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REGD. NO. DA 781

VOL. XVIII No. 350

DHAKA SATURDAY JANUARY 10, 2009

POUSH 27, 1415 BS

MUHARRAM 12, 1430 HIJRI

28 PAGES PLUS THE STAR PRICE: Tk 10.00

BNP front bodies to be dissolved, revamped: Khaleda

WASIM BIN HABIB from Noakhali

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said all committees of BNP and associate organisations would be dissolved and revamped through elections.

She also appealed to her party rank and file not to lose heart.

The former prime minister said BNP will join parliament to speak for the people. "People want to buy rice at Tk 10; they want fertiliser for free and job for one from each family."

"We want to see implementation of all the pledges Awami League made before the election. But they have already started denying

making those [promises]."

The BNP chief made the remarks campaigning at Sonaimuri and Chatkhil in Noakhali and speaking at a view-exchange meeting with party men in Comilla.

At polls rallies, she introduced Mahbubuddin Khokan as BNP nominee in the January 12 election to Noakhali-1 constituency and sought vote for him.

She again alleged massive rigging in the December 29 general election.

She said people voted BNP, but the result was changed in favour of another party and alliance. Even the voter roll has been 'tampered with'.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Army to be deployed in UZ polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) has decided to deploy army personnel to help ensure peaceful holding of election to 481 upazila parishads in the country on January 22, deviating from its earlier decision in this regard.

"A decision to deploy army has been taken," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (ret) M Shakhawat Hossain said when contacted yesterday.

EC sources said although the commission had earlier decided not to deploy members of the armed forces during upazila polls, it has changed its decision apprehending deterioration in law

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Israel defies UN call for truce, pounds Gaza

Death toll nears 800

AFP, Gaza City

A defiant Israel pounded Gaza with bombs and shells yesterday, vowing to pursue its war on Hamas despite a truce order from the UN Security Council, amid warnings the territory was running out of food.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel would not bow to "outside influence" as its aircraft carried out more bombing and the army's tanks shelled several locations despite an announced three-hour "humanitarian" lull.

Hamas meanwhile also rejected the United Nations resolution which called for an "immediate, durable" ceasefire on the grounds that it only served Israel's interests.

Two weeks on from the start of Operation Cast Lead, SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Smoke from Israeli strikes billows from the Gaza Strip yesterday as seen from Gaza City. Israel battered Gaza with bombs and shells.

PHOTO: AFP



PHOTO: STAR

JS goes into first session Jan 25

AL welcomes BNP's joining decision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ninth parliament will convene at 3:00pm January 25. President Iajuddin Ahmed has summoned the newly elected legislature to meet as per article 72 (1) of the constitution, said a Parliament Secretariat handout Thursday.

The first sitting will see a speaker and a deputy speaker elected. It will also have to give legal cover to over 100 ordinances promulgated by the caretaker government.

Meanwhile, the BNP lawmakers-elect have decided to take oath and join the first session of parliament. The party won 29 seats and its rival Awami League (AL) 230 in the December 29 election.

"We'll join parliament for the sake of democracy and in national interest," Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, senior BNP leader and MP-elect, told reporters after a two-hour meeting at Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office Wednesday.

He also said the government must create an environment SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

Commentary

Sheikh Hasina's cabinet: Gutsy but risky

MAHFUZ ANAM

She promised to surprise us with her choice of the cabinet, and she did. Though the media was able to get some predictions right but generally speaking she outwitted us all. Not only in choosing the individuals but equally in giving them portfolios. Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina showed a boldness and a spirit of moving away from the trodden path that is rare in our politics. However, in her 'thinking out of the box' she has also taken some very serious risks that can make or break her government's prospect for success.

Whatever be our reaction to the cabinet we will, and must, give it a reasonable time to perform before we make any conclusion as how correct the PM was in choosing the cabinet that she did. So today's comments therefore are preliminary ones, based more on our impression and existing reputations of the ministers concerned.

In terms of new faces one couldn't have asked for more. As to clean reputation, except for a few, she is well on target. She also scores very high on getting some grassroots based politicians, who are not well known in Dhaka circles, into the helm of affairs. It is in the area of experience that she runs her greatest risk. Though she brushed aside this point by saying that in her last cabinet (1996-2001) most people were first-time ministers and, in her view, they did well. So why can't it work again? Well, she is right, and she is also wrong. Everyone is not Matia Chowdhury, SAMS Kibria or ASHK Sadique. There were other first-timers SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Experts' views on ordinances by caretaker govt Monday

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Members of the legal experts' committee formed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will submit to the government on Monday their opinions on 117 ordinances promulgated during the tenure of the last two caretaker governments.

Sources said a few committee members have already prepared their opinions in line with the High Court (HC) verdict, which said the president can only promulgate ordinances regarding election matters and day-to-day government affairs during the tenure of the caretaker government.

Eminent jurist barrister Rafique-ul Huq yesterday told The Daily Star that since the ninth parliament has been set SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Hasina promises balanced dev, no discrimination

Pays tribute to Bangabandhu at Tungipara

UNB, Tungipara, Gopalganj

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government will work for balanced development of all people, irrespective of caste and creed.

"We'll work for the development of all equally and won't discriminate between those who had voted for us and those who did not," she told a gathering of local people at Bangabandhu mausoleum complex at Tungipara.

Hasina, also the Awami League president, said: "The massive victory of Awami League-led grand alliance in the 9th parliamentary elections has entrusted us with a great duty and

responsibility towards the nation."

She directed the leaders and activists of Awami League and its front organisations to take "this victory as responsibility towards the nation and work with utmost tolerance and patience."

The prime minister sought blessings of all irrespective of party affiliation and belief so that she could meet the people's expectations.

Hasina pledged to reintroduce some programmes like allowances for the freedom fighters, elderly allowance, widow allowance, 'asrayan' housing projects and community clinic scheme.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Urgent steps to cut rice price imperative for new govt

Former ministers tell The Daily Star

JULFIKAR ALI MANIK and EMRAN HOSSAIN

The new government should immediately undertake measures to reduce rice price for a positive impact on other commodity prices and make agriculture profitable so that farmers stick to their profession, suggest former heavyweight ministers from both Awami League and BNP.

They also suggest well coordination between the commerce and finance ministries to control the prices of essentials.

They also put emphasis on turning domestic industry more vibrant and

paying attention to industrial financing and existing weak infrastructure for industrialisation.

A former BNP minister emphasised bringing businesspersons, who left the country out of fear in the last two years, back to business to address unemployment problems.

Political analysts observe the new cabinet formed by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with fresh and inexperienced faces would face challenges in running their respective ministries.

Against this backdrop, The Daily Star contacted some former senior ministers from AL and BNP who talked about the primary challenges and offered sugges-

tions for the new cabinet.

AL presidium member and lawmaker Tofail Ahmed is one of the bigwigs in the party who did not find a place in the cabinet. Tofail had served as the commerce minister for the first few years while working as the industries minister of the previous AL government.

From his experience Tofail said: "A commerce minister cannot be successful unless the commerce and finance ministries are well-coordinated as the former requires tremendous support from the latter."

Citing an example, Tofail said the finance ministry could have helped the SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

POST-POLL VIOLENCE BNP criticises home minister's comment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday claimed that 13 people were killed and innumerable others injured by the Awami League activists since the day after the December 29 elections.

In a statement, Delwar condemned the home minister's remark, terming the post-election violence an 'outcome of BNP's internal conflict'.

"Government is patronising the criminals who are torturing the BNP men and common people across the country," he alleged.

He also said the government mindset of patronising SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

BANGABANDHU MURDER

2 judges to be appointed soon to dispose of case

ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Two judges may be appointed to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court this week as per the recommendations of the Supreme Judicial Commission, paving the way for the disposal of long pending Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister barrister Shafique Ahmed yesterday told The Daily Star that steps will be taken this

week to fill up the two vacant posts of judges in the Appellate Division.

The Supreme Judicial Commission on October 16 recommended four senior most judges of the High Court Division for the two Appellate Division posts that have been lying vacant since July 2 last year. The recommended judges are Justice Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman, Justice Md Abdul Quddus, Justice Md Abdul Aziz and Justice Bijan Kumar Das.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

5 hurt as BCL factions fight at DU Zia Hall

Provost resigns

DU CORRESPONDENT

At least five activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of Awami League (AL) were injured in a factional clash at Muktiyoddha Ziaur Rahman Hall of Dhaka University (DU) in the early hours of yesterday.

Police rounded up six BCL men and an outsider from the hall compound for their alleged involvement in the clash.

Meanwhile, hall provost Prof Borhan Uddin Khan submitted his resignation letter to DU Vice-Chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz in this connection yesterday afternoon.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Rice prices may surge again this year: Experts

AFP, Manila

Rice prices are likely to rise sharply for the second straight year in 2009 as the global economic slowdown hits farmers and consumers alike, the International Rice Research Institute warned yesterday.

The worldwide credit crunch will make it hard for farmers to secure cash to purchase essentials such as seeds and fertiliser, the Philippines-based body said in the latest edition of its quarterly journal "Rice Today".

At the same time, it added, the economic downturn may increase demand for rice in developing nations as falling income forces poor people to switch back to less expensive staples.

The price of rice -- a staple food for half the world including nearly 700 million poor Asians -- spiked to 1,080 dollars a

tonne last April, triggering fears of social unrest.

It slid to about 575 dollars six months later due to record production and the early effects of the economic slowdown.

However, the institute warned, "production uncertainty due to tight credit and declining rice prices combined with strong demand growth points to another rise in rice prices in the coming months."

"Price volatility will remain high." Even if they had the cash, farmers burned by the sudden plunge in commodity prices "will likely play safe and reduce input for their 2009 crops."

The institute pointed to a decision by the Philippines government to lower its 2009 rice output estimate by almost four percent, and said a similar move from other rice producers "is likely in the near term."

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Brawl in Baitul Mukarram Mosque over new Khatib

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two groups of people -- one supporting the acting Khatib and the other favouring the newly appointed Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque -- involved in scuffles and shoe-throwing at each other before Jum'a prayers yesterday.

The incident took place over who would lead the prayers.

Witnesses said when acting Khatib and senior Pesh Imam of the mosque Maulana Mufti Mohammad Nuruddin stood up to lead Jum'a prayers, some people shouted in protest.

And another group of SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

19th Death Anniversary

DATE: 10TH JANUARY 1990

We deeply mourn the death of our beloved mother Late "Masuda Begum" wife of late Mr. Abul Khair, founder of Abul Khair Group (Abul Co.). Today with due respect, we remember her works, ideals and memories and pray to Almighty for her divine blessings.

We request all our relatives and well-wishers to pray for her eternal peace.

BELOVED SONS & DAUGHTERS.