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RAM TEMPLE CONTROVERSY

The idea of India cannot exist for long without pluralism, writes Kuldip Nayar

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THE LEAK IS JUST THE BEGINNING

Mar Cabra, key person behind Panama Papers probe, talks to the Star

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Eyes on polls

AL's 20th national council begins today to elect new leadership, showcase successes targeting next JS elections

SHAKHAWAT LITON and PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

- 6,500** councillors
- 50,000** expected participants
- 54** foreign guests
- Election of new leaders tomorrow

The ruling Awami League opens its 20th National Council today, with Prime Minister and party chief Sheikh Hasina is expected to use the occasion to call on party colleagues to highlight the government's achievements over the past eight years and start preparing for the next general election.

To display the government's successes, a giant LED screen has been installed on the stage at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan, where the two-day triennial council will take place amid an unprecedented extravaganza.

The stage resembles a floating boat, the party's electoral symbol.

The AL expects some 50,000 participants, including party delegates from across the country and local and foreign guests. Hasina is expected to inaugurate the council at 10:00am.

All preparations have been completed for the council, which, in theory, elects the party's leadership for three years.

Already, much of Dhaka looks like a city of lights with major streets illuminated with colourful bulbs. In addition, numerous placards, billboards and festoons have been lauding various achievements of the government.

The slogan of the event is, "We are marching down the highway of development, now is the time for Bangladesh to stand tall."

In the proposed amendments to the party's declaration paper, achievements and major development activities -- both at planning stage as well as

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ROADS TO AVOID TODAY, TOMORROW

- Vehicles from Rajshahi, Khulna, Rangpur regions will use Mirpur Road to reach council venue
- Vehicles from Sylhet, Ctg divisions will use Hanif flyover, reach council venue via Nimitoli
- Vehicles from Mymensingh, Gazipur, Tangail will go via Mohakhali, Moghbazar flyover, Kakrail, GPO, High Court. Vehicles from Barisal, Khulna, Faridpur will reach DU gymnasium field via GPO, High Court
- Parking allowed on different roads in DU, Katabon, Palashi areas

Vehicular movement from Jahangir Gate to Shahbagh via Farmgate will remain suspended from 8:00am today for VIP movement

Legend: Closed Road, Temporarily Closed Road, Road block

Watch out for traffic disruption

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

City dwellers fear there will be a major traffic disruption in the capital today as around one lakh Awami League leaders and activists converge on Suhrawardy Udyan for the party's 20th national council.

Buet admission seekers and patients heading for three major hospitals in the area -- Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Birdem and Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University -- might be the worst sufferers.

Some 9,157 students will sit for the admission test starting at 9:00am on the Buet campus. They are likely to face trouble on their way to the university, about a kilometre from the council venue, as thousands of AL men would reach the venue before 10:00am.

Doctors, nurses, outdoor patients and their visitors might find it

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Her finest hour

SHAKHAWAT LITON

One might say this is the finest hour of Sheikh Hasina in her political career.

She is now all-powerful in both houses--party and cabinet--as her leadership is unchallenged. She faces little opposition inside the parliament to run the government. Outside, her archrival Khaleda Zia-led BNP is in shambles.

In foreign policy, she demonstrates her adroit diplomacy, particularly by maintaining good ties with India and China--two behemoths and rivals in regional politics.

The above point became clear during two recent events, first, the visit of Xi Jinping--first ever by a Chinese president in last 30 years to Dhaka--and the signing of deals with his country worth around \$24 billion, and second, her

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BNP to send delegation to AL council

RASHIDUL HASAN

The BNP is likely to take part in the Awami League's national council today and would call upon the ruling party to "restore democracy" in the country.

"A BNP delegation is scheduled to join the opening ceremony of the council," BNP Joint Secretary General Moazzem Hossain Alal told The Daily Star last evening.

He, however, refused to disclose the names of the delegation members.

"In the council, we would remind the Awami League that it had a long tradition of waging movements and working for democracy since the period of undivided Pakistan. The party also had a culture of showing tolerance to its opponents," said Alal.

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Seven Pak Rangers killed in Kashmir

Indian jawan hurt, says BSF; Pakistan denies

AGENCIES

The Indian Border Security Force (BSF) said yesterday it killed seven personnel of the Pakistani Rangers and a militant in retaliatory firing following a ceasefire violation along the International Border in Kathua district of Jammu and Kashmir.

A BSF trooper was also injured in the skirmish, reports PTI. Pakistan Rangers, the border force of Pakistan, resorted to sniper attacks at Indian posts at Hira Nagar in Kathua around 9:35am, the BSF said.

The Indian border guarding force launched an aggressive offensive against the Pakistani firing, the BSF said in a release, adding seven Rangers and a militant were shot dead in the retaliatory firing.

Seeking to suggest that the killings had been corroborated by Pakistani media, the BSF said "source input" claimed that a media organisation in that country was running a news item about death of five Rangers.

The strong response by the BSF came after one of Constables Gurnam Singh was injured in a sniper fire attack by Pakistani Rangers yesterday morning in the same area.

Singh, whose condition is considered to be critical, was evacuated with the cover fire to Government Medical

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Rab claims it identified Abu Ibrahim Al-Hanif

Says he was the militant who died in Ashulia drive; police have no information to back Rab version

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Rapid Action Battalion yesterday claimed to have identified Shaykh Abu Ibrahim Al-Hanif, who law enforcers believe is the ameer of militant group "Neo JMB".

Al-Hanif was no one but Abdur Rahman, who died after jumping off a five-storey building during a Rab raid in Ashulia on October 8, said Rab Director General Benazir Ahmed.

"The real name of the Neo JMB ameer is Sarwar Jahan, known in the militant circle as Shaykh Abu Ibrahim Al-Hanif, Moktar, Prakash and Babu," the Rab chief said at a press conference yesterday.

According to a Rab press release issued yesterday, Sarwar's passport, driving licence and national identity card, however, mention his name as Abdur Rahman.

Two top officials at DMP's Counter



Sarwar Jahan

Terrorism and Transnational Crime (CTTC) unit and the Police Headquarters, who have been intensively dealing with militancy, said they got nothing that corroborates the Rab claim.

At no stage of their investigation, the police officials said, they ever found that Al-Hanif was Abdur Rahman or Sarwar Jahan. "Neo JMB" militants arrested so far did not divulge any such information, they told

The Daily Star, seeking anonymity. The name, Shaykh Abu Ibrahim Al-Hanif, came to light after he was described as the ameer of the "Khilafah's Soldiers in Bengal" by IS propaganda magazine Dabiq several months back.

Initially, police mistook him for Bangladeshi-Canadian Tamim Ahmed Chowdhury, the alleged mastermind of the Gulshan attack.

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Tavella shot dead 'by Neo JMB'

Rab says quoting documents found in raids

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Documents recovered from several "Neo JMB" dens claim that Italian aid worker Cesare Tavella was shot dead by the militant group, Rapid Action Battalion said yesterday.

The special force distributed a press release among journalists during a press briefing at its new media centre in the capital's Karwan Bazar yesterday. The release had a list of 19 attacks claimed by the "Neo JMB" and the killing of the foreigner in Gulshan diplomatic zone on September 28 last year was mentioned at the top.

The attacks were carried out by militants under the leadership of Shaykh Abu Ibrahim Al Hanif alias Sarwar Jahan alias Abdur Rahman, it said, quoting the documents.

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Opener Tamim Iqbal played a resolute knock of 78 off 179 balls as Bangladesh posted 221 for five, 72 runs adrift of England's first innings total with five wickets still in hand, at stumps on the second day of the first Test in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Late strike keeps Test evenly poised

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

Another fascinating day of Test cricket came to an end with Bangladesh perhaps slightly better placed, trailing England's first innings score of 293 all out by 72 runs with five wickets in hand and two recognised batsmen waiting their turn. A battling and accomplished 78 from opener Tamim Iqbal placed the home team on the road to a dominant position which was compromised when skipper Mushfiqur Rahim was dismissed two overs before the close of play on the second day of the first Test, a day in which Bangladesh dominated every session but England struck back with crucial wickets before each break in play.

At the end of play at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong under floodlights as play had extended past the scheduled close, Bangladesh had reached 221 for five with Shakib Al Hasan unbeaten on 31 and Shafiqul Islam keeping him company as the nightwatchman.

Mushfiqur had batted resolutely and with purpose to score 48 on a difficult wicket, but was undone by a Ben Stokes delivery that moved away and took the edge through to Jonny Bairstow.

The last half hour of the day saw Stokes and Stuart Broad get some reverse swing and the quest for survival dried up the runs, but for most of the evening session first Tamim and Mushfiqur, then Mushfiqur and Shakib were intent on keeping the scoreboard moving on a pitch that Tamim later said did not allow the batsmen to ever feel truly set.

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SEVEN RINGS CEMENT