

BNP's name synonymous with torture and plunder

Says PM at Juba Mohila League's triennial conference

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the people rejected BNP's December 10 rally like they had abandoned the party during the voter-less election on February 15 in 1996.

The prime minister said this while addressing the third triennial conference of Juba Mohila League at Suhrawardy Udyan in Dhaka.

She said on February 15, 1996, BNP held an election where no voter and political party had taken part.

She also mentioned that people not only rejected that election, but also launched a movement forcing Khaleda Zia to resign in one and a half months.

"It is the character of BNP to play ducks and drakes with the elections and voting rights of the people. The reason is only one, they are not the party of people," she said.

The PM said the name BNP is synonymous with oppression, torture and misrule, looting, corruption, militancy and Bangla Bhai.

She said fate of the people of Bangladesh only changes only when Awami League comes to power.

The premier once again requested people not to pay any heed to the rumour regarding liquidity situation in the banks. "I will tell you, not a single person will remain

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



A makeshift car repair garage has been set up encroaching a large portion of this road at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. As a result, commuters often find it difficult to use the road. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Jamaat spreading propaganda against nation

Say eminent citizens in statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of eminent citizens yesterday strongly condemned the appointment of lobbyists by Jamaat to convince the US and UK governments to impose sanctions against Bangladesh.

They also viewed that Jamaat is spreading propaganda against Bangladesh using human rights issue as a shield.

They said it in a joint statement under the banner of Sammilita Samajik Andolon, a citizens' platform.

"We have come to know through a news report of a Qatar-based media outlet that a British lawyer lobbied in the US and UK for imposing sanctions on Bangladesh," said the statement.

Toby Cadman, a UK lawyer, had been working

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Hefajat rearing its head again

RASHIDUL HASAN

After a long hiatus, Hefajat-e-Islam, the Qawmi madrasa-based organisation is becoming active to strengthen the organisation once again and press home its 13-point demand, including scrapping "anti-Islam" women and education policies.

The outfit is going to organise a conference tomorrow in Dhaka.

As the tenure of current government is nearing an end, Hefajat has apparently taken a move to strengthen the organisation and put pressure on the government to realise its demands, including the release of its arrested leaders, said Hefajat insiders.

The organisation has already started to form committees at union, thana and district levels across the country before the national elections.

Soon after the formation of the new committee in late 2020 -- following the demise of Hefajat amir Ahmad Shafi -- the organisation hogged the headlines as it strongly opposed the construction of Bangabandhu's sculpture in the capital and issued anti government statements.

Later, the tension between the government and Hefajat eased, following a meeting of both sides.

Hefajat drew the fresh attention of the government when it opposed the visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Bangladesh on March 26, 2021.

At least 17 people died in different parts of the country following a clash between Hefajat men and law enforcement agencies from March 26 to March 28.

At least 154 cases were filed against Hefajat men in the following days. At least 1,230 people, including more than 30 top Hefajat leaders like Mamunul Haque, were arrested, according

to the police headquarters data.

Amid pressure, Hefajat was forced to scrap its committee and announce a new committee in June last year. Hefajat first appeared on the scene in 2009 by protesting a draft of a national women's development policy that provided equal inheritance rights to women.

After a year, Hefajat-e-Islam was formed in 2010 as a regional organisation based in Chittagong under the leadership of the late Ahmad Shafi.

Things changed after the 2013 mayhem at Shapla Chattar, after which the then Hefajat ameer Shah Ahmad Shafi and the AL government got closer.

The organisation has already started to form committees at union, thana and district levels across the country before the national elections. The outfit is going to organise a conference tomorrow in Dhaka.

The central leaders said they are now looking at overcoming their organisational weaknesses.

"We've taken steps to restructure the organisation," said Hefajat leader Abul Kashem Kasemi.

Hefajat Joint Secretary General Mohiuddin Rabbani said, "We could not become more active in the last two years due to various reasons, including Covid-19 and the demise of our several top leaders. Now we want to press our longstanding demands along with some fresh ones, including the release of our arrested leaders."

Apart from its 13-point demand, Hefajat recently criticised the government for shrinking religious education in

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

High time parties found common ground

Say speakers at event on election

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

If political parties don't find common ground on setting up an acceptable election-time government, the country could face a political crisis, said political analysts and opposition leaders yesterday.

The observations came at a seminar titled "Common Ground: How to Get to Free and Fair Elections", held at a hotel in the capital. It was organised by Dhaka Tribune with support from the Norwegian embassy.

Speakers said transfer of power, especially under political governments, in Bangladesh has always faced difficulties. Elections were mostly free and fair under caretaker governments.

Awami League has been in power for the last 14 years, and the two elections that were held under its government were marred by allegations of vote rigging. So, the opposition has little trust in the upcoming elections, they said.

Ahead of the next national polls, BNP already held rallies in all divisional districts, and the Dhaka rally on December 10 drew national and global attention. Seven BNP lawmakers have resigned.

For fair elections, BNP is demanding a caretaker government, the provision of which was abolished in 2011 through the 15th amendment. Foreign diplomats have also made repeated calls for free, fair and participatory elections.

At the event, Norwegian Ambassador Espen Rikter Svendsen said, "At the moment, we are at the early stage of elections, but time is running fast, and we see challenges in many directions. It is very important not to lose momentum."

Brotee Executive Director Sharmeen Murshid, who monitored many of the previous elections, said she does not believe that the present Election Commission can deliver a fair election under the current government.

Mentioning that violence and legal irregularities are two major obstructions to fair polls, she said the government and opposition are already confronting each other, and it is high time for political parties to find common ground for a peaceful and fair election.

Sharmeen added that it is also time for the international community to be part of the

ISSUES

Antagonism between political parties

Violence, legal irregularities

Dysfunctional democratic institutions

RECOMMENDATIONS

Parties finding common ground

Involvement of international community

Interim arrangement for elections

process. If not a caretaker government, an interim arrangement for elections is required.

Noting that the 2014 and 2018 elections were rigged, BNP International Affairs Secretary Rumeen Farhana said the democratic institutions have been destroyed, and so, there is no check and balance. BNP leaders and activists also face legal and political repression.

"So, a participatory election is a bare necessity to restore peoples' representation and accountability in governance," she said.

Gano Samhati Andolan Chief Coordinator Zonayed Saki said it is not a matter of pride that after 50 years of independence, the country is debating over election-time government.

He said there has been huge plundering of public money, and the state has become more authoritarian. However, the party in power justifies it in the name of the Liberation War. Thus, the country is becoming more and more divided.

Political scientist Prof Rounaq Jahan said it is imperative to make sure that the elected government is not in a position of "winner takes all". If that is the reality, there is no possibility of fair election.

Awami League MP Nahim Razzaq said it

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

Fakhrul, Abbas denied bail for the third time

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday rejected the bail petitions of BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and the

party's standing committee member Mirza Abbas for the third time in a case filed over the December 7 clash between police and party men in Nayapaltan.

Dhaka Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tofazzal Hossain passed the order after their lawyers moved the petitions on the grounds that the complainant did not include Fakhrul and Abbas' names in the first information report.

The two submitted the bail petitions on Wednesday. On December 12, another Dhaka court rejected their bail petitions. The case was filed

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Saleemul Huq on Nature's list of 10 scientists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Scientific journal -- Nature -- has unveiled a list of 10 people, who helped shape the biggest science stories in 2022.

Bangladeshi scientist Saleemul Huq has made it to the list for his efforts to force wealthy countries to pay for the losses and damages due to climate change.

Saleemul, director of International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, was instrumental at the COP27 summit where negotiations had gone on for two extra days before attending nations agreed to a "loss and damage" fund.

The "loss and damage" fund is the result of a nearly 30-year campaign, primarily led by

SEE PAGE 4 COL 1



Menon criticises Haas

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon yesterday said the behaviour of US Ambassador Peter Haas on Martyred Intellectuals Day was "politically arrogant and disrespectful".

Mentionable, Haas visited the home of a victim of enforced disappearance in Dhaka's Shaheenbagh area on the day.

Yesterday, Menon made the remarks after laying wreaths at the graves of three martyred brothers -- Badiuzzaman, Shaheed Siraj and Shaheed Mulluk Jahan -- in the capital's Gopibagh area.

He said the US took side of Pakistan during the Liberation War by

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4

Star launches Olympiad for students

CITY DESK

To commemorate Victory Day, The Daily Star launches Bangladesh Olympiad today.

With the theme -- "Know your country, understand your country", this knowledge initiative plans to instil knowledge about Bangladesh among the students of schools and colleges.

Registrations are ongoing in three categories -- school junior (Class 4, 5, 6), school senior (Class 7, 8, 9, 10) and college (1st year and 2nd year). Students will need to register in the Olympiad website, download their respective Question Banks and prepare for the Olympiad.

The preliminary round will be held in January 2023. The finale of Bangladesh Olympiad is set to be held on March 26 of 2023. Winners will be given certificates, crests and cash prizes.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5



Dengue death toll **269**

Total number of patients **61,089**

803 still undergoing treatment

Number of recovered patients **60,017**

163 more hospitalised yesterday

SOURCE: DGHS

PRAYER TIMING
DECEMBER 16



Fazr Juma Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:20 12:30 3:45 5:22 7:00
JAMAAZ 5:55 1:15 4:00 5:25 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



SCHOOL'S OUT... Students of Sher-E-Bangla Government Boys' High School sit around their playground in the winter morning with the results of their final examination in their hands. Despite it being a result day, the joy in their faces is evident as they go into winter vacation before the new academic year begins. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON