

Language movement fund SC reigns supreme

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convicted that the movement was aimed at destabilising it, swiftly went into action by taking a number of prominent figures into police custody. Hamidul Haq Chowdhury, owner of the Pakistan Observer newspaper and known for his vocal opposition to Chief Minister Nurul Amin, was arrested. At the same time, Abdus Salam, editor of the Pakistan Observer, was carried off to prison on the excuse that in an editorial criticising the government, he had committed blasphemy through making certain derogatory remarks about Hazrat Osman, the third Caliph of Islam. For good measure, the government decreed a ban on the Pakistan Observer. Despite the fact that the directors of the newspaper as well as its editorial team offered apologies for the editorial in question, the ban on the newspaper remained.

movement for Bangla as the state language of Pakistan clearly had unnerved the government. In spite of the reality that the students of Dhaka University as well as the general public had done nothing that could be construed as violent in intent or nature, the authorities made it known on February 20 that any assembly of five or more persons and the carrying of objects that might cause bodily harm to people had been banned under Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code. The government's action quickly led to rethinking on the part of the All Party State Language Committee of Action. By an overwhelming majority, 20 out of 24 members, it was decided that the general strike planned for the next day, February 21, would be called off. Only four went against the majority decision. A major factor that appeared to have guided the Action Committee into its new move was the view of

those present that a violation of the restraining orders could lead to a delay in the holding of provincial elections, something that was expected to be held sooner rather than later. It may be noted that elections to the East Bengal Legislative Assembly had repeatedly been delayed on one pretext or another. The provincial government, fearing a rout at the polls, was not willing to call elections only to lose office. The Action Committee was therefore reluctant to give the government any more chance of keeping the elections at bay. The move to call off the strike was, however, strongly opposed by the students. Tempers ran high, so much so that eventually the Action Committee decided that the next day, February 21, the option of whether the strike would go ahead or would be called off would be left to the students. The moment of decision was thus at hand.

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illegal takeover of power from an elected government in 1981. It was the apex court that put the controversy over who proclaimed the country's independence to rest. In a landmark ruling on June 21, 2009, the High Court Division of SC said it was Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman who proclaimed the independence of the country in 1971. It also declared illegal and unconstitutional the publications that claim the independence was proclaimed by late president Ziaur Rahman, who was also the founder of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). The SC also resolved the dispute over BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's previous residence in Dhaka Cantonment. The High Court and Appellate divisions of SC issued directives in around 100 public interest litigations sought to protect the environment, and legal, constitutional, fundamental, and human rights of the people. In July last year, the HC declared all kinds of extrajudicial punishment including those in the name of fatwa illegal, and directed the authorities to take steps banning corporal punishment to school students. In March 2009, the HC ruled against import of any ship for scrapping unless hazardous chemicals are cleaned at source outside Bangladesh. The same year the HC issued guidelines to stop sexual harassment of women at work places, educational institutions, and public places. It directed the government to demarcate boundaries of the Buriganga, Balu, Turag, and Shitalakkhya rivers and stop their illegal grabbing. In this secular state, everybody has religious freedom, and therefore no man, woman or child can be forced to wear religious attire like burqa, cap and dhoti, it said. Expressing grave concern over repeated instances of men stalking women and girls with tragic consequences, the HC on November 2, last year directed the government to formulate a policy and guidelines to curb the prevalence of the crime. The High Court disposed more than 50,000 cases over the last four months following the chief justice's initiative to speed up disposal of cases. Since assumption of office in September last year, Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque took measures for quick disposal of more than one lakh criminal cases pending with the HC, said an SC official wishing anonymity. "If this trend continues, I think the backlog of cases will

be reduced to a very tolerable level by the end of this year, and the litigants won't have to wait for years to get their cases adjudicated," said eminent jurist Dr Shahdeen Malik. Manzill Musrid, who moved over 50 public interest litigations, told The Daily Star that people went to the court because the administration always does not do its job. Some of the directives of the highest court are also not being implemented on time by the government, he added saying, although the court ordered to remove structures from the rivers around Dhaka, the government is not so active in removing the structures established by influential people. The HC in a verdict on June 1, 2009, directed the government to set up food courts in every district and to appoint sufficient food analysts and food inspectors in all districts within two years to prevent food adulteration, but that order is yet to be implemented by the government, he said. He however said if the court did not pass such orders, the situation would be worse. The attorney general welcomed the SC rulings, even though the main opposition BNP sees the chief justice as a "controversial" person. In an interview with The Daily Star, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said, "The Supreme Court played the most proactive role in the history of judiciary to uphold the constitution, and also to establish rule of law." He said the SC verdict in the case of the fifth amendment "is not only a world class judgment, but also a literature in the legal arena". The attorney general is dismayed that attempts are being made to politicise the apex court and its rulings. He accused pro-BNP lawyers of trying to politicise both divisions of the SC over BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's previous residence in Dhaka Cantonment. Barrister Mahbub Uddin Khokon, a BNP leader, said they will not accept Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque as the chief adviser to the next caretaker government if his name is proposed. "He has become controversial," Khokon said. Dr Shahdeen Malik said the provision of making the last retired chief justice the head of caretaker government "is an unwise decision of the politicians". "The nation has to pay the price for that unwise decision," he headed. Chief Justice ABM Khairul Haque administered oath to two HC judges amid protests from the Supreme Court Bar Association led by pro-BNP lawyers on November 4 last year. SCBA leaders then criticised the chief justice and demanded that he steps down. The chief justice said he administered the oath to uphold the constitution.

Businesses offer

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a meeting between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and the business leaders at PM's official residence Ganobhaban last night. Importers and millers of various commodities including rice, pulse, oil and sugar attended the meeting. Emerging from the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told newsmen that the prime minister discussed the essentials' price situation at home and abroad. The business leaders told the PM that price of essentials in the international markets are very high. Though Bangladesh has to import almost every commodity, still now prices of commodities in the domestic market are comparatively low, they observed. "In any situation, we will try our best to keep the prices within the purchasing capacity of the common people," the business leaders said. They alleged that despite their sincere effort to keep market stable, a group of businessmen are hatching conspiracies to put the government in trouble by increasing prices of essentials through hoarding. The business leaders requested the PM to keep all government authorities highly vigilant to monitor those businessmen's activities so that none can increase prices of essentials through hoarding. They also gave their commitment to the PM that they would release food grains in line with the demands in the market. Addressing the businessmen, Hasina urged them to make less profit to reduce the sufferings of the mass people.

"We will do everything necessary to keep the prices of essentials within the people's reach," she said. The PM said import of some 11.5 lakh tonnes of food grains is in the pipeline while there is a stock of 10 lakh tonnes of food grains in the country. She said the government is providing food grains to the mass people at fair price through open market sale and fair price card systems to keep the market stable. The PM at the meeting also asked the authorities concerned to strictly implement the Anti-Hoarding Act to stop illegal stocking of food grains. FBCCI President AK Azad, business leaders Masud Alam, Mustafa Kamal, Md Jainal Abedin, among others, attended the meeting. PM's Principal Secretary MA Karim, Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and Commerce Secretary Golam Hossain, among others, were present.

No risk to Egypt-Israel ties: Ehud Barak

AFP, Washington
Israel's ties with Cairo are safe and sound, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in comments aired yesterday, adding that Egypt's uprising shares little with the 1979 Iranian revolution. "I don't think that the relationship between Israel and Egypt is under any risk, or that any kind of operational risk is waiting for us just behind the corner," Barak told ABC's "This Week" program. But he did warn of the potential for an unsettling political shift in Egypt if authorities there rush too quickly to elections, a move he said would be "catastrophic" for the region if it allowed extremists to snatch power. Egypt has maintained a historic peace accord with the neighboring Jewish state for more than 30 years -- only one of two Arab countries to do so. With the ouster this past week of Egypt's longtime strongman Hosni Mubarak, a committed shepherd of the agreement and a Washington ally in the global fight against extremists, concern has surged over the potential for radical elements to take power in Egypt and eventually annul the peace pact. While Barak -- who spoke to ABC Friday hours after Mubarak stepped down -- was optimistic about keeping strong ties with Cairo, he expressed concern over the political potential of the Muslim Brotherhood, Egypt's major opposition group, especially if elections take place too soon. "The real winners of any short-term election, let's say within 90 days, will be the Muslim Brotherhood, because they are already ready to jump."

Maternal

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another step forward in achieving the United Nations' Millennium Development Goal (MDG)-5. To achieve the MDG-5, the MMR should come down to 143 per one lakh live births by 2015. The initial findings of Bangladesh Maternal Mortality and Health Care Survey 2010 were released at a city hotel yesterday. The MMR was 322 per one lakh live births in 2001. The situation has improved, as the number of pregnant women taking medical assistance has increased, speakers said at the programme. Reduction in child marriage and increase in female education rate have also contributed to this achievement, they added. They said the number of mothers taking medical assistance during pregnancy and delivery has doubled in the last nine years. Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque, the chief guest, expressed his determination in achieving the MDG-5 and said the government will do everything to keep up and advance this achievement. The survey was conducted by the government covering 1,75,000 households with assistance from USAID, Australian Government Aid Programme, UNFPA, Measure Evaluation, ICDDR,B and NIPORT. It reveals that far lesser mothers are dying from haemorrhage and eclampsia (high blood pressure during later stage of pregnancy) -- the two main reasons behind maternal death. Experts, however, suggested strengthening family planning programme and increasing the number of skilled birth attendants. Captain (retd) Mozibur Rahman Fakir, state minister for health, Modasser Ali, health adviser to the prime minister, Humayun Kabir, health secretary, and representatives from donor organisations also spoke on the occasion.

Tigers stuck

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World Cup has truly arrived was further reaffirmed when the England cricket team arrived to play two warm-up games. According to our Chittagong correspondent, the Bangladesh and Canada cricket teams waited for more than two hours at the Shah Amanat International Airport after the Bangladesh Biman aircraft experienced a glitch forcing the cricketers and other passengers to get off the plane after it taxied off around 11:55am. Though the BG022 flight eventually took off at 2:15pm, Biman's station manager Abul Kashem said that the plane was at the edge of the runway when the crew realised the malfunction. "As it was about to take off at the edge of the runway, the flight crews stopped it noticing some technical fault," he said. Rumours circulated all afternoon but eventually the cricketers arrived in Dhaka, but without five players of the Canada side who were too perturbed by the experience. They took a separate Regent Airways flight at 2:00pm, arranged by the local organisers. Chaos returned to the streets of the capital yesterday as Dhaka Bank began selling tickets for the World Cup's opening ceremony to be held on February 17. The Bangladesh Cricket Board informed that 9,700 tickets were equally distributed to ten branches of the private bank and though the sale will run till the day of the event, it is predicted that most of it has been sold out. There were irregularities in several branches as people were being given only one ticket per person when it was stated that one person can buy a maximum of two tickets. Early in the morning, Pakistan cricketers Younis Khan, Umar Gul, Shoaib Akhtar and Misbahul Haq made their assertions for the World Cup with the Rawalpindi Express proclaiming that the dangerous side are hurting from the spot-fixing ordeal that resulted in three players being suspended. The Andrew Strauss-led England arrived in town and have also declared their stake on the trophy, sensing his team has an "excellent chance".

Swiss to vote

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launched by a coalition of non-governmental groups, the Church and centre-left parties, wants the weapons to be kept in armouries instead. The people's initiative is seeks to abolish the practice of allowing those on military service to take home their government-issue assault rifles even after they leave the army. The practice was once a core part of the country's defence strategy, which was in part aimed at deterring invasion with the threat that citizens, mainly men, are combat-ready at any sign of trouble.

Ship-breaking

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recycling with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair for office. The prime minister said the ship breaking sector has been identified as a separate industry considering its huge potentials and economic involvement. She, however, cautioned that the authorities concerned will have to be careful so that the ship breaking industry does not cause any harm to the environment. "We have to protect our environment at any cost," Hasina said. The premier also asked all individuals and institutions involved in the ship breaking industry to abide by conventions and laws about environmental impacts of the ship breaking. "Laws and conventions regarding the ship breaking and environmental issues must be followed to protect natural environment," she said. The prime minister also directed the authorities concerned to bring the ship breaking yards in a disciplined and well organised system. Ship breaking industry here and there causes serious threats to environment as well as lands of the country, she said. "Our agricultural lands and coastal forests are inevitable parts of our food security and environment. We must ensure proper utilisation of our lands," she said. The meeting also observed that after the declaration of the ship breaking sector as an industry, this industry will advance much and help reduce cost of rods to a great extent. Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Law Minister Barrister Shafique Ahmed, State Minister for Environment and Forest Hasan Mahmud, PM's Adviser HT Imam, Principal Secretary to PM MA Karim and PMO Secretary Mollah Waheeduzzaman were, among others, present.

Muggers

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Agency at Middle Badda and the injured, Abdul Huq, a transport businessman. A gang of five to six muggers obstructed Shamsul and his two colleagues near Madhya Badda Community Centre around 2:30pm when they were going to a nearby bank on foot to deposit Tk 16 lakh. Shamsul was carrying a bag containing the money. As the muggers tried to snatch the bag, they resisted. The muggers shot Shamsul in the abdomen. When the gang was leaving the place with the money, locals chased them and managed to catch three of them. The mob beat up the three before handing them over to Badda police. Shamsul was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died around 4:30pm. CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan said there is significant inadequacy in the design of the monetary policy. "You have created a system of capital market and financial intermediation, which is really not a capital market. What we have in Bangladesh is a casino in the name of capital market," he said. "You are having people running into the market in a totally crazy way, which is unrelated with the price earnings ratio," said Sobhan, who presided over the discussion. Mustafizur Rahman, CPD executive director, Ahsan Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Salehuddin Ahmed, former BB governor, Ziaul Hasan Siddiqui, BB deputy governor, and Sanjay Kathuria, World Bank's lead economist in Bangladesh, also spoke.

Nurul Islam

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Additional Attorney General MK Rahman submitted the statement before the bench of Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik and Justice Sheikh Md Zakir Hossain during the hearing on a petition challenging the trial and execution of Col Taher. In his statement, the former army major general said he was posted in Rangoon (Yangon) as a defence attaché from December 1973 and did not visit Bangladesh until he was recalled by the end of November 1975. He was appointed adjutant general of Bangladesh army in February 1976 and principal staff officer to the CMLA around the same time, Nurul Islam said adding president Sayem was serving as the CMLA. "Being away from the country, I had no idea or knowledge of the incident of November 7, 1975. From Burma [Myanmar], there were no telephone communications with Bangladesh. The only source of information was local press and our diplomatic bags," he said. Nurul Islam said the arrest of Col Taher and others must have taken place during his stay abroad. "I had no knowledge when the investigation started and by whom. Neither

Keep highways

FROM PAGE 1
Manikganj have been asked to comply with the HC directives and submit a report to the court within two weeks. The rule followed a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh on February 10 as a public interest litigation seeking necessary directives from the HC to ensure proper road transport and traffic management. Meanwhile, a two-lane highway is 12.3-metre wide, including 1.5-metre hard shoulder and one-metre soft shoulder on both sides, said a Roads and Highways Department official. And a four-lane highway is 20.6-metre wide (14.6-metre main road, 1.5-metre hard shoulder, one-metre soft shoulder on both sides and one-metre wide divider), he said, when contacted. The HC bench directed the deputy inspector general (DIG) of Highway Police to deploy the police on the highways from Dhaka to Mymensingh, Chittagong, Manikganj and Faridpur to reduce traffic jams and prevent road accidents. Those made respondents to the rule include the home secretary, finance secretary, IGP, DIG Highway Police, joint commissioner of traffic, and SPs of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Manikganj.

BNP plans

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release day) demanding release of party's leaders from jail. Party policymakers and senior leaders took these decisions at a meeting last night. BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting at her Gulshan office in the capital. The main opposition will hold a press conference to announce these programmes on February 22. Beside the organisational affairs of the party, latest political situation of the country also came up for discussion, meeting sources said. BNP chairperson directed the party leaders to remain in touch with grassroots level leaders to strengthen the party activities. Party leaders Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Mirza Abbas, Gayeshwar Chandra Roy, Nazrul Islam Khan, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Aman Ullah Aman, among others, were present.

Stock crash

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cut dependence on bank loans. "The investors have to depend on their own equity." CPD Chairman Rehman Sobhan said there is significant inadequacy in the design of the monetary policy. "You have created a system of capital market and financial intermediation, which is really not a capital market. What we have in Bangladesh is a casino in the name of capital market," he said. "You are having people running into the market in a totally crazy way, which is unrelated with the price earnings ratio," said Sobhan, who presided over the discussion. Mustafizur Rahman, CPD executive director, Ahsan Mansur, executive director of Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, Salehuddin Ahmed, former BB governor, Ziaul Hasan Siddiqui, BB deputy governor, and Sanjay Kathuria, World Bank's lead economist in Bangladesh, also spoke.



Festive look reflects first day of spring

RAKIB AHAMMED
The Amar Ekushey Bô Mela wore a festive look yesterday, on the occasion of Pahela Falgun as Bangalees dressed in every possible shade of yellow and poured into the fair premises. Welcoming spring, the king of all seasons, young men and women draped in their traditional attires were seen browsing books in the stalls while many were found waiting in long queues to enter the fair. The fair got a little too crowded towards the evening as visitors embracing the moods of spring, continued to pour in. "We came to visit Dhaka University on the occasion of Pahela Falgun and didn't

want to miss the book fair but we had a hard time getting in," said Munim, a student of the capital's Titumir College who was seen in company of his female friend. The stalls with the new arrivals saw more rush than the others as couples flocked in to buy romance novels by noted writers for their loved ones ahead of Valentine's Day. Sellers passed a busy day fulfilling buyer's demands. The security measures were beefed up to tackle the flow of visitors on the premises. A total of 84 new titles hit the fair on that day among which were 26 collections of poems.

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