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BNP SIT-INS

Year's first demo mostly peaceful

Rallies across the country on January 16

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP will hold rallies and demonstrate across the country on January 16 to drum up support for its 10-point demand and to protest the government move to hike power price.

The announcement came at the party's sit-in in the capital yesterday.

The programme passed off peacefully in Dhaka though the ruling Awami League leaders and activists took position in different parts of the city.

The four-hour programme, the BNP's first political programme this year, began at 10:00am in Dhaka and at 11:00am elsewhere in the country.

BNP leaders in Faridpur alleged their sit-in was attacked by police and Jubo League and Chhatra League men.

Police, however, said it was the BNP activists who threw brick chunks at them forcing them to retaliate with rubber bullets.

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PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

BNP leaders and activists stage a sit-in in front of the party's Nayapaltan headquarters in the capital yesterday to press home its 10-point demand, including resignation of the government and election under a non-party interim government.

US OFFICIAL'S VISIT Bilateral ties, rights issues on agenda

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant Secretary for State for South and Central Asian Affairs Donald Lu will discuss ways to strengthen bilateral relations and economic engagement during his visit to Bangladesh on January 14-15.

He will also hear perspectives on labour and human rights.

After his two-day India visit, Lu will fly to Dhaka and meet senior officials and civil society leaders.

Foreign ministry officials said he may also raise the issue of security concerns that stemmed from an incident during US Ambassador Peter Haas's meeting with relatives of enforced disappearance victims.

He had earlier discussed the issue with Bangladesh Ambassador to Washington Muhammad Imran.

According to the US embassy in

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Donald Lu

Furnish proof to support claims

PM says about allegations of corruption in mega projects

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rejecting outright the allegations of corruption in different mega projects, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday threw down a challenge to an opposition lawmaker to come up with concrete proof.

The allegations of corruption are baseless, she told parliament while replying to a supplementary question from Gonoforum MP Mokabbir Khan about allegations of graft in various major projects.

Mokabbir said that the Russia-Ukraine war was not solely responsible for the country's current economic crisis; many internal issues were also responsible. Chaos in the financial sector, widespread corruption in mega projects, smuggling of thousands of crores of taka abroad, and massive looting in financial institutions were responsible for the economic crisis, he alleged.

In reply, the leader of the House asked the MP to state clearly where the corruption took place and how much money was involved. "Then I will give the answer."

Hasina said the BNP, which quit the 2018 national election halfway through the voting, was able to make the polls questionable through propaganda.

Responding to a supplementary question from Jatiya Party MP Fakhrul Imam, the premier said the BNP apparently stayed away from

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RANGPUR CITY POLLS Slow voting thru EVM prompts EC to launch enquiry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal yesterday said the Election Commission was concerned about the slow voting through electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the recently held Rangpur City Corporation polls.

He also said the commission was looking for the reason behind the delay in voting.

"We will review these allegations and try to overcome the crisis. At the same time, I am telling you that we didn't face problems to this extent in other elections," Habibur said.

He was talking to reporters after holding a views-exchange meeting with a group of journalists and election observers who covered the December 27 RCC polls.

"Slow voting rate was a major complaint, and in some cases fingerprints of voters didn't match. The delay might have occurred due to many reasons. We will think about it," the CEC said.

He said that the commission would talk with technical experts about why the delay occurred, and why fingerprints didn't match.

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DHAKA-CTG RAIL LINK Project on cards to build chord line It'll shorten distance between two cities by 90km

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway is moving forward with its plan to build a chord line from Dhaka to Cumilla via Narayanganj to shorten the distance between the capital and the port city.

The line will reduce the distance between Dhaka and Chattogram by 90 kilometres and travel time by one-and-a-half hours, say BR officials. At 320km, the Dhaka-Chattogram rail line, which goes through Tongi-Bhairab-Akhaura-Cumilla-Laksham, is rather drawn-out at present.

Once the new line is built, it could be used as a dedicated line for passengers, with the existing line reserved for freight service.

BR yesterday got the nod from the cabinet committee on government purchase to hire a consortium of Japan's Oriental Consultant Global, France's EGIS and Malaysia's HSS to carry out the feasibility study and detailed design for the project.

The consortium will carry out the feasibility studies and prepare detailed designs and development project proposals for 11 projects, including the chord line, over 30 months for Tk 193.64 crore.

BR is now aiming to sign the contract with the consulting firm this month, according to Mahbubur Rahman, the project director.

The chord line will bring a significant change in the railway, said BR officials involved with the proceedings.

The feasibility study and detailed design for the chord line will be carried out while keeping the provision of electric traction, meaning it is likely to open a new avenue for BR.

But, discussion for the construction of a chord line went on for decades, with BR carrying out a feasibility study for the project in 2010.

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Govt to import over 20 lakh tonnes of fuel

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is set to import 20.4 lakh tonnes of refined petroleum from five countries, including India and China, for Tk 18,215 crore in the first half of the year to meet the country's annual demand.

The Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase approved the procurement at a meeting chaired by Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday.

The BPC will buy the fuel from seven state-owned enterprises in Indonesia, the UAE, India, China and Malaysia.

The meeting also approved the BPC's proposal for importing 60,000 tonnes of diesel at Tk 545 crore from India's Numaligarh Refinery this year.

The cabinet committee also approved the import of 60,000 tonnes of fertiliser at Tk 333.5 crore to ensure uninterrupted agricultural production.

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An elderly couple seeks warmth from a fire they lit using straws and hay in Salapak village of Rangpur's Gangachara upazila. With the cold ripping through the northern districts, people from low-income families usually turn to fire to stay warm yesterday. However, this has already caused major accidents in at least eight districts, as many people have had to suffer serious burns. Two women have recently succumbed to such injuries in Rangpur Medical College Hospital.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

IMF \$4.5B LOAN Deputy MD to get a taste of Bangladesh Monsio Sayeh is expected to arrive on Sunday

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

There would not be any further negotiations on the \$4.5 billion loan programme during International Monetary Fund's deputy managing director Antoinette Monsio Sayeh's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

"We wanted to emphasise that it's not the purpose of this visit," a spokesperson for the Washington-based multilateral lender told The Daily Star yesterday.

Sayeh, who is also visiting India, Vietnam and Thailand, is scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on Sunday on a four-day tour.

Her visit is to underline the IMF's strong relationship with its Asian member countries, the IMF spokesperson said.

"The visit to Bangladesh will provide an opportunity to strengthen the IMF's engagement and reiterate its continued support to the country," the spokesperson added.

Sayeh's itinerary suggests she wants to get an idea of the economic progress made by Bangladesh over the decades, where the country stands now and what its future potential is – putting her in good stead to answer all questions that the IMF executive board may have later this month when Bangladesh's loan proposal is placed for approval.



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