



BCL President Saifur Rahman Sohag, left, and General Secretary SM Zakir Hossain hand over a bouquet to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is also the president of ruling Awami League, at a programme at the Gono Bhaban yesterday. The programme was organised to mark the 70th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Chhatra League, a pro-AL student body.

PHOTO: BSS

## Israel wants nod to more settlement

AFP, Jerusalem

Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman has summoned a meeting of top Israeli planning officials for next week to expand Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank, his office said yesterday.

A brief statement said he had convened a session of the Supreme Planning Council for Monday "to approve new programmes for the planning and sale of housing units in all parts of the (West Bank)."

It did not give details. The Hebrew-language statement said the move was "part of the policy of Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman to strengthen settlement in Judea and Samaria," the Hebrew biblical term for the West Bank.

Israel occupied the territory in the Six-Day War of 1967. Today more than 600,000 Jewish settlers live there and in annexed east Jerusalem among 2.9 million Palestinians, with frequent outbreaks of violence between the sides.

The settlements are deemed illegal under international law and widely seen as a main obstacle to peace.

The central committee of Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party on Sunday passed a resolution urging its MPs to work for annexation of the West Bank settlements.

Taking such a measure could effectively end prospects for a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as there would be little area left for a Palestinian state.

But a significant number of members of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition say that is precisely what they are seeking and openly oppose a Palestinian state.

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas on Monday harshly condemned the Likud vote and criticised the United States for its silence.

"We hope that this vote serves as a reminder for the international community that the Israeli government, with the full support of the US administration, is not interested in a just and lasting peace," he said.

The prime minister says he still supports a two-state solution with the Palestinians, although he has also pushed for Jewish settlement expansion in the West Bank.

According to settlement watchdog Peace Now, Israel advanced plans for 6,742 settlement units in the West Bank in 2017, the most since 2013.

## Trinamool

FROM PAGE 20

staged a demonstration against the exclusion of Bangla-speaking people in Assam from the NRC.

Responding to the opposition's allegation, the Indian home minister said the citizenship verification exercise was going on under the supervision of the Supreme Court and there was no need for anyone to feel concerned.

"Those whose names have been left out can approach a tribunal. It is a baseless allegation that some people are being driven out," Rajnath said.

Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal had yesterday said all those excluded in the first NRC draft should not worry as no one would be discriminated against on the basis of caste or community and given opportunities to prove their citizenship.

Sonowal also said a mechanism has to be devised "humanely" by the Indian government on what to do with those found to be illegal immigrants after finalisation of the NRC, a list of the state's citizens.

Led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, BJP had made identification of illegal immigrants in Assam allegedly from Bangladesh, an overwhelming number of whom are Muslims, its key poll plank during the Assam assembly polls in 2016 that brought the party to power in the state for the first time.

Opposition parties have claimed that the exercise has harassed many genuine citizens as well.

## DNCC by-polls

FROM PAGE 1

March 13. Ruling Awami League lawmakers in those constituencies have passed away recently.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the EC with Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda in the chair at the Nirbachan Bhaban yesterday.

After the meeting, EC acting secretary Helaluddin Ahmed told journalists that the schedule of the by-election to the DNCC would be announced on January 9.

The DNCC mayoral post became vacant after Mayor Annisul Huq passed away on November 30 last year. On December 1, the Local Government Division declared the post vacant.

The ruling AL is likely to nominate Atiqul Islam, former-president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, as its candidate, while the BNP is expected to pick party leader Tabith Awal, who ran against AL contender Annisul in the previous election.

In terms of population, the DNCC is the country's largest city corporation with 23.45 lakh voters.

In the previous election on April 28, 2015, BNP-backed Tabith boycotted the polls halfway on the voting day, bringing allegations of widespread rigging.

In November 2011, the AL-led government split the Dhaka city corporation into two.

The first election to the undivided DCC was held in January 1994, and Mohammad Hanif became the first elected mayor.

AL lawmaker Golam Mostafa of Gaibandha-1 passed away after a road accident on December 19 and Sayedul Haque of Brahmanbaria-1, also fisheries and livestock minister, at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University on December 16.

## AL hold 2 rallies

FROM PAGE 1

"gala" celebrations across the country, said a press release of the party.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader called on AL activists and supporters to observe the day in the final year of the incumbent government.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police denied the BNP permission for holding a rally at the Suhrawardy Udyan today, the fourth anniversary of the 2014 parliamentary election which the party boycotted.

"We have been denied permission for the rally," Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annie, publicity affairs secretary of BNP, told The Daily Star after a meeting with the DMP authorities yesterday.

Abdus Salam and Abul Khoyor

Bhuiyan, advisers to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia were also in the meeting.

BNP's high ups would reveal their next course of action via press conference scheduled for today at the party's Nayapaltn headquarters, Annie said.

The last parliamentary election was held on January 5, 2014, amid controversy as the BNP, main opposition in the immediate past parliament, and most other political parties boycotted the polls terming it "farical and one-sided". At least 153 lawmakers were elected uncontested in the 10th parliament.

In 2015, on the first anniversary of the day, violence erupted across the country centring rally and counter rally of the parties. The situation remained turbulent for weeks.

The BNP was not granted permission for its rally then. Police kept Khaleda confined to her Gulshan office by blocking the streets in front of her office with sand-laden trucks.

Only the ruling AL men were on the streets, celebrating the day as "Victory Day for Democracy".

An angry Khaleda called for a countrywide non-stop blockade from January 6 to topple the government. The blockade went on until the last week of March.

At least 95 people were killed and about 1,500 injured in arson attacks on public transports during the blockade. Most of them were ordinary citizens. Another 45 got killed in "shoot-outs" with law enforcement agencies. About half of them were allegedly involved in the arson attacks.

## Trust fund public or private?

FROM PAGE 1

Mohammad Ali said the Amir of Kuwait had sent \$126,000 to a private fund to build an orphanage in memory of late president Ziaur Rahman.

But the prosecution submitted "forged documents" to make the private fund appear as a public fund under the Prime Minister's Office only to implicate and harass Khaleda.

At one point, the judge asked the defence counsel whether the money Kuwait's Amir sent came directly to the Zia Orphanage Trust.

When the defence counsel replied in the negative, the judge said, "then how the money came to the Zia Orphanage Trust?"

Mohammad Ali did not give a direct answer. Rather, he said the nature of the fund should be determined first. It was a private fund and the money came for a specific purpose.

When the court asked the same question to Abdur Rezak Khan, another counsel for Khaleda, he also could not provide any direct answer.

According to the case document, Khaleda Zia, when she was the prime minister in between 1991 and 1996, opened an account named "Prime Minister's Orphanage Trust", with Ramna branch of Sonali Bank.

On June 9, 1991, \$126,000 (Tk 4,44,81,216) was deposited to the account from United Saudi

Commercial Bank, but the money was not spent for any orphanage in between June 9, 1991 and September 5 of the same year, it said.

Zia Orphanage Trust was established by Khaleda's two sons and a nephew. It was registered on September 5, 1993.

And, Tk 2,33,33,500 was given to Zia Orphanage Trust on November 13, 1993, to establish an orphanage in Bogra, reads the FIR.

The money was deposited to the Trust account on November 15, and Tk 4 lakh was withdrawn from it on December 4, 1993, it added.

Yesterday, AJ Mohammad Ali, also a former attorney general, said Kuwait's embassy in Bangladesh has sent him a letter saying that the Amir of Kuwait said the donation was given to Zia Orphanage Trust.

When the judge asked how much money the Amir donated for the trust, the lawyer said the embassy did not mention the amount.

After the case proceeding, Public Prosecutor Mosharrar Hossain Kajal raised the authenticity of the embassy document.

Kajal told journalists that the letter mentioned Mohammad Ali as the former attorney of BNP and had no signature. "They accused us of submitting forged documents. Actually, they are the ones who submitted forged

documents," he said.

Refuting allegations of the defence, Kajal said 10 government officials, who worked at the PMO, and 10 bank officials gave testimonies in the case elaborating everything. The defence counsels, during their cross-examination, did not give any suggestion about the "forged documents" either, he added.

"Now, they are raising the false allegations to divert the issue," Kajal insisted.

But, Moudud Ahmed, a former law minister and another defence counsel for Khaleda, said as the prosecution submitted "forged documents", the case should be declared null and void.

He also said actions should be taken against those who have forged the documents.

In July 2008, the Anti-Corruption Commission filed the graft case with Ramna Police Station accusing Khaleda, her son Tarique Rahman and four others of misappropriating over Tk 2.1 crore that had come as grants for orphans from a foreign bank.

Three years later, the anti-graft body filed the Zia Charitable Trust graft case with Tejgaon Police Station, accusing four people, including Khaleda, of abusing power to raise funds for the trust from unknown sources.

The case is also pending now.

## Upbeat despite warning

FROM PAGE 1

Before him three ministers -- Jatiya Party's GM Quader, Awami League's Faruk Khan and Workers' Party's Rashed Khan Menon -- headed the ministry since the AL took office in 2009.

Despite making some progress, Quader and Faruk could not turn it into a profitable venture. For the last three years under Menon, however, Biman made substantial profits.

Shahjahan admitted Biman has an image problem, but vowed to take the national flag carrier to a new height in Asia even "at the cost of his blood".

On his first day on the job, however, it was his son Fahim Kamal Chowdhury who stole the show, taking pictures with his father, officials and visitors, which is very unusual.

Officials were generally vexed, with one asking, "What role does his son have here?"

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inducted three new faces to her council of ministers and made a state minister a full minister. The next day, portfolios of five ministers were reshuffled.

Of the nine, four did not go to their new office yesterday while Narayon Chandra Chanda, who was given the charge of fisheries and livestock ministry, is in India for treatment.

Talking to reporters at his office, Mustafa Jabbar, the new minister for posts, telecommunications and information technology, said time was now ripe for building a highway for internet traffic like the highway for vehicles.

The noted IT expert, known for creating the first Bangla keyboard "Bijoy", said his ministry would take digital services to people's doorstep.

He acknowledged that the ministry had some critical problems and it would not be easy to solve those.

"But one thing I want to say that we have some organisations under the ministry, and I will work to make them profitable and dynamic," said Jabbar, who was made minister in technocrat quota.

Assuming his new role as social welfare minister, Menon said he ran the civil aviation and tourism ministry successfully and was satisfied with what they achieved there in the last four years.

He termed his new job "challenging", saying his responsibility was

now more than any other ministries as it was involved with the safety and welfare of the people.

"I hope that I will do a better job in my new assignment."

Replying to a question, Menon said, "The aviation and tourism sector was unprofitable in the past, but it had been making profit for the last three consecutive years."

State Minister Nuruzzaman Ahmed, who was in charge of the social welfare ministry since June last year, welcomed Menon with a bouquet.

Portfolios of Menon as well as two other high-profile ministers from Jatiya Party -- Anisul Islam Mahmud and Anwar Hossain Manju -- were reshuffled Wednesday. All of them were in the dark about it until the official announcement.

Neither of the JP ministers joined their new office yesterday.

State minister for post and telecommunication Tarana Halim, who was shifted to the information ministry, and Kazi Keramat Ali, newly-appointed state minister for education, also did not go to their office.

Tarana and Keramat are likely to start their new assignment on Sunday, sources said.

## Infant's DNA tells

FROM PAGE 20

She was named Xach'itee'aanenh Teede Gaay (Sunrise Girlchild) by the indigenous community, and her genome "provided an unprecedented window into the history of her people", said Potter.

The team had expected the girl's genetic profile to match that of known Native American groups.

Instead, it showed she belonged to a completely new group, which they named Ancient Beringians.

"Prior to this study, we did not know that this Ancient Beringian population existed," said Potter.

Critically, the girl's genome also revealed the identity of a common ancestor her people shared with Native Americans.

This common forebear or "source population", which the team dubbed Ancestral Native Americans, emerged some 36,000 years ago in what is Russia today, splitting from East Asians, whose progeny include the Han Chinese.

## 56 days

FROM PAGE 1

vacant only for a day, according to records of the apex court since 1972.

Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha, the 21st chief justice of the country, had resigned on November 10 while he was abroad. He resigned amid flak from the ruling quarters over different issues, including cancellation of the 16th constitutional amendment.

He had gone on leave on "health grounds" on October 3 last year, and left the country on October 13.

On October 3, the president gave Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, senior-most judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, the responsibility of discharging the duties of the chief justice.

According to article 95 (1) of the constitution, the president appoints the chief justice.

And appointing the senior-most judge of the Appellate Division to the post of CJ has become a norm.

Contacted, Law Minister Anisul Huq on December 29 refused to make any comment on the issue. "I

don't know when the president will appoint the chief justice," he said.

Legal experts have termed the vacancy unprecedented and said the post of the chief justice, who leads one of the three organs of the state, should not be left vacant for such a long time.

"Consequently, we are a country without a chief justice. It clearly indicates our disregard and disrespect for major institutions, democratic norms and the rule of law," eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik told The Daily Star recently.

He said, "One wonders why this post is kept vacant. Is it another way of exerting dominance over the judiciary?"

Khurshid Alam Khan, a SC lawyer and the editor of Dhaka Law Reports, said that even though Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah has been discharging the functions of the chief justice, the post should not be lying vacant like this.

With the resignation of Justice SK Sinha, the number of Appellate Division judges has come down to five from 11 in 2009.

## Iran accuses US govt

FROM PAGE 20

from the United States at the appropriate time!" Trump tweeted.

US Ambassador Nikki Haley said Tuesday she would be seeking an emergency UN Security Council meeting to discuss the violence that has left 21 dead.

But diplomats said Wednesday that no such meeting was scheduled for the time being.

Russia and China are among the countries that are expected to oppose Security Council action on Iran, diplomats said.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres earlier deplored the loss of life during the anti-government protests and said "further violence must be avoided."

Iran saw another day of large pro-regime rallies yesterday after authorities declared the end of deadly unrest and turned attention to addressing the economic concerns that fuelled protests.

A week after demonstrations broke out, there was a very heavy police presence on the streets of Tehran, AFP journalists said, and no reports of fresh

protests overnight.

Limited activity on social media suggested unrest in provincial towns was also down.

Iranian state TV showed huge crowds marching in support of the government across 10 cities early yesterday, including Isfahan, Ardebil and Mashhad, where the protests first erupted a week ago.

"We are together behind the leader," chanted the crowds, in reference to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

In a bid to address grievances that drove the initial unrest, Iranian authorities were weighing options including blocking unpopular measures in President Hassan Rouhani's recent budget.

"The people's main demand now is for the government and officials to deal with the economic problems," Ali Akbar Velayati, an advisor to Khamenei, told the semi-official ISNA news agency.

The head of the army, General Abdolrahim Mousavin, thanked security forces for "putting out the fire of sedition".

A total of 21 people died and hundreds were arrested in five days of unrest that began on December 28 as protests over economic woes and quickly turned against the regime as a whole, with attacks on government buildings and police stations.

## PDB signs

FROM PAGE 20

getting power facility across the country," he added.

He however hoped that the company would be able to supply power from its plant within the stipulated time.

BPDB Secretary Mina Masud Uzzaman and Managing Director of Desh Energy Navidul Huq signed the deal from their respective sides. Other officials concerned were present at the contract signing ceremony.

According to the deal, the power plant would supply electricity to the national grid within nine months. While BPDB would purchase power from the company at US cents 10.65 kWh and the duration of the contract is 15 years.

The company would establish the power plant at Chandpur and use Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) to generate power.