

Ban on new launches with more than 2 decks under consideration

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan tells The Daily Star

KAILASH SARKAR

The government is considering imposing a ban on construction of launches with more than two decks with a view to preventing launch disasters, which cause huge loss of lives every year.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan said this in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star at his office in the city yesterday.

"In the future, none would be allowed to build launches with more than two decks," he said, adding that steps would also be taken to phase out such launches operating on the river routes.

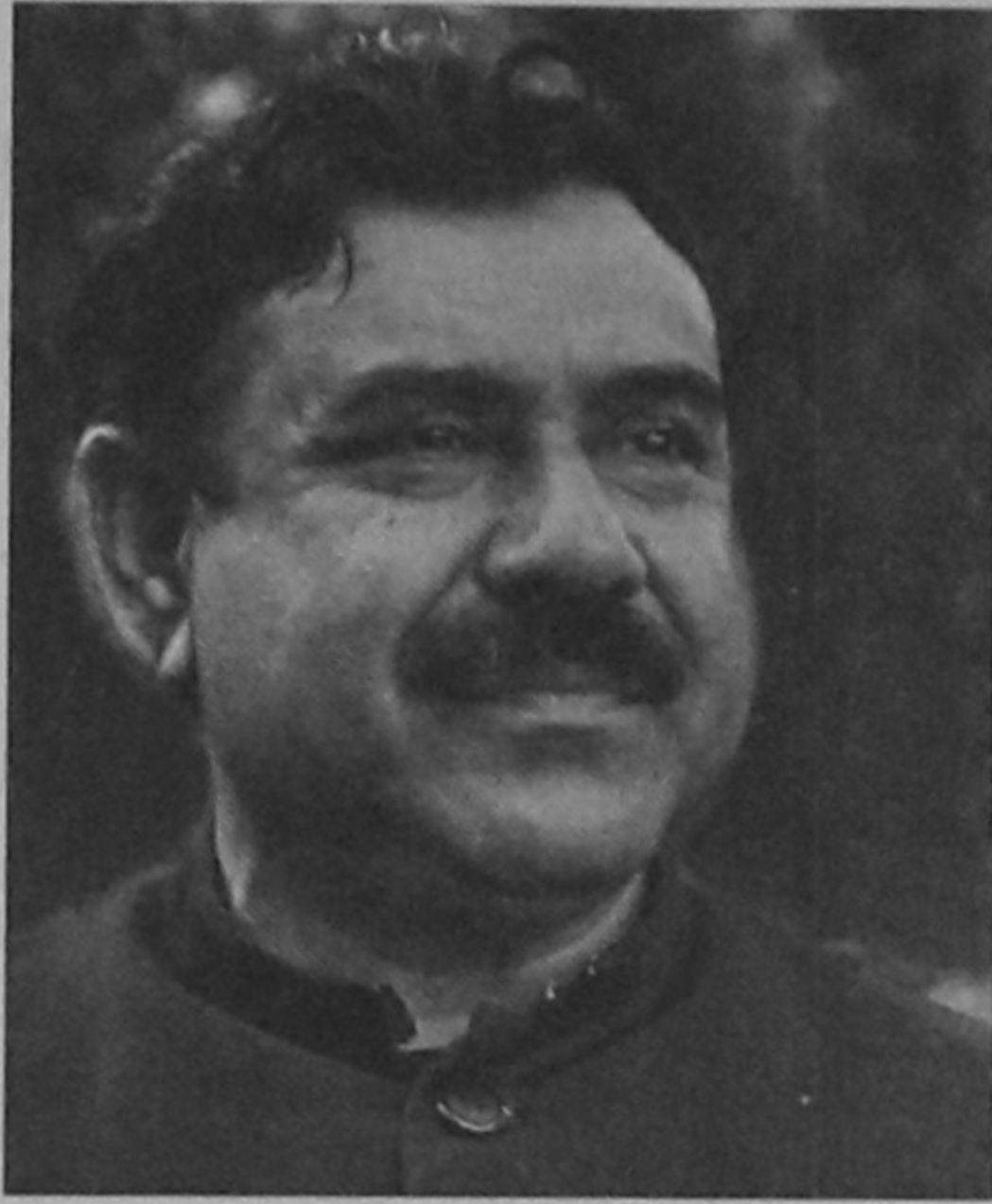
"The owners of launches with more than two decks would be requested to convert their vessels into double-decker ones," the minister said.

According to sources, about 5,000 people have been killed in launch disasters since 1991. But the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport (Passenger Carriers) Agency (BIWTPCA) puts the figure at 2,300.

Explaining the reasons behind the government move, Shahjahan Khan said the launches with more than two decks are more vulnerable to accidents, as they can easily lose their balance due to various factors, including overloading of passengers.

"We have discussed the issue at inter-ministerial meetings and experts also expressed the same views in this regard. However, no decision has yet been taken in this regard."

Replying to a query, the minister said, "It is true that just after any launch disasters in the past, the



Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan

authorities concerned have always vowed to take stern action against the persons responsible and also to take preventive measures. But after some days, they forgot their commitments."

"I can assure you that this government will not do the same. Rather, it will work towards fulfilling its commitments," he said.

"We have plans to evict encroachers from the rivers and restore navigability of the rivers to enable water vessels to operate smoothly," he added.

The government will also take some other decisions to protect river water from pollution through raising mass awareness, said the minister.

"Each launch must have waste bins and garbage bags so that the passengers can put waste into them instead of dumping them into the river," he said.

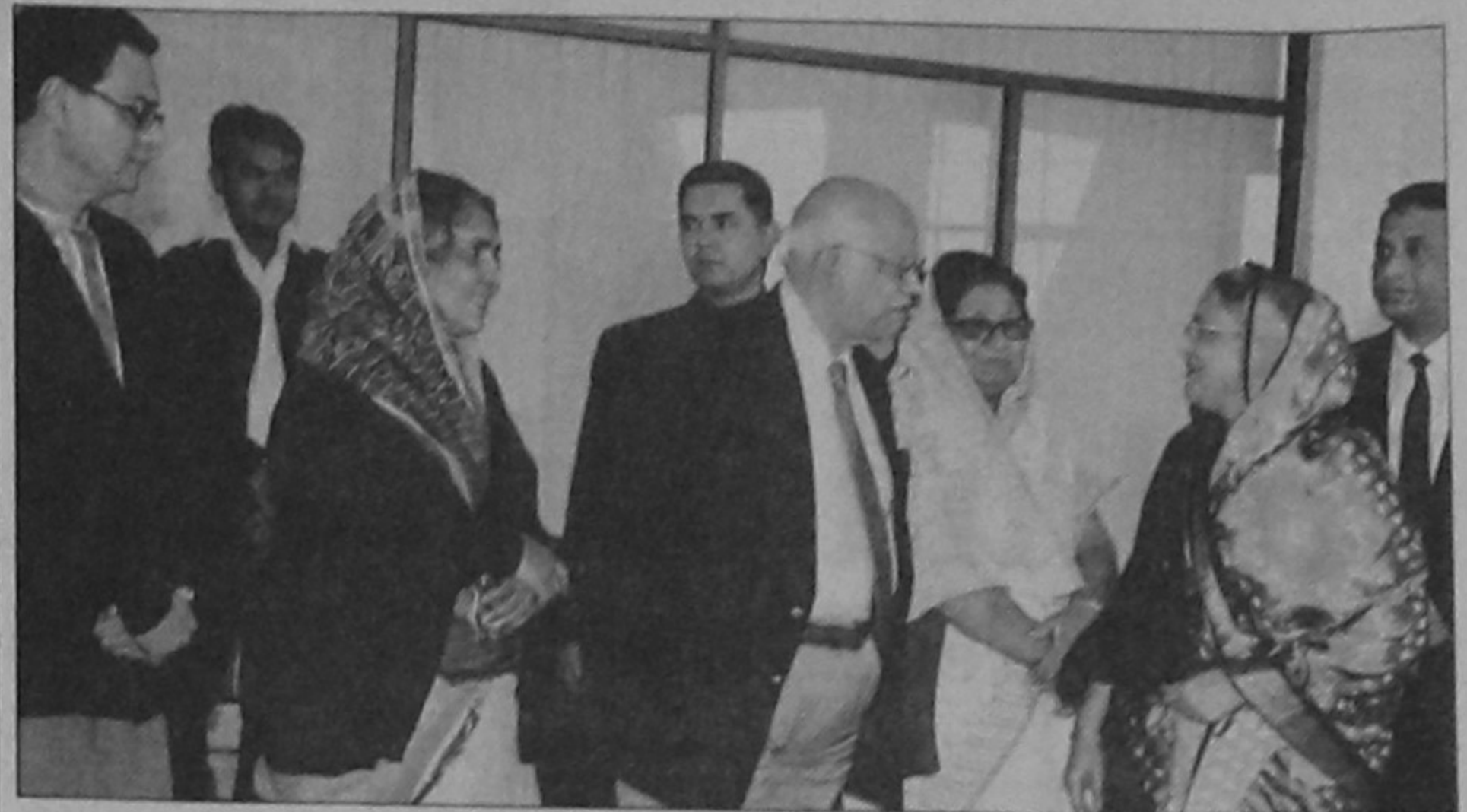
"We are also trying to introduce some measures so that the launches do not carry more passengers than their capacity and the people also do not board any launches full of passengers."

According to Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and BIWTPCA, around 600 launches are operating on different routes from Sadarghat Launch Terminal in the city.

The number of launch routes has declined from 51 to 36 in the last 10 years due to lack of navigability and various anti-river activities.

The number of launch passengers has also declined significantly. Earlier, 20,000 people, on an average, used to travel by launches from Sadarghat. But now the number has gone down to 10,000 to 12,000.

According to BIWTPCA Senior Vice-President Badiuzzaman Badal, water vessels carry about five lakh passengers during Eid holidays.



Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Finance Minister AMA Muhith and LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam receive Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Zia International Airport in the city yesterday on her return from Copenhagen climate change conference. (Story on page 16)

DCC draft voter list Jan 3

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Draft voter list for Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) area will be published on January 3, allowing voters to file complaints against errors if any, the Election Commission (EC) announced yesterday.

With the draft voter list publication for DCC, the EC started the process across the country to prepare the final electoral roll with photographs.

"Directives regarding

publication of district level draft voter list will be issued later," said the EC Secretariat in a press release.

The schedule would allow people to verify the draft voter list for DCC at the district and Thana election offices, ward commissioners' offices and voter registration centres till January 18.

People will have to file application on or before the date for correction or amendment in the list. The revision authorities will decide on the

applications by January 26 while decision on them will be incorporated in the list by January 31.

After the process, the final voter list for DCC will be published on February 3. And then the EC will announce schedule for the DCC polls, which will be held at the end of March or early April.

The EC prepared draft voter list countrywide through updating the electoral roll prepared for the ninth parliamentary election.

Ameerah takes over as UN Under Secy Gen Jan 5

UNB, Dhaka

Ameerah Haq has been appointed Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative for Timor-Leste and Head of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT).

She will take office in Dili, Timor-Leste on January 5, says a press release.

Ameerah Haq is the highest-ranking UN staff from Bangladesh and the first woman from Bangladesh to reach this level.

She served as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Sudan, and prior to that, as Deputy Special Representative for Afghanistan. In both cases, she also held the position of UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Representative of UNDP.

OVERSEAS EMPLOYMENT

11 Asian countries plan common policy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eleven Asian labour sending countries will frame a common policy to address problems in the overseas employment process, said Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khondaker Mosharrar Hossain yesterday.

The initiative has been taken in the wake of labour problems caused following the global economic meltdown, he said in an interview with BBC radio broadcast.

Mosharrar Hossain is the

chair of the Colombo Process, a regional grouping of 11 countries that started in 2003.

The countries include Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

The process aims to continue to provide a forum for dialogue among the member states. With the continued participation of the destination countries, this dialogue is set to evolve and contribute to strengthening migration management both in the Asian region and in countries of destination.

The minister told the BBC radio with participation of the labour-receiving countries, the sending countries want to set a minimum standard of overseas labour management so that none gets in trouble in the process of labour migration management.

In the wake of global meltdown, thousands of Asian workers, including Bangladeshis, returned home on 'long vacation' or lost jobs.

Bangladesh's labour market also shrunk almost by half compared to last year's figure of 8.75 lakh.

Justice Nozrul might have made comment due to ignorance Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday said Justice Nozrul Islam Chowdhury might have made a comment on lawmakers due to his ignorance of the process of making laws.

However, it is not appropriate for a judge of the High Court to make such a comment on the members of parliament, he said while replying to queries from reporters.

At a meeting on Saturday, Justice Nozrul Islam said, "It is not much difficult to make laws in parliament. Clerks draft the laws and the parliament members pass them with applause without knowing anything about them. Most of them even do not read the drafts."

On Sunday, State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam protested the remark of Justice Nozrul and said he would lodge complaints to the Supreme Judicial Council against the justice.

Meanwhile, Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta yesterday said the government should handle this 'sensitive issue' intelligently and sensibly.

He said the ongoing debate over the remark of a judge would cause harm to the people, the political parties, the government and the judiciary as well. So, the government should handle the issue carefully.

The senior lawmaker said this while talking to this correspondent at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban premises.

"I hope the issue will be resolved amicably before the upcoming session of parliament," said Suranjit, also the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry.

"The people hope that a judge and a lawmaker will show respect to each other and any deviation from this will cause harm to the people as well as the government," he added.

BCL activist caught while snatching

DU CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) activist was caught red handed while snatching a mobile phone from a pedestrian on the Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday.

Police said their patrol team and pedestrians caught Pervez, a student of philosophy department and resident of Surjo Sen Hall, while snatching a phone near Doel Chottor at around 3:00pm.

Sources in Surjo Sen Hall confirmed that Pervez is an active activist of the hall unit BCL.

DU Proctor Dr KM Saiful Islam Khan confirmed the incident and said three more people were involved in the process managed to flee the scene immediately.

A case will be filed against him in this connection, police said.

'Extend Ekushey Book Fair to Suhrawardy Udyan'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lekhak, Pathak, Prakashak Sanghati Parishad, a platform of writers, readers and publishers, will launch a signature collection campaign today demanding expansion of the Amar Ekushey Book Fair, says a press release.

They demanded the fair be extended to Suhrawardy

Udyan, arguing that the area on the Bangla Academy premises is too congested as the Academy is constructing new buildings while the number of the visitors is also increasing. The stalls are getting smaller and the fair is becoming more congested every year, making it difficult for women, children and the elderly visitors to roam around.

Contraband drugs seized

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Directorate of Drug Administration (DDA) seized contraband drugs worth around Tk 60,000 from different parts in the city yesterday.

A DDA team raided four drug stores at Rajarbag, Maniknagar, Jatrabari and

Sayadabad and sized several items of such drugs.

Shahidul Islam, assistant director of DDA, told The Daily Star that a team conducted the five-hour drive from 10:30am and seized the drugs.

DDA Director Brig Gen Ismail Hossain said they would continue such raids.

Man held for demanding Tk 1 crore from lawmaker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) last night arrested a man at Sarail in Brahmanbaria on charges of demanding Tk one crore as extortion from Ziaul Haque Mridha, a Jatiya Party lawmaker in the district.

The arrestee, Mostafa Haider, 28, over cellphone yesterday morning threatened to kill the son of Mridha if the lawmaker does not give the amount Haider was demanding. Commander Mohammad Sohail, director, Legal and Media Wing of Rab, told The Daily Star.

A Rab team from Bhairab camp started tracking the criminal soon after they received the information and finally arrested him in less than 12 hours from Sarail of the district, Sohail added.

Exhibition of photographs on liberation war begins

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A three-day exhibition of rare photographs taken during the liberation war by freedom fighter and journalist Haroon Habib began at the National Museum in the city yesterday.

Around 100 photographs are put on display at the photography exhibition titled 'Ekatturer Jatri'.

Alongside the exhibition, two seminars will also be held at the National Museum today and tomorrow.

An album of a total of 88 photographs taken by Haroon Habib and an autobiographical novel by Haroon was also launched yesterday.

Joya Taher, daughter of Col (ret'd) Taher, and Nadeem Qadir, son of Col Muhammad Abdul Qadir, a martyr of the liberation war, inaugurated the exhibition.

Speaking at the inaugural ceremony, Haroon Habib said the new generation should know more about the liberation war and the exhibition is an effort to this end.



Mild cold wave likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather may remain dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Moderate to thick fog may occur over the river basins and light to moderate fog elsewhere over the country during midnight till morning, Met Office said.

Mild cold wave may sweep Jessore, Kushtia and Srimongal regions and Rajshahi division, it said.

Night temperature may fall slightly over the country during the period.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:17pm today and rises at 7:38am tomorrow.

Country's highest temperature 27.5 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Cox's Bazar and Teknaf and lowest 8.9 degrees Celsius at Srimongal.

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	26.0	16.4	45	50
Chittagong	25.6	16.0	63	47
Rajshahi	25.0	10.0	70	69
Khulna	25.5	13.4	73	70
Barisal	26.6	12.3	63	71
Sylhet	27.3	14.4	75	74

DHAKA TODAY

Lecture

Asiatic Society of Bangladesh organises Moulvi Shamsuddin Ahmed Memorial Lecture 2009. Venue: Society auditorium. Time: 4:30pm.

View exchange meet

Campaign for Good Governance organises a view exchange meet on the health sector and health policy 2009. Venue: Cirdap auditorium. Time: 10:30am.

Seminar

Magnum Opus, a publication house, organises a seminar titled 'The sojourner of 1971: From generation of generation'. Venue: National Museum auditorium. Time: 12:00noon.

Seminar

A two-day seminar on 'Right at work and social protection in the Asia Pacific region and evaluation of social dialogue in these countries', organised by the trade union federations and other related organisations in the Asia Pacific region under the World Trade Union Federation (WFTU), will begin. Venue: Biam auditorium. Time: 10:00am.

Workshop

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) organises a workshop on updating of agro-ecological zone for effective land resource planning. Venue: BARC conference room. Time: 10:00am.

Conference

The inaugural ceremony of the 2nd international conference of GBMF 2009 on 'World financial crisis and global business challenges' will be held. Venue: Nabab Nowab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban, Dhaka University. Time: 10:00am.

Namaz-e-janaza

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Namaz-e-janaza of Dipika Kamrunnessa, wife of former navy chief Admiral (Retd) Abu Taher, will be held on the premises of House No. 192/B, Road No. 1 at DOHS, Mahakhali at 10:00am today, says a press release.

She will be buried at the Banani military graveyard.

Dipika passed away due to a cardiac arrest at her son's residence at Melbourne in Australia.

War crimes trial venue may be shifted: Shafique

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government may shift the war crimes trial venue from 14 Abdul Gani Road as the space for setting up tribunal and other offices is not sufficient, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed said yesterday.

Earlier, the government started the process of setting up tribunal and other offices at 14 Abdul Gani Road near the secretariat but recently halted the process.

Shafique said the space at Abdul Gani Road is not sufficient for setting up tribunal and other relevant offices. He was talking to reporters after visiting offices at Abdul Gani Road and the Law Commission's office at old High Court building in the

afternoon.

He said the government is thinking of selecting new place for setting up the tribunal, offices for the judges, prosecutors, investigators, security officials and rooms for the witnesses, journalists and observers.

Decision will be taken in this regard soon, he added.

The parliament has passed the International Crimes Tribunals (Amendment) Act 2009 and taken a unanimous resolution for the war crimes trial. The government allocated Tk 10 crore in the budget in this connection.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam was present on the occasion.

Primary Terminal Exam results today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The result of the Primary Education Terminal Examination will be published simultaneously at 3:00pm today.

Primary and Mass Education Minister Afsarul Amin will brief the newsmen at 3:00pm about the results at his secretariat office, says an official release.

The examination began on November 21 with the participation of over 18 lakh students of class V.

The government introduced the new public exam in place of primary scholarship examination with a view to imparting equal education to all students.

The students must pass the terminal exam to get enrolled in class VI. Scholarships will be awarded on the basis of their results in two categories -- talent-pool and general--half to boys and half to girls.

'MINUS JOY THEORY'

Delwar dismisses Ashraf's allegation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday dismissed the allegation raised by Awami League General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam that BNP is hatching conspiracy to eliminate Sajeeb Wazed Joy from politics to bring him at the same level with Tarique Rahman.

The AL general secretary's allegation is false and ill motivated, Delwar said when asked about Ashrafur's comment that BNP had been conducting the campaign through a portion of the media loyal to the opposition party.

He was talking to reporters after placing wreaths at the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar.

The newly elected members of the party's standing committee, the highest policymaking forum of the party, senior joint secretary general and joint secretaries general also paid their tribute to the party's founder by placing wreaths at his grave.

Syed Ashraf, also the LGRD minister, in a briefing on Sunday made the allegations following the publication of a

report regarding Joy in a pro-BNP newspaper.

Referring to Ashrafur's comment on Tarique, Delwar said, "It is not fair in the eye of the law to jump to conclusion and label someone guilty immediately after accusation. There should be proper investigation into the allegations according to the laws."

He alleged that the ruling party is envious of Tarique's role in party politics.

"It is everybody's birth and fundamental right. There should be no question about it. One should leave it to the people whether or not he will succeed in politics."

The immediate past military-backed caretaker government could not prove the allegations brought against Tarique Rahman, but he was tortured and faced indignities during the caretaker regime, said the BNP secretary general.

He, however, said fair investigation into the allegation against Joy should be done without making it politically motivated.

The BNP leader hoped that the new leadership of BNP would work sincerely for the welfare of the people and the country.

Obituary

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Kamal Uddin Ahmed, the first deputy commissioner of Dhaka after independence, passed away due to a cardiac arrest at his residence at Uttara in the city yesterday at the age of 83, says a press release.

He left behind his wife, two sons and two daughters to mourn his death.

He was buried at Sector-6 graveyard in Uttara.

His Quikhwani will be held at his Uttara residence after Asr prayers on Thursday.

Mid Jinnatul Islam

A CORRESPONDENT, Kishoreganj

Advocate Md Jinnatul Islam, organising secretary of Kishoreganj district Awami

League and former president of Kishoreganj Bar Association, passed away at his residence in Kishoreganj yesterday at the age of 62.

He left behind wife, three sons and three daughters and a host of admirers to mourn him.

He was buried at Sholakia Bage Zannat graveyard yesterday.

Speaker Advocate Abdul Hamid and LGRD Minister Syed Ashrafur Islam expressed shock at his death and pared for eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family members.

Death anniversary

BSS, Dhaka

Today is the second death anniversary of Fazlul Karim, Language Movement veteran, journalist and sports organizer.

On the occasion, a memorial meeting will be held at the conference lounge of Jatiya Press Club at 4:00pm today, family sources said.

Abdul Haque

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Today is the 14th death anniversary of comrade Abdul Haque, says a press release.

On the occasion, wreaths will be placed at his grave at martyred intellectual graveyard in Mirpur in the morning and a discussion will be held at Moni Singh-Farhad Memorial Trust building auditorium at 4:00pm.

Kohinoor Banu

METRO DESK

Today is the 16th death anniversary of Kohinoor Banu, mother of martyred intellectual

Prof Abdul Kalam Azad, says a press release. On the occasion, a milad mahfil and Qurankhwani will be held at House-35/B, Road-07, Block-G, Banani at 11:00am.