



Foreign debt doubles in five years



Markram new SA T20 captain



Pakistan bans airing of Imran Khan speeches



Tradition of breadmaking on Shab-e-Barat

14-party fragile as AL 'shifts rightwards'

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and ASHIK ABDULLAH APU

With the ruling Awami League apparently reaching out to some right-wing political parties to forge a bigger electoral alliance, a gap with its left allies keeps widening since the national polls in 2018.

As the parties the AL is trying to woo include the Islamists who have impressive vote banks, its left allies think such coalitions would only mean a deviation from the principles behind the formation of the 14-party alliance.

Democratic values and secularism were the core ideals when the combine came into being during the BNP-Jamaat rule in 2005.

But now, the AL is keen to have ties with Islamist parties keeping the equation of votes in mind, ignoring its ideological partners, said 14-party insiders.

According to some left leaders, it is frustrating that two textbooks of sixth and seventh grades were withdrawn in the face of objections from Islamist groups including Islami Andolon Bangladesh.

The fact that the AL was trying to win the

hearts of Islamist forces was also evident earlier when the government brought changes to the textbooks, caving in to the demands of Hefazat-e-Islam, they said.

The left partners alleged that the AL has deviated from its promises made in the 31-point reform programmes of the 14-party alliance, adopted on July 15, 2005, and the 23-point minimum common programmes, adopted on November 22 of the same year. A secular and democratic government was the crux of it all.

The AL's left allies at a recent meeting expressed their reservations about its efforts to get closer to Syed Bahadur Shah-led Islamic Front Bangladesh.

To the chagrin of the alliance partners, the AL also communicated with Islami Andolon Bangladesh (IAB), founded by "Charmonair Pir" Fazlul Karim, and expressed its interest to bring the Islamist party into its fold, insiders said.

Over the last four years, the left allies on several occasions were ignored in times of crucial decision-making and denied space in the government though

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



'I said what I needed to say'

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and DIPAN NANDY

After delivering his watershed speech on March 7, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned home with thousands in his wake.

He knew very well the consequences the speech could have.

During dinner with his family that night, he said, on a rather sombre note, "I said what I needed to say at today's rally. The government can now arrest me or kill me at any time. That is why from today, you will have meals with me twice a day."

Scientist MA Wazed Miah, in his book "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Ke Ghire Kichhu Ghotona O Bangladesh", wrote that from that day, the family members complied with his wish until March 25 afternoon.

"Bangabandhu was busy talking to the leaders of Awami League, Chhatra League, Krishak League, Sramik League, Jubo League and other organisations on the ground floor of the house till 11:00pm [March 25]. We all except my mother-in-law [Sheikh Fazilatunnesa Mujib] had supper," he wrote.

On that fateful night, Bangabandhu was arrested and later taken to Pakistan where he was kept in solitary confinement.

On March 7, Wazed and his wife – Bangabandhu's eldest daughter Sheikh Hasina – were staying at the house.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



What's their organisational capacity?

Amir Hossain Amu, the spokesperson and coordinator for the 14-party combine, has challenged the allies to make the alliance "functional".

"Those who are complaining that the alliance has become non-functional, please ask them to make it functional. Those who talk so much about it – what do they have to offer? What's their organisational capacity?" the veteran politician told The Daily Star on Sunday.

Organising any event under the banner of the alliance has become impossible as the ruling Awami League and the opposition BNP are

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



There is a top-heavy imbalance

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon said the practice of alliance-based politics was never there in the 14-party alliance and it is still absent.

"We hold meetings at the centre and decide to participate in the election unitedly. But those decisions are not reflected at the grassroots. Which means the alliance does not exist at the grassroots and for this, a top-heavy imbalance has been created within the alliance," said Menon in an interview with The Daily Star on Saturday.

"The alliance was forged based on the spirit of secularism and democratic values. Now if the alliance

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Golden period of alliance is over

Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua has said there is a competition between the ruling Awami League and the BNP over doing religion-based politics and trying to prove which party is more pro-religion.

"It is true that the BNP is doing politics with Jamaat, while the ruling party is negotiating with Hefazat directly and indirectly to create a split in the BNP's religion-based politics. They are basically like two flowers on a single stem," said Dilip Barua, also a leader of the AL-led 14-party alliance.

Talking to The Daily Star on Saturday, he said

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Dollar crisis not ebbing despite best efforts

If the trend continues, second tranche of IMF loan may be in jeopardy

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Bangladesh's dollar crisis is just not subsiding even though imports have dropped off and both exports and remittance are staging a rally.

At the end of January, the overall balance – which is the record of all economic transactions in goods, services and assets of the country with the rest of the world – stood at \$7.4 billion in the deficit in contrast to the deficit of \$2.1 billion a year earlier, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

But, the trade balance, which is the difference between exports and imports, improved: it was \$13.4 billion in the deficit in contrast to \$18.8 billion in the deficit a year earlier.

In the first seven months of the fiscal year, exports increased about 10 percent while imports declined 5.7 percent.

"This is a paradoxical situation. You would think that if imports dropped, the cash flow situation would become stable, but that hasn't been the case," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 5

GENDER GAP IN ADMINISTRATION Women still made to lag far behind

NILIMA JAHAN

While women in Bangladesh have been making remarkable strides in various fields, they still seem to be falling behind when it comes to working in the administration.

The 2021 government report prepared by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics revealed how the percentage of female officials in the administration cadre is far lower than the males.

The report, titled "Gender-Based Employment and Wage", said the percentage of female officials in public administration was 19.62 percent, while it was 22.64 percent in the field administration.

Out of 6,310 posts of senior secretary/secretary, additional secretary, joint secretary, deputy secretary, senior assistant secretary and assistant



A significant gender imbalance prevails in high-level positions – the higher the position, the fewer the number of women.

secretary under the public administration ministry, the number of male officials is 5,072, while that of women is just 1,238.

Out of 742 divisional commissioners, deputy commissioners, additional deputy commissioners, and upazila nirbahi officers, only 168 are women.

The report highlighted a significant gender imbalance in high-level positions – the higher the position, the fewer the number of women.

For instance, there are only 10 female secretaries compared to 66 male officials, and there are no female divisional commissioners or additional commissioners.

Despite the exceptional performance of the only

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Holy Shab-e-Barat tonight

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Shab-e-Barat, the night of fortune, will be observed tonight across the country with due religious fervour and devotion.

Muslims consider Shab-e-Barat as one of the three most sacred nights. They also believe that on this night Almighty Allah decides the fate of all human beings, fixing their livelihood for the next year.

Muslim devotees will spend the night at mosques and homes offering prayers, reciting from the holy Quran, and seeking blessings of Allah for long life, peace, progress and happiness for themselves, their families, relatives and friends.

At night, devotees would visit graves and pray for their beloved ones seeking eternal peace of their departed souls.

HOLIDAY NOTICE

The Daily Star offices will remain closed today on the occasion of Shab-e-Barat. Therefore, the newspaper will not be published tomorrow.



Women from the low-income group crowd an OMS truck in Khulna city's Dualatpur bus stand to purchase essentials at subsidised rates yesterday. With prices of commodities skyrocketing continuously, the number of people from poor families turning to the trucks is ever-increasing. They wait from morning till late afternoon to buy some rice at Tk 30 per kg.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

'Invest in our energy sector' PM urges Qatar businesspeople



UNB, Doha

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged oil-rich Qatar to invest in Bangladesh's energy sector, especially in renewable energy.

"We remain open to investment proposals in our infrastructures and logistics sectors. We believe there is scope for Qatari investment in the energy sector, including in renewable energy," she said.

The premier was addressing the Doha Investment Summit 2023 titled "The Rise of Bengal Tiger: Potentials of Trade and Investment in Bangladesh", held at The St Regis Doha.

Hasina said Bangladesh could benefit from Qatar's expertise in offshore gas exploration and energy distribution systems.

The PM urged the businesspeople from Qatar to look at certain thrust sectors in Bangladesh. She invited a delegation of Qatari businesspeople to visit the country soon.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6