakhali-1 constituency in the upcoming parliamentary election, suffered burns in a mysterious fire at his Lalmania apartment in the early hours on Wednesday. His only son Tamohar Islam Puchi was burnt alive in the blaze.

Nurul Islam's wife Rubi Rahman and their only daughter Moutusi Islam, who returned to Dhaka from the US in the early hours yesterday, stood in silence beside the coffin at the Shaheed Minar. They broke into tears when they saw their relatives there.

Leaders and activists of various political parties including Awami League (AL), BNP, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers' Party, Gono Forum, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal and Liberal Democratic Party paid floral tribute to the veteran politician.

Ganotantri Party Presidium members and party general secretaries led by its advisory committee president Azizul Islam also paid homage to Nurul Islam.

The party announced a three-day mourning at the death of its president.

Nurul Islam's body was kept at Shaheed Minar until 1:00pm. His body was then brought to the Dhaka University Central Mosque where his first namaj-e-janaza was held after the Jum'a prayers.

He was laid to rest at the Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard at Mirpur in the evening after his second namaj-e-janaza on Hazaribagh Leather Technology College Ground at 4:00pm.

AL leaders Abdur Razzak, Matia Chowdhury, BNP leaders Nazrul Islam Khan and Mahbulul Alam Tara, Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, Workers' Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu, Journalist Shahriar Kabir, former adviser to a caretaker government Sultana Kamal, FBCCI President Anissul Huq, businessman Abdul Awal Mintoo, Dhaka University Vice Chancellor SMA Faiz and Rajshahi City Corporation Mayor AHM Khairuzzaman Liton, among others, paid homage to Nurul Islam.

Various organisations including Bangabandhu Sangkritik Jote, Bangladesh Economic Association, Uddhi Shilpi Gosthi, Samajik Protirodh Committee, Muktijuddho Museum, Ekattorer Ghatik Dal Nirmul Committee, Sammito Sangkritik Jote, Dhaka University Teachers' Association, Peshajibi Samannoy Parishad, FBCCI, BGONE, Supreme Court Ainjibi Samiti, Kendriyo Olama League, Swachhabhak League, Jatiya Kabita Parishad, Bangladesh Hindu Buddha Christian Oikya Parishad, Kendriyo Khelaghar Asar, Ganotantrik Ainjibi Samiti, Karmojibi Nari, Nari Pragati Sangha, Muktijoddha Sanghata Parishad, Hazaribagh Tannery Shramik Trade Union, Ganotantrik Bam Morcha, Monisingha Farhat Trust, Kendriyo Kakhikachar Asar, Bangladesh Chhatra League, Shramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, and Dhaka City Awami League placed floral wreaths on the coffin.

## LAND DISPUTE

### Acid thrown on 2 farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Two farmers suffered severe burn injuries as criminals threw acid on them near Tota farm on Thakurgaon-Goreahighway in Sadar upazila yesterday evening over a land dispute.

The victims are Md Abdul Malek, 38, son Md Hakim Uddin, and Md Enamul Haque, 26, son of Md Erfan Ali of Boda upazila in Panchagarh.

Police sources in Thakurgaon said some criminals riding motorbikes hurled acid on them while the farmers were returning home by a motorbike at about 7:10pm.

Hearing cries of the farmers, local people rushed there and sent them to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital in a 'critical condition'.

Police and doctors suspected that the miscreants might have collected acid of battery and threw it on the farmers from behind. Backsides of the farmers were burnt partially, sources said.

## Nilphamari Govt High School reunion Dec 11

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Reunion of old students of Nilphamari Government High School will be held on the school premises on December 11.

Former students who are interested to join are requested to register with the reunion celebration committee on payment of Tk 200 and submission of two passport-sized photographs.

Interested persons can also call at 01820548154, 01716058656, 01717061418, 01712252584, 01197118465 or 01712295690 for details.

## EC asked to ensure safety of minority

FROM PAGE 16

many constituencies in 2001 polls still haunt the minds of the Hindus, the speakers said at a discussion on a survey report on the state of minority communities in Bangladesh organised by Sampriti Mancha at the Asiatic Society auditorium in the capital.

Such incidents have increased the sense of insecurity among minority communities before the polls, said the speakers.

"We should write to the Election Commission asking it to mark the constituencies where minorities were repressed during and after the 2001 polls as 'red areas'," said Bangladesh Mahila Parishad General Secretary Aysha Khanam.

Presenting the survey report, journalist Ajoy Dasgupta said properties of the Hindus were grabbed by influential people in some areas after the election violence in 2001 increasing the sense of insecurity among the community members.

"The authorities concerned must take steps to ensure that the violent incidents occurred during 2001 polls do not take place again in the upcoming election," he said, adding that a huge number of Hindus were deprived of their voting rights in the last election.

According to the survey, 64.76 percent of 1,388 respondents said they were subjected to repression in the 2001 polls, while 38.2 percent of 1,403 respondents said they feel insecure for being members of Hindu community.

At least 36 percent of 1,426 respondents said they and their relatives think of leaving the country for the same reason, said the survey report conducted on 1,552 Hindus recently.

Only 28.1 percent of 1,388 respondents said the police took actions when they complained to police of violence on them while 42.21 percent said police on a few occasions took actions when they lodged such complaint with them.

Ajoy Dasgupta said 59.5 percent of 1,440 respondents said they feel that their properties are under threat because of the Vested Properties Act.

Termining the findings about the Hindu community 'sad' Regulatory Reforms Commission Chairman and former adviser to a caretaker government Dr Akbar Ali Khan said the whole society gets affected when a state makes discrimination against any section of its population.

Bangladesh was born with a dream of establishing equality of all regardless of gender, religion and ethnicity. But it is unfortunate that disparity exists in all spheres of life, he said.

"We must root out the vested groups that patronise fanatics," he added.

Prof Imtiaz Ahmed of International Relations Department of Dhaka University (DU) said the Muslims of Bengal are basically tolerant.

But intolerance among some of them is growing gradually because of the influence of petrodollar from the Middle East where a large number of Bangladeshis are living now.

He stressed the need for increasing democratic practices, strengthening internal democracy of political parties, development-oriented policy and structural reforms to deal with it.

Justice Golam Rabbani, DU professors Ajay Roy, AK Azad Chowdhury, Dr Neem Chandra Bhowmik, journalist Shahriar Kabir and Denis Dilip Datta of National Christian Fellowship of Bangladesh spoke at the discussion moderated by DU Associate Professor Robayet Ferdous.

**DHAKA TODAY**

**Seminar**  
FBCCI organises a seminar on 'Maximizing growth for Bangladesh: A private sector vision'. Venue: Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre. Time: 10:00am.

**Dialogue**  
South Asian Institute of Advanced Legal and Human Rights Studies, and Embassy of France in Bangladesh jointly organises a dialogue on 'National and regional institutions for the protection of human rights: Challenges for Bangladesh'. Venue: Lake Shore Hotel. Time: 9:30am.

**Saarc Charter Day**  
The Saarc Charter Day will be observed. Venue: Brac conference room. Time: 10:00am.

**Rotary Dhaka Central**  
The regular meeting of Rotary Club of Dhaka Central will be held. Venue: Dhaka Club. Time: 1:30pm.

**WEATHER TODAY**

No change in temperature

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 24 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Light to moderate fog may occur over the river basins during early morning.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met office said.

Yesterday's highest temperature of 31.0 degree Celsius was recorded at Cox's Bazar and the lowest of 14.5 degree at Srirangol.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:11pm today and rises at 6:29am tomorrow.

The highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	28.9	17.8	71	76
Chittagong	29.7	18.2	74	70
Rajshahi	28.0	16.5	90	88
Khulna	28.0	17.8	79	80
Barisal	28.8	17.5	91	87
Sylhet	29.0	18.5	71	70
Cox's Bazar	31.0	18.8	70	77