



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurating construction work of the Padma bridge yesterday. She later addressed an Awami League rally, right, at Khanbari near the project site in Mawa. Once in operation, the 'dream bridge' will establish direct road link between the capital and 21 southern districts.



PHOTO: PMO

Time to build it

FROM PAGE 1
Mawa point by unveiling two plaques. She said her government was determined all along to press ahead with the plan to build the country's largest bridge, ignoring all propaganda campaigns. Referring to the corruption allegation raised by the World Bank over the project, she said, "I asked them where the corruption was committed. I asked for proof as no fund had been released until then. How could corruption take place without any fund being released? "I also wrote to them but didn't yet get any reply. They couldn't prove the corruption allegation. A Canadian court asked the World Bank to submit

the documents about the corruption allegation, but they couldn't do so because there was nothing to inform." Hasina said the issue was a different one. "A world famous personality, who had been the managing director of a bank for 11 years violating rules, started using his connections against Bangladesh to pursue his personal vendetta." She said the government has set up 99 Composite Brigade comprising two infantry battalions and an Engineer Construction Battalion for ensuring security and supervision of the bridge project. The government is planning to set up modern townships at Mawa and

Janjira points in addition to building international standard hotels and resorts to attract tourists, she noted. About the possible positive impact of the bridge on the economy, the PM said the economy of southern Bangladesh would get a boost once the construction of the bridge is completed. She urged all to come forward and work together for developing the nation and building a Sonar Bangla as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader and local lawmaker BM Mozammel Haque also

spoke, among others. On her way to Mawa from Janjira by a coast guard vessel, the PM witnessed the piling work at the bridge's pillar no-7 in the middle of the river. **RALLY AT MAWA** Later, speaking at a huge public rally at Khanbari of Louhajang upazila in Munshiganj, Hasina urged all to strengthen the hand of the Awami League so that the country cannot go to the clutch of "hyenas like BNP-Jamaat". She said her government's aim was to serve the nation and its people, not to do "destructive politics" like the BNP and Jamaat do. Teamed up with Jamaat, the BNP "burned people" like the Pakistani

occupation forces did in 1971, she alleged. "They don't care about people. They don't do anything for people's welfare... they only engage in looting, corruption, money laundering and siphoning off orphans' money... they want to make the country dysfunctional." Coming down heavily on the BNP-Jamaat alliance for its violence and atrocities last year, Hasina said 157 innocent civilians and 20 law enforcers were killed during that period. To foil the war crimes trial, the BNP chief along with 68 leaders and workers stayed at her political office for over three months from January this year and directed her workers to "unleash

atrocities across the country to topple the government", she alleged. The prime minister thanked people who inspired her and stood beside her when she appealed for funding the mega bridge project and also those who provided lands for the project. She sought their cooperation in completing the project. Munshiganj district AL organised the rally, with its president Mohiudddin Ahmed in the chair. Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, Shipping Minister Shajahan Khan and Food Minister Qamrul Islam spoke, among others.

MUNICIPAL POLLS

Four hurt in attack on BNP meeting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

At least four people were injured when some masked men blasted cocktails and fired shots at an election meeting of local BNP men in Noakhali last evening. All the injured were struck by shotgun pellets, said Jahir Uddin Harun, BNP mayoral candidate in Choumohoni municipality, who had convened the meeting at the residence of a party leader in Hazipur village under Begumgonj upazila. The injured were receiving treatment at local clinics, Harun said. Three of the victims were identified as Shaon, Bhutto and Khokon, all BNP activists. Witnesses say Harun and other party members were discussing issues of the December 30 municipal polls in the front yard of the house around 6:00pm when seven to eight people wearing masks hurled crude bombs and fired shots at them. Harun alleged that activists of pro-Awami League Chhatra League and Jubo League might have been involved in the incident. His claim, however, could not be verified.

Saudi women

FROM PAGE 16 candidates, another first, despite the conservative kingdom being the only nation where women are not allowed to drive. A total of 978 women have registered as candidates, alongside 5,938 men. Female candidates have had to speak behind a partition while campaigning or be represented by a man. Turnout was high, state media reported. About 130,000 women registered to vote, officials said. That figure still falls well short of male voter registration, which stands at 1.35 million. Salma alRashed was the first woman to register to vote. "It felt really good," she told the BBC. "Change is a big word but the election is the way to make sure we are really represented." The election is for municipal councils with few powers, but it's a milestone for Saudi women. As soon as the polls were open at 8:00am local time in Riyadh, Hatoon alFassi rushed to cast her vote. The Saudi academic and women's rights campaigner had to be driven there. Women are still banned from taking the wheel here. She voted in an almost empty polling station, for women only. The election is segregated, like everything else in this deeply conservative

society. "It feels great," she said as she emerged, with a huge smile. "This is a historical moment. I think Allah I am living it." She has been pushing for this day for more than a decade. Fassi said it did not matter how many women actually get elected. "I am not really worried about the number, or to have any women winning," she said. "The fact that we have gone through this exercise is what really matters." Elections themselves are a rare thing in the Saudi kingdom, yesterday will be only the third time in history that Saudis have gone to the polls. There were no elections in the 40 years between 1965 and 2005. The decision to allow women to take part was taken by the late King Abdullah and is seen as a key part of his legacy. In announcing the reforms, King Abdullah said women in Saudi Arabia "have demonstrated positions that expressed correct opinions and advice". Before he died in January, he appointed 30 women to the country's top advisory Shura Council. There are 2,100 council seats available in yesterday vote. An additional 1,050 seats are appointed with approval from the king.

Trust at new heights

FROM PAGE 16 (IGCC) yesterday afternoon. Saran also made it clear that India would always deal with the "government of the day", and added that there had been no change in the stance India took on January 5, 2014, elections in Bangladesh. "We are dealing today with the government of the day. This has been our policy and this continues to be our policy. India will always deal with the government of the day," he added. The Indian diplomat, who discharged his diplomatic assignment in Bangladesh for four years and would leave for Russia to join as India's next ambassador there, said it had been "a real privilege" for him to serve as the Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh. Harsh Vardhan Shringla, currently the Indian Ambassador to Thailand, has been appointed as the next Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh and he was expected to take over in mid January. Saran said the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement showed that India and Bangladesh could resolve "the most difficult issue". "We have been able to narrow down our differences and open new

areas of cooperation in this period," he said. Replying to a question on security, the Indian envoy said the threat from the IS or ISIL was a global one and this was something almost every country in the world had agreed to confront. "And India is no exception. We ourselves taking whatever necessary measures there are to counter this threat. I presume the government of Bangladesh is doing the same," he added. On security cooperation, he said Bangladesh and India had a very good relationship on "day to day" security cooperation. Saran said the future of India-Bangladesh relations would focus on economy, trade, investment, connectivity and issues like energy, environment, health and food sufficiency that affect the people. Responding to another question, he said he was able to see the transition of the relation to a higher level in almost every single sector but lamented that there had been some decision-implementation challenges for both sides. Praising Bangladesh, he said Bangladesh had become a far more mature and self-confident country than before and every single power of the world want to have good relations with Bangladesh.

Car bomb in Syria kills 16, wounds dozens

AFP, Damascus

A powerful car bomb exploded near a hospital in the central Syrian city of Homs Saturday, killing 16 people and wounding dozens, the provincial governor and a monitoring group said. Talal Barazi said the blast near the Al-Ahli hospital, in the Al-Zahraa neighbourhood where most residents belong to the same Alawite sect as President Bashar al-Assad, killed 16 people. Another 54 were wounded, some seriously, and being treated at hospitals throughout the city. The vehicle used in the attack, which has yet to be claimed, had been carrying at least 150 kilogrammes (330 pounds) of explosives, Barazi added. There was no immediate information available on the situation inside the hospital, but the facades of many buildings appeared to have been severely damaged. Debris from the explosion had punched through the windshields of cars parked along the street. Firefighters, security forces and dozens of other men packed into the residential street where the blast occurred, searching for victims and seeking to rescue the injured.

Shame they hid for 28 years

FROM PAGE 1 commanders who brought "disgrace and defeat to Pakistan." The Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report was kept under wraps and finally declassified by the Government of Pakistan in the year 2000. It also recognized the atrocities that the Pakistan army had committed, something Pakistan now denies. The report's explosive observations "The government of Pakistan should set a high-powered Court of Inquiry to investigate these allegations and to hold trials of those who indulged in these atrocities, brought a bad name to the Pakistan Army and alienated the sympathies of the local population by their acts of wanton cruelty and immorality against our own people," the Commission candidly commented in its report. It said such a court of inquiry should be publicly announced so as to satisfy national conscience and international opinion. The Commission observed: "The commission feels that sufficient evidences is now available in Pakistan for a fruitful inquiry to be undertaken in this regard (atrocities). As the Government of Bangladesh has been recognised by Pakistan it may be feasible to request the Dacca authorities to forward to this Court of Inquiry whatever evidence may be available with them."

tion by the militants of the Awami League or other miscreants could justify retaliation by a disciplined army against its own people. The Pakistan army was called upon to operate in Pakistan territory, and could not, therefore, be permitted to behave as if it was dealing with external aggression or operating on enemy soil. Irrespective, therefore, of the magnitude of the atrocities, we are of the considered opinion that it's necessary for the Government of Pakistan to take effective action to punish those who were responsible for the commission of these alleged excesses and atrocities." Commission mentions persons to be tried The Commission said the following army officers "ought to be tried" by court martial for their role in the 1971 war: Lt Gen AAK Niazi, commander Eastern Command; Maj Gen Mohammad Jamshed, ex-GOC (ad hoc) 36 Division Dacca; Maj Gen Rahim Khan, ex GOC 39 (ad hoc) Division Dacca; Brig Gen Baqir Siddiqui, former COS, Eastern Command; Brig Mohammad Hayat, former commander; 107 brigade and Brig Mohammad Aslam Niazi, former COD, 53 brigade. It wanted further inquiry into the "allegations of personal immorality, drunkenness and indulgence in corrupt practices" against Gen Yahya Khan, Gen Abdul Hamid Khan and Maj Gen Khuda Dad Khan. The Commission report gave a quick but telling glimpse of the activi-

ties of the army when it observed that inquiry should be launched on "allegation of indulging in large scale looting of property in East Pakistan including theft of Rs 1.35 crore from the National Bank Treasury at Sirajganj persistently made against Brig Jahanzeb Arbab, former commander 57 brigade, Lt Col Muzaffar Ali Zahid, former CO 31 Field Regiment, Lt Col Basharat Ahmed, former Commander 18 Punjab, Lt Col Mohammad Taj, former CO 32 Punjab, Lt Col Mohammad Tufail, former CO 5 Field Regiment and Major Madad Hussain Sha of 18 Punjab." The report also showed the lascivious moral character of Pak officers by stating "Inquiry is also necessary into the allegation made against Brig Hayatullah that he entertained some women in his bunker in the Maqbulpur sector West Pakistan on the night of the 11th and 12th December, when Indian shells were falling on his troops." The commission felt that firm and proper action would not only satisfy the nation's demand for punishment where it is deserved, but would also ensure any future recurrence of the kind of "shameful conduct displayed during the 1971 war". It then made this explosive recommendation: "That General Yahya Khan, General Abdul Hamid Khan, Lt Gen SGMM Pirzada, Lt Gen Gul Hasan, Maj Gen Umar and Maj Gen Miha should be publicly tried for being party to a criminal conspiracy to illegally usurp power from FM Mohammad Ayub Khan in power if

necessary by the use of force." It is, however, clear that the final and overall responsibility must rest on General Yahya Khan, Lt Gen Pirzada, Major Gen Umar, Maj Gen Miha. It has been brought out in evidence that Major Gen Miha was particularly active in East Pakistan in the days preceding the military action of the 25th of March, 1971, and even the other Generals just mentioned were present in Dacca along with Yahya Khan, and secretly departed there on the evening of that fateful day after fixing the deadline for the military action. Maj Gen Miha is said to have remained behind. There is also evidence that Lt. Gen Tikka Khan, Major Gen Farman Ali and Major Gen Khadim Hussain were associated with the planning of the military action. The immediate responsibility for executing the plan of this action fell on Lt Gen Tikka Khan who succeeded Lt Gen Mohammad Yakub on the 7th March 1971 as Zonal Administrator Martial Law as well as Commander Eastern Command. This last responsibility was passed on to him from Lt Gen Niazi on the 7th of April 1971. **WHY THE COMMISSION WAS FORMED** The defeat in the war caused a huge uproar in Pakistan because its people believed it had a very competent military to crush any nation leave aside the Mukti Bahini. And so when Pakistan meekly put down its arms to the Joint Forces of Mukti Fouz and Indian Army, the delusional Pakistanis were shaken by this event. AAK Niazi, who surrendered to the

Joint Forces in 1971 and who was a chief patron of the atrocity and whose trial the Commission sought, wrote in his book, The betrayal of East Pakistan: "The Nation, ill-prepared for the shock, was stupefied. Its expectations were fragmented and its pride scarred. Tempers ran high and sentiment reached fever-pitch. The message was restless. Their anger had to be cooled." The demand of the Pakistanis was to hang the "traitors." The people came out on the streets on December 20, 1971, just four days after the defeat of their army on December 16 in Dhaka. In a press conference Bhutto was asked, "Will Yahiya be tried?" Bhutto replied, "Those who were asking for the trial of the traitors had already been defeated in the 1970 elections." When told that the nation wanted it, he said, "I will not be a party to it." Niazi further wrote: "The demand of the public was too overwhelming to be ignored. Procrastination would have placed Bhutto in a vulnerable position. He had to ease out of this dilemma to establish his credentials." So on December 24, 1971, he ordered the formation of the commission headed by Pakistan chief justice Hamoodur Rahman. "The formation of the commission was hailed by all and sundry" General Niazi wrote. **FATE OF THE COMMISSION REPORT** When the Commission submitted its report in July 1972, Bhutto found it too hot to handle because all the

army top brass were held responsible for the atrocities. Army was too entrenched in Pakistan politics to be angered by holding trial of its senior generals. Extracts of the Hamoodur Rahman Commission Report have been released some thirty-three years later and still raise question about the "strategic delusions" and "character" of Pakistan's generals. Husain Haqqani, former Pakistani ambassador and also adviser to Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, in his book Pakistan: Between mosque and military wrote: "To avoid embarrassing the army, Bhutto kept secret the report of an inquiry commission examining the loss of East Pakistan. The release of the report soon after Pakistan's split would have been devastating for Pakistan's army. By withholding the report, Bhutto did the military a favor." At the same time Bangladesh was intent on the trial of the 195 POWs and that had put new pressure on Pakistan politics and mounted a challenge to Bhutto. "The more suspicious minds in the military worried that Bhutto would give a wink and nod to such trials as means of discrediting the generals who had plotted to keep him out of power, but Bhutto apparently had no such intention," Haqqani wrote. The generals did not have to worry because Bhutto swept the report under the carpet and Pakistan's own commitment to try its generals for atrocities remained a false public statement forever.