

JS ELECTION
Rehana in
Dhaka to
assist sister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sheikh Rehana arrived home yesterday after nearly two years to assist her sister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina as the parliamentary election is drawing nearer.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sheikh Hasina's deputy information secretary Mahbubul Haque Shakil said Rehana along with her two daughters arrived at the Zia International Airport by a flight of British Airways at 3:00am from London.

Rehana, younger daughter of slain president Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, has been living in London for 10 years. She came to Dhaka within 16 hours after Hasina rolled out AL's election manifesto on Friday.

AL sources said Sajeeb Wazed Joy, only son of Hasina, may also arrive here soon to assist her mother in election campaign.

Rehana, who is implicated in Tk 3 crore extortion case along with Hasina and cousin Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, will stay here till the elections.

Businessman Azam J Chowdhury who is the plaintiff of the case said earlier that he filed the case only against Selim while Hasina and Rehana were implicated in it later by the investigation officer of the case.

Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court framed charges against Rehana showing her as a fugitive in the case.

The High Court later halted the trial proceedings following a writ petition filed by the AL president challenging the legality of the case. The final verdict in the case is still pending.

Death anniversary
of Birsreshtha
Jahangir today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chawabganj

Today is the 37th death anniversary of Birsreshtha Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir.

On this day in 1971, just two days before the victory, he embraced martyrdom in a battle with the Pakistani occupation forces at Rehaichar, near the river Mahananda in Chapainawabganj.

Our correspondent in Barisal adds: Birsreshtha Shahid Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir Smriti Parishad and Birsreshtha Mahiuddin Jahangir Library and Museum authorities will observe the day with different programmes at his memorial complex at Agorpur village at Babuganj upazila in the district.

Prof Ghyasuddin

BSS, Dhaka

Today is the 37th death anniversary of Shaheed Prof Ghyasuddin Ahmed.

Prof Ghyasuddin was abducted from Mohsin Hall of Dhaka University and later killed at Mirpur along with Dr Mohammad Murtaza, Dr Santosh Bhattacharjee, Dr Abul Khair, Dr Serajul Haque, Dr Faizul Mahi, Prof Rashidul Hasan and Prof Anwar Pasha.

On the occasion, a milad mahfil will be held at the residence of Sajeda Banu, Shaheed Ghyasuddin's youngest sister, after Asr prayers on December 18.

Boy's wit saves
300 train
passengers

A CORRESPONDENT, Chandpur

A major train accident was averted thanks to the presence of mind of a minor boy on Friday morning.

According to witnesses and railway officials, a Laksambound passenger train with at least 300 passengers on board left Chandpur station at around 7:30am.

Before the train reached Dhera village in Hajiganj, Siyam observed to his utter surprise that a section of the railway track was lying broken which could cause an accident.

He took off his jumper at once and fluttered it with his right hand standing on the track to attract the attention of the train driver (loco master) and the guard.

His efforts were successful as the guard and the loco master stopped the train apprehending that something might be wrong on the track.

They were stunned when they saw the broken railway track.



Students of Begum Rahima Ideal Girls' School perform a dance at a Victory Day programme at the Liberation War Museum in the city yesterday.

170 shanties gutted
in city slum fire

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 170 shanties were gutted and 10 people, including a fire fighter, were injured in a devastating fire at a slum at Badda in the city last night.

Police and fire brigade sources said the fire broke out in a shanty at Nayanagar in the area and engulfed the entire slum immediately. Fire brigade sources said the fire was

originated from a hearth.

Slum dwellers said the fire also gutted almost all belongings of the shanties.

Six units from four fire stations in the city rushed to the spot and after an effort of one and half hours they doused the fire.

Ten people, including a station officer of Tejoigan fire station, were injured while they were trying to put out the fire.

'End discrimination
against Harijans'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A country cannot be considered democratic in real sense unless equal rights are ensured for each and every citizen irrespective of their religion, caste and creed, said the speakers at a view exchange meeting yesterday.

They said Harijans, a section of people traditionally regarded as untouchable or low caste, are exploited both socially and economically.

The view exchange meeting was organised by Bangladesh Harijan Oikya Parishad in association with the Manusher Jonno Foundation at the National Press Club in the city.

"It is the responsibility of the state to ensure human dignity for all. Until equal rights are ensured for every citizen, a country cannot be considered democratic," said Prof Mesbah Kamal.

"Our country does not ensure the rights of the minority people. It should be a punishable offence to call someone untouchable," he added.

Democracy means equal rights and dignity for every human being, said CPB

Dhaka Int'l Book
Fair begins
tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 15th Dhaka International Book Fair begins at the central playground of the Dhaka University tomorrow.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed will inaugurate the book fair organised by Jatiya Granthakendra.

This year the theme of the 15-day long book fair is 'Book for a peaceful world' where a significant number of local and overseas publishing houses will take part.

To make the book fair more attractive, cultural programmes, subject-wise discussions, seminars, open discussion on the books on liberation war, women and children and meet-the-writer sessions will be held.

The fair will remain open from 11:00am to 8:00pm and on holidays it will remain open from 11:00am to 8:30pm.



Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours until 6:00pm today.

Moderate fog may occur over northern, central and southwestern parts and the river basins of the country during late night.

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

Highest temperature 30.7 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 14.4 degrees at Srimangol.

The sun sets in the capital at 5:14pm today and rises at 6:34am tomorrow.

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	29.0	17.6	96	75
Chittagong	28.8	18.8	83	65
Rajshahi	26.8	16.0	100	91
Khulna	28.8	18.0	93	75
Barisal	29.7	18.0	95	90
Sylhet	25.8	17.3	83	86
Cox's Bazar	30.0	19.0	73	61

NURUL ISLAM'S DEATH
High-powered
probe body
formed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A high-powered investigation committee has been formed to investigate the cause of the mysterious fire in which Gonatantri Party President Nurul Islam and his son Tamohar Islam Puchi were killed at their residence on December 3.

The committee, formed on Thursday, has been asked to submit its report within five working days.

Additional Police Commissioner Abdus Salam of DMP will head the investigation committee comprising Special Superintendent Abdullah Hel Baki of CID, Major Montazur Rahman, an explosive expert of Rab, and Deputy Commissioner (DC) Mainul Hasan of Detective Branch (DB).

Earlier, a three-member investigation committee formed by the fire brigade submitted a report on December 7 saying that an electrical short-circuit sparked off the fire.

But the family members of Nurul Islam and his party leaders rejected the report.

War criminals

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criminals and the people "who killed democracy in the country" in the next parliamentary elections to materialise the dreams of freedom fighters.

The Jote's General Secretary Golam Kuddus said they started Victory Day celebrations in 1990 to mark the victory in the Liberation War and the defeat of the then autocratic ruler. Now it has become the festival of all pro-liberation warforces in the country.

He called upon the people to resist fundamentalists, terrorists and war criminals in the next polls so that Bangladesh could be led by people who have the real spirit of the Liberation War.

The Jote's President Nasir Uddin Yusuf Bachchu criticised Jamaat-e-Islami for pledging, in their election manifesto, to enact 'blasphemy act' if voted to power.

"Such act is against the constitution of the country and human rights," Bachchu observed, adding, "People who speak of formulating such acts have no right to participate in the election."

He said Jamaat has unveiled its true character before the people once again through this.

He also called upon the people to boycott war criminals in the next election to establish a secular and democratic society.

Mohammad Golam Mostafa, son of Birsreshtha Shaheed Nur Mohammad Sheikh, told reporters that it is not acceptable that the flag of Bangladesh should fly on the cars of war criminals.

Assistant General Secretary of Sammilito Sangskritik Jote Hasan Arif moderated the session. Poet Prof Muhammad Samad, media personnel M Hamid, theatre activist Mamunur Rashid and Mannan Hira also took part in the session along with others.

Anti-Islamic law

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covering the parliamentary elections slated for December 29.

Matia said they strongly oppose the forces that use the name of Islam for political purposes.

"The extremists have tarnished the image of Islam as a religion of peace. Awami League will do everything to restore the image of Islam," she said adding that they would also ensure the rights to practise all religions.

The AL leader said if voted to power, her party will ensure freedom of press and free flow of information.

"We are pledge-bound to ensure trial of torture and killing of journalists," Matia added.

AL President Sheikh Hasina was supposed to inaugurate the media centre at House No 33/B, Road No-4 but she could not be there for health reasons.

"All information about the grand alliance's election activities and its candidates will be available at the media centre," co-chairman of AL election conducting committee HT Imam told reporters.

The centre will be alert to any propaganda against the grand electoral alliance candidates and take necessary steps.

It will remain open from 10:00am to 11:00pm until December 25 and from 10:00am to 12:00 midnight from December 26 to 29.

The contact numbers of the centre are 9669961, 9669962 and 8651901 and fax numbers are 8650457 and 8651493. The e-mail addresses are almedia2008@gmail.com and info@albd.org.

Election related news will also be available on the website www.albd.org.

Economists sing praises

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To achieve this the existing capacity has to be manipulated by using technological progress. For this emphasis has to be given on agriculture and industrial sectors, especially increasing agriculture production. And important issues that need to be addressed for that are seed, fertiliser and farming.

For all economic issues including power generation and creation of employment two things are very important: financing and policy framework. Zahid said it is a good sign that for the first time a political party has formulated specific short-term and long-term action programmes focusing on economic issues and global crisis.

Noted economist and Unnayan Samunnay Chairman Ataur Rahman said if political stability prevails and corruption and terrorism are checked, additional two percentage points GDP growth is possible. At present the average growth in the country is 6 percent.

If emphasis is given on agriculture and small and medium enterprise (SME), AL's target to achieve 8 percent growth is possible and it will not be impossible to bring down poverty rate to 25 percent in that case, he said.

If participatory budget system and e-governance are introduced and parliament is

strengthened, the problem of financing can be solved. If good governance can be established, foreign funding would increase.

He also said if the local government system is strengthened, resource collection from local level would be possible.

Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue Mustafizur Rahman said, "The positive side is that it has identified major challenges facing the economy both in short and medium terms and has set medium-term and five-year concrete goals in quantifiable terms."

He said the challenges would be to ensure adequate resources to achieve ambitious targets.

"However, from this perspective fiscal initiatives to mobilise domestic resources, domestic borrowing and foreign resources required are not detailed out. The targets for poverty alleviation with the potential GDP growth rates will require a major overhaul of the way growth is to be sustained and outputs to be distributed. This will need to be detailed out subsequently," he observed.

"The issues of regional disparity and income inequality will make achievements of targets set in the manifesto all the more challenging," he said.

Prof MA Taslim, chief executive of Bangladesh Foreign Trade Institute, also found implementation of the promises made in the manifesto would be tough given the existing level of resources.

"The real weakness of the manifesto is that it has not given any costing on how to realise these goals. A lot can be done if sufficient resources are there," he said, referring to issues like power generation, which would require increase in gas output or coal production.

Citing the thorny issue of coal mining that had brought grief to the previous BNP-led four-party alliance government, he said, "Whatever steps it takes it may be unpleasant for them."

Taslim however praised the plan to open seaports and develop deep-sea ports.

He was reluctant to give the next government credit for reducing commodity prices, arguing that the prices have already started to drop. "Prices have started to decline and it will go down further. Any government will enjoy its benefit," he said.

Taslim said 8 percent growth or more is attainable depending on appropriate policy support and proper infrastructure.

Economist and Economic Research Group Executive Director Sajjad Zohir said bringing down prices was supposed to be a widely

claimed agenda but unfortunately not much thought is put into it.

"I will be happy to see political parties acknowledge the difficult times ahead for the global economy as well as the local economy, and the fact that prices are not generally in the control of the government," he said, adding, "Thus commitments are more credible if these are made in context of employment and on access to basic food to all at affordable prices or through safety nets."

Sajjad demanded a clear-cut commitment on how political parties would establish democracy amongst their members and what mechanism would ensure that the party members remain accountable to the people at large.

He said land and its mismanagement are widely acknowledged to be at the centre of many corrupt practices and the source of black money. "We had hoped that the manifesto would make commitments to use ICT in updating land records and easing land registration procedures to provide people of all classes relief from the wrong-doings of a few touts, officials and legal practitioners. I hope that the political parties will pay due attention to this area."

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Mix of doable, pragmatic, lofty things

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that the AL feels the urgency that the world events should be followed closely for taking effective measures. Mention of global warming as an issue for Bangladesh also reflects its better understanding of the globalisation process.

Its target for an 8 percent GDP growth by 2013 in medium term and 10 percent by 2017, reduction of poverty to 25 percent from the current 45 percent in five years, massive social safety network, village level rationing, employment schemes for the jobless—all sound good. But as said before, the problems with implementation and financing. Looking at the total manifesto, a part of it needs political will and a part -- economic acumen. The AL showed its political will in the past by signing the Ganges deal and the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Treaty. It will need such will again for realising the intentions of joining the Asian Highway and Railway, and building the deep seaport.

Bangladesh has been striving for an 8 percent growth for quite some time, but that dream figure is yet to be achieved. Besides corruption and lack of infrastructure, what has held Bangladesh back from arriving at the figure is the lack of investment. Investment in the past was at best around 24 percent of the GDP. To reach the 8 percent figure, it will need an investment of at least about 32 percent of GDP, a big jump and a daunting task. This will need a bigger Annual Development Programme (ADP), which should not be a big issue. The hurdle would be to improve implementation capability, which despite years of efforts remains dismal. A tumbling ADP would also mean a crumbling GDP growth. And in a time of deepening global economic crisis, 8 percent still

might look lofty.

Although poverty has been a favourite buzzword for both development organisations and political parties, fighting it still remains an elusive game. In the 1990s, poverty dropped at a snail's pace of 1 percent while the economic growth rate averaged 4.8 percent. From 2000 to 2005, poverty dropped at a faster rate of 2 percent with an average growth rate of 5.4 percent. The AL's vision spells out, it wants to cut poverty by 20 percent in five years, an annual reduction of 4 percent. This by any measure is a huge challenge. The question is -- can an 8 percent growth do the miracle? The critics would take the promise with a rather large pinch of salt.

The other interesting proposal the manifesto makes, is the composition of GDP. The AL envisions a rise in industry's share in GDP from 25 percent to 45 percent, a fall in service sector's from 50 percent to 45 percent, and of agriculture's from 22 percent to 15 percent. This shift of gear is natural if an economy has to graduate to a better position. More industrial development means more employment, as the party sets specific employment goals as well. A lesser emphasis on the service sector means less stress on modernisation, but also less stress on growth without employment. But if agriculture slows down, that would throw a real challenge to employment and equality. Others might look at it from a different angle. As the economy becomes bigger and bigger, the agriculture even with a better growth as promised in the manifesto, might lose its share.