

BNP pledges to work with govt for nation's progress

Party MPs to join JS on 1st day, Khaleda asks them to work honestly

SHAKHAWAT LITON and RASHIDUL HASAN

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said her party deputies will attend parliament from its inaugural sitting and play a constructive role there. She urged them to lead honest and constructive lives, shunning luxury.

"We hope the government will take the country forward in cooperation with the opposition. We want to assist the government and we want the government creates that atmosphere and maintain it," Khaleda said after a meeting of the BNP Parliamentary Party.

After taking oath in the afternoon, the BNP lawmakers held the meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban and elected Khaleda unanimously as their leader in parliament and decided to send a copy of the decision to Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar to recognise



Led by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, 31 MPs-elect of four-party alliance being sworn in as lawmakers. Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar administered the oath taking in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

her as the leader of the opposition.

Later at a briefing at Khaleda's Gulshan office BNP Vice-President MK Anwar said the meeting authorised the party chief to pick her deputy in the

House, nominate one for the election to the post of deputy speaker and choose lawmakers for other posts including the opposition chief whip.

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Khaleda to lead smallest-ever opposition

SHAKHAWAT LITON

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is going to be recognised as the leader of the smallest-ever opposition that has pledged to play a strong role to make parliament effective.

The BNP Parliamentary Party yesterday elected Khaleda its leader in parliament and decided to forward a copy of the decision to Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar for recognition.

After the meeting of the BNP body yesterday afternoon, Khaleda said, "We will join parliament in the interest of the nation and play a constructive role in parliament."

However, regardless of the number of lawmakers in her support, Khaleda's status in

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Govt moves to boost power, gas production

PM forms special cell at ministry to implement projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday formed a special cell for the power, energy and mineral resources ministry aiming to scale up country's power and gas production.

The cell headed by the premier's adviser HT Imam will monitor the works in the sector and implement the development projects under the ministry in light of the new policy guidelines of the present government.

"We need more energy for development works. You must work fast and sincerely as we do not have much time in our hands to do so," Hasina, also in-charge of the energy ministry, told a meeting at the ministry.

The meeting decided to withdraw all taxes



from import of solar energy accessories to facilitate generation of solar energy.

She also asked the officials concerned to resume power generation at 150-MW Bhola Power Plant soon.

Hasina attended office at the ministry for the first time yesterday after taking the charge of prime minister.

Hasina, also the chief of Awami League, said the previous AL government left the power sector in a good shape in 2001 but since then no initiative was taken to increase power and gas production to meet the country's growing demand.

The prime minister said she would see what actually had happened in the energy sector in the last seven years to find out the reasons for

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BTV ignores BNP MPs' oath-taking ceremony

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The swearing-in of the lawmakers from BNP and allies yesterday was not aired live on Bangladesh Television.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar said, "It is discrimination against the opposition in parliament from day one."

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia said, "This shows the public the difference between what they [AL-led grand alliance] pledge and do."

The state-run TV broadcast live the oath-taking ceremony of Awami League-led grand alliance lawmakers on January 3.

Talking to reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban yesterday afternoon, the speaker said his office had sent an application to the authorities

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Smoke billows from the Gaza Strip following an air strike by the Israeli air force yesterday. Israeli tanks rumbled ever deeper into Gaza cities early yesterday, going into several neighbourhoods of the enclave's capital.

PHOTO: AFP

Israel shells UN office in Gaza

UN operations suspended; terrified residents flee as toll nears 1,100

AFP, AP, Gaza City

Israeli strikes set media and UN buildings and a hospital ablaze yesterday as tanks rolled deep into Gaza cities even amid hope that the war on Hamas that has killed nearly 1,100 people may soon end.

Hundreds of terrified civilians, many gripping wailing children, fled the advancing Israeli troops inside Gaza City as warplanes pummeled the battered Palestinian enclave where half the population is under the age of 18.

While battles raged on the ground, Egypt kept up Western-backed efforts to end the 20-day-old war that was launched on the Islamist Hamas in response to rocket fire and that has killed an estimated 600 civilians.

Shortly after UN chief Ban Ki-moon arrived in Israel, a raid hit the main UN compound in Gaza, wounding three employees, setting fire to a warehouse filled with tonnes of aid, and leading the UNRWA agency to partly suspend operations.

"I have conveyed my strong protest and outrage and demanded a full explanation," Ban told reporters after holding talks with Israeli officials as part of a regional truce tour.

The UN chief, who has for weeks called for a ceasefire in Israel's deadliest offensive ever on

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Sahara asks law enforcers to go tough on extortionists

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Sahara Khatun yesterday asked the law enforcement agencies to smash the hands of extortionists, whoever they may be, to stop overt or covert toll taking.

"Whatever it is -- overtly or covertly -- smash the hands of extortionists," she said responding to a reporter's question about silent extortion across the country.

Briefing reporters on law and order and the outcome of the meeting of the national smuggling prevention committee, the minister said the government strategy is to deal with an iron hand with those who want to create law and order situation.

She sought cooperation of the people in curbing terrorism, rooting out militancy and eliminating extortion.

The home minister dismissed the apprehension

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Govt lifts duty on solar energy tools

10pc of total power from renewables by 2020

SHARIER KHAN

The government has decided to withdraw all duties from solar energy equipment to encourage use of solar energy, especially in the remote and economically backward locations.

With over three lakh households already using solar energy equivalent to 15 megawatt, mainly in the coastal southwestern region, this withdrawal would reduce around Tk 1,500 per solar panel worth Tk 10,000. People usually go for a two-panel system that costs them Tk 20,000.

Currently, there is 15 percent VAT on renewable energy equipment.

This decision came at a meeting of Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina, who also holds the energy portfolio, with the energy ministry officials yesterday.

This decision was made in line with the Renewable Energy Policy of Bangladesh, approved by the caretaker government on December 18 and made effective through a gazette notification.

The policy follows the Vision and Policy Statement, 2000 that aims at providing power to all by 2020 in phases.

The policy targets developing renewable energy resources to meet five percent of the total power demand by 2015 and 10 percent by 2020.

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Sircar changes mind, won't quit politics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Outgoing Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar yesterday said he would not quit politics; a contrary view from what he told a few days back that he would call it a day from politics after the new speaker was elected.

"Out of anguish, I told you earlier that I would give up politics. Now I've changed my mind and decided to practise law and carry on with politics," Sircar told reporters at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban after administering oath to BNP-led four-party alliance lawmakers.

Following the oath-taking of AL lawmakers on January 3 the speaker told reporters that

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US action has no link with Bangladesh politics

Says Moriarty about bribe money stashed in S'pore

UNB, Dhaka

The US Department of Justice believes that there is corrupt money in bank account in Singapore and the department's actions in this regard have nothing to do with Bangladesh politics, said US Ambassador James Moriarty.

He told journalists replying to a question about Arafat Rahman Koko's monetary scandal in Singapore after meeting Foreign Minister Dipu Moni.

It is to implement the US

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News analysis

Fertiliser subsidy: Winding way to wealth creation

INAM AHMED

The price reduction of fertiliser has given rise to new thoughts on how the rice -- a commodity with less price elasticity -- will behave on the market, and how and whether the Tk 2,700 crore subsidy will translate into wealth creation.

On both counts, it is difficult to come to a conclusive answer, but generally any high hope of subsidy equivalent impact on rice price can

be ruled out. On the other hand, price is not a factor in wealth creation and transfer of the farmers' savings into productivity, which actually creates wealth, will depend on many other policy decisions and actions.

"If the price of rice remains constant, the reduction of fertiliser price would lead to higher savings for farmers," says Dr Sajjad Zohir of Economic Research Group. "Unfortunately, as it is a harvest time the benchmark rice

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Dr Toufique made adviser to PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed former energy secretary Dr Toufique-e-Elahi Chowdhury Bir Bikram as an adviser to the prime minister.

As an adviser he will enjoy the rank and status, salaries, allowances and other benefits of a minister, according to an official handout.

We Remember

We solemnly remember our esteemed Director, Anindya Majumder, who passed away on this day in 2007. We miss him in every step of our lives and pray for his soul to find eternal peace in heaven.

Bereaved family members, Directors and employees of New Generation Construction Co. Ltd.

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