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New cabinet radiates hope on first day

M ABUL KALAM AZAD and HASAN JAHID TUSHER

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her cabinet colleagues on their first day in the new government yesterday joined offices with promises to fulfil their electoral pledges to the people.

Before going to her new office in the morning, the premier advised her ministers not to waste even a day, and to work fervently throughout the five-year tenure for development of the country in service of the people.

Hasina began her maiden
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Clarification

A report published in our yesterday's issue headlined "Hasina sworn in as PM" says many Awami League leaders were left out of the newly formed cabinet for allegations of corruption and their dubious political role in the post 1/11-months. The names of Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Asaduzzaman Noor were mentioned in the story by error for which we regret.

Cabinet decides to cut diesel price

Fertiliser subsidy to be raised; directive to curb essentials prices

HASAN JAHID TUSHER and M ABUL KALAM AZAD

The first meeting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's cabinet last night decided to improve law and order and to increase

subsidy on fertiliser while reducing the price of diesel in a bid to boost agricultural production in the coming Boro season.

The prime minister directed the ministers concerned to take immediate measures to bring prices of everyday essen-

tials within the reach of consumers. The meeting that started around 8:30pm in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), also decided to provide all privileges of a minister to the former chief

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses the first meeting of her cabinet held at the PMO yesterday.

BNP to join parliament on first day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP lawmakers-elect last night in a meeting decided to take oath and join the first session of the parliament.

However, party sources said the BNP lawmakers-elect might attend the first day's proceedings of the ninth parliament.

"We shall join the first session of the parliament for the sake of democracy, the country's interest, and to continue the democratic process," Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, a senior party leader and an MP-elect, told reporters after a two-hour meeting of the BNP's parliamentary party.

Referring to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's proposal for appointing the deputy speaker of the house from the opposition, Salahuddin said they will consider it, if they get a formal offer.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting in her Gulshan office, where all MPs-elect of the party were present.

Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury also said the government must create the necessary environment for the opposition's proper role in the parliament.

"We hope that our Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will continue to express the same kind of tolerance that she did in her post-election media conference," he said.

The BNP leader also said, "We are pledging that we will do whatever necessary to keep the government accountable to the parliament."

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More world leaders greet Hasina

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Heads of governments of different countries congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her assumption of the office of Prime Minister.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh yesterday congratulated his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina on her becoming the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, saying India attaches the "highest importance" to its relations with her country.

"Our two countries share close bonds of friendship based on a rich cultural heritage, a common border and regular people-to-people

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Holiday

The offices of The Daily Star will remain closed today on account of Ashura. Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow. Friday's Star Magazine will come out on Saturday along with the main edition.

Israel resumes bombing after a brief halt

Death toll in Gaza crosses 700; Israeli cabinet okays expanding offensives

AGENCIES, Gaza City

Hopes of a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Gaza were dampened yesterday as two Palestinians were killed in an Israeli strike after the army resumed bombings in Gaza City after a three-hour lull.

The strike hit the eastern Gaza City neighbourhood of Zeitun, they said. The identity of the victims was not immediately available.

Meanwhile, the death toll from Israel's 12-day-old offensive on Hamas in the Gaza Strip has passed 700, medics said.

The offensive unleashed on December 27 has killed 702 people and wounded more than 3,100, the head of Gaza emergency services, Moawiya Hassanein, told AFP.

At least 220 of the dead have been children,

hesaid.

The Israeli security cabinet approved expanding the offensive against Hamas in Gaza.

Earlier yesterday, the Israeli army halted bombings around Gaza City for three hours in what the government called a "humanitarian respite."

Optimism rose with the news that Israel had agreed "on the principles" of a ceasefire proposal.

Details of the plan, put forward by Egypt and France, must still be agreed.

The Palestinian militant group Hamas, which has been targeted by the Israeli military in Gaza, said there were "positive signs but no agreement yet".

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HC lifts ban on five milk powder brands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday withdrew its ban on sale and display of powdered milk of five brands as laboratory tests found them safe.

The brands are Dano, Red Cow, Diploma, Nido and Anlene. The HC bench of Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui came up with the ruling on the basis of test reports from a German and three local laboratories.

The court directed the government to have powdered milk of the other brands too tested, and report back within six weeks.

The HC ban on eight leading brands—Yashili-1, Yashili-2 and Sweet Baby-2—will remain in force.

Manzil Murshid, counsel for the petitioners, yesterday told The Daily Star that the ban on selling and displaying the milk powder of the three other brands—Yashili-1, Yashili-2 and Sweet Baby-2—will remain in force.

On November 17 last year, the Supreme Court directed the
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Don't harass Hasina over graft cases

HC extends its earlier orders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday extended its earlier orders that directed the law enforcers not to harass or arrest Prime Minister and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina in Niko and barge-mounted power plant corruption cases filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC).

Responding to separate prayers moved by the government and Hasina's counsels,
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Fertiliser supply to be ensured

Says Matia

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury yesterday gave indication of reducing diesel price and ensuring supply of fertiliser to the farmers to help them during the current Boro season.

She said an announcement about diesel price might come soon from the prime minister.

"We do not want the farmers to suffer from a shortage of fertiliser and cannot let it happen," she told journalists on her first day in office.

The agriculture minister said the present government's first priority will be to bring down the prices of
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Govt to form price control body

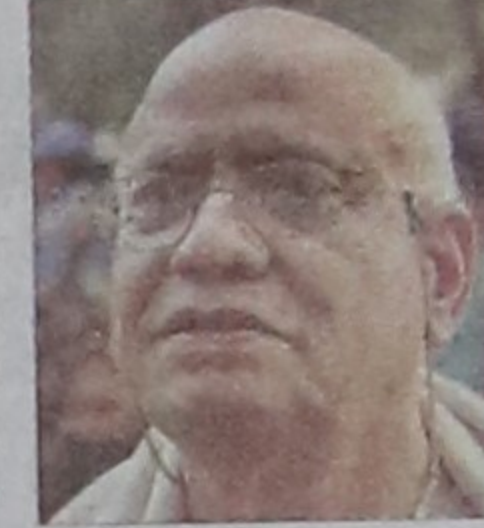
Muhith promises

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Newly appointed Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said they would form a price commission to keep prices of essentials under control and crack down on unscrupulous business syndicates.

After joining office on the first day Muhith said his maiden task would be to control the prices of commodities. They would do this by implementing the six-point programme on their election manifesto, he added.

Muhith became the finance minister for the second time. Yesterday he came to his Secretariat office
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Govt to fight terror with neighbours

Dipu Moni says

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will hold talks with neighbouring countries to work out effective measures to fight militancy and terrorism for ensuring peace and stability in South Asia, said newly appointed Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni yesterday.

Dipu Moni, the country's first woman foreign minister, made the remark at her office while replying to a query from journalists about the anti-terrorism Joint Task Force in South Asia proposed by Sheikh Hasina.

"Militancy and terrorism are not limited to geographical boundary. For that reason, we will take
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Extortion, extremism to be stamped out

Says Sahara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Advocate Sahara Khatun yesterday vowed to establish rule of law in the country by rooting out terrorism, extremism and extortion from the society.

The country's first female home minister believes that terrorism and extremism cannot be eliminated only by suing criminals and putting them behind the bars.

"We will have to identify the sources of terrorism, extremism and extortion. And if we can take effective steps to root those out Bangladesh will not be lagging behind," she told reporters on her first day in office.
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1972 constitution to be restored

Says Barrister Shafique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Barrister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said his ministry will take steps to restore the 1972 constitution in order to reestablish the spirits of secularism, the great liberation war, rule of law, human rights and democracy in the country.

"As a lawyer and human rights activist I have certain commitments to the people. The government is also committed to restore the Constitution of 1972. If those commitments are fulfilled, the religious militancy and terrorism emerged in recent years in
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MORE INTERVIEWS ON PAGE 2, 3, 5



Ashura today

UNB, Dhaka

The holy Ashura will be observed across the country today as also in other Muslim countries to commemorate the Karbala tragedy in which Hazrat Imam Hossain embraced martyrdom along with his family and friends.

On the 10th of Muharram, the fateful day, Muslims vent remorse over the martyrdom of Imam Hossain, grandson of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (peace be upon him), in the hands of Yazid, son of Muslim ruler Muabia, and his forces over 1300 years ago.

While on a journey towards Kufa, Hazrat Imam Hossain, his family members and a number of his followers were ambushed by the forces of Yazid at Karbala in Iraq
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Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and Home Minister advocate Sahara Khatun talk to senior AL leaders -- Suranjit Sengupta, Abdur Razzak and Amir Hossain Amu -- who were left out of the newly formed cabinet, in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum in Dhanmondi yesterday.

5 lakh-strong security to guard UZ polls

SHAKHAWAT LITON and SHARIFUL ISLAM

The government has decided to deploy over 500,000 security personnel across the country to ensure peaceful holding of elections in 481 upazila parishads on January 22.

Sources said the home ministry has already laid out a security plan for the polls and members of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), coastguard, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and Armed Police Battalion (APBn) will fan out as mobile and striking forces across the country from January 16 as per the arrangement.

The Election Commission (EC) has already decided not to deploy members of the armed forces in the upazila polls, which will be the first election under the newly elected government.

However, the EC yesterday held a meeting on the security of upazila polls and decided to seek opinion regarding security situation from the field level officials engaged in holding the elections.

"On the basis of the opinions from field level officials, the EC might review its earlier decision not to deploy members of the armed forces

during the upazila polls," Election Commissioner M Sohul Hossain told reporters at his office yesterday.

The government has already asked BDR and members of other law enforcers to tighten security and watch in the bordering areas so that criminals hiding abroad could not come to the country with firearms, ammunition and explosives ahead of the upazila elections.

It has also asked the customs and immigration authorities to mount watch to control arrival of persons who might be a risk or threat for holding the elections peacefully. Order has also been issued to arrest probable troublemakers during the election.

EC Secretariat officials also said security arrangement for the upazila parishad elections will be as same as that of December 29 parliamentary election. They said around 50,000 army personnel were deployed in the parliamentary elections but there will be no deployment of army in the upazila polls.

A home ministry official, wishing anonymity, also said members of BDR, coastguard, Rab
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