

Mayors of Sylhet, Barisal take oath

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday administered oath to the newly elected mayors of Barisal and Sylhet city corporations.

Barisal City Mayor Advocate Mojibur Rahman Sarwar MP of BNP and Sylhet Mayor Badaruddin Ahmed Kamran of Awami League took oath at the International Conference Centre (ICC) at noon.

The elections to the two newly formed city corporations were held on March 20.

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, State Minister for LGRD Ziaul Huq Zia and Deputy Minister for LGRD Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulul were present during the swearing in of the two city mayors.

Ministers, MPs, political leaders, mayors of Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna city corporations, diplomats, ward commissioners of Sylhet and Barisal city corporations, professionals and eminent personalities were also present.

After taking oath, Mayor Kamran said, "today is a memorable day as I was sworn in as the first mayor of Sylhet by the Prime Minister." He invited Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to visit Sylhet.

"I believe in development", Kamran said replying to a question. He sought all-out cooperation of Prime Minister, Finance Minister

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Halliburton gets \$7b fire fighting deal

AGENCIES, Washington

A subsidiary of oil giant Halliburton Co., the company formerly chaired by Vice President Dick Cheney, won a contract that could run as high as \$7 billion to put out oil-well fires in Iraq, according to a Pentagon official. The potential payout is 10 times what it cost to douse the inferno of burning Kuwaiti wells at the end of the Gulf War.

In a letter to Representative Henry A. Waxman, a US Army Corp of Engineers officer said the Halliburton subsidiary, Kellogg Brown & Root Services of Houston, was awarded the two-year contract to extinguish oil-well fires and to evaluate the state of Iraq's petroleum fields.

The contract was designed to cover a "worst-case estimate" of wartime damage and "those services necessary to support the mission in the near term," wrote Lieutenant General Robert Flowers. Those services include assessments of how badly damaged the oil wells will be in the immediate aftermath of the war, Flowers wrote.

Wendy Hall, a spokeswoman for Kellogg Brown & Root, said the company would not necessarily receive the full \$7 billion, much of which could go to smaller companies as subcontracting work. Hall said the company will work under the contract for an "interim period, until the US Army Corps of Engineers procures additional contracts to provide a broad range of services required to support full execution" of the project.

Hall said the company would not necessarily be tapped to provide the services requested beyond the interim period, which she said was impossible to quantify at this early date. Halliburton said it has been given orders for \$50.3 million of work so far.

Waxman and Representative John D. Dingell, a Michigan Democrat, are leading an investigation into the contract in addition to other deals relating to post-Iraq war construction. The US Agency for International Development, the chief agency responsible for Iraqi reconstruction, is reviewing bids from companies for rebuilding projects worth billions of dollars that will include the development of everything from seaports and airports to telecommunications, power grids, and water facilities.

Several of the bidding companies, including Halliburton and Bechtel Group Inc., have close ties to the Bush White House or were major contributors to the Bush presidential campaign. According to the Washington-based Centre for Responsive Politics, Bechtel, which has not won a contract for the rebuilding campaign, gave \$1.3 million of campaign donations to Republican candidates between 1999 and 2002. Cheney was Halliburton chairman until 2000.

A White House spokesman declined to comment on whether these factors pose potential conflicts of interest.

The process for the tender was conducted in secret, which USAID officials have said would expedite a complex process under emergency circumstances. Spokesmen for Halliburton and Bechtel stressed that their size and reputation in the development industry are far more important factors in the bidding process than whatever ties they may have with the White House.

The congressional investigation was launched in part to shed light on the details of an unusual tender that is allowed under federal procurement laws in times of a national crisis. Most government contracts require competitive bids in what is usually a public process.

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Saddam adviser surrenders

AGENCIES

Saddam Hussein's top scientific adviser, one of 55 people on America's most wanted list of Iraqi leaders, has surrendered to US forces, German public TV station ZDF reported yesterday.

General Amer Hammoudi al-Saadi, who liaised with UN weapons inspectors before war broke out, gave himself up to US forces in Baghdad, ZDF said.

The station said one of its camera crews had accompanied al-Saadi at his request. His surrender would be the first from the group of 55 the United States wants pursued, killed or captured, ZDF said.

Al-Saadi told ZDF he did not know where Iraqi President Saddam

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SHEDDING THE OLD SORROWS: Girls dance at the Boishabi, the main festival of three tribal communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, yesterday to welcome the Bangla New Year.

JCD activists assault DU reporters

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of Dhaka University correspondents of different dailies were assaulted by some activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) at S M Hall on the campus on Friday night.

Witnesses said the JCD activists tried to oust Khademul Islam Ridhoy, general secretary of DU Journalists Association (DUJA), from his room and harassed him. About 14 DU reporters protested the incident.

Then, around 15 JCD activists belonging to Sahabuddin Laltu group assaulted two DU reporters - Enamul Haque and Shameem of

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Boishabi festival begins

PINAKI ROY and MONIRUL ALAM, from Rangamati

Boishabi, the three-day key festival of the three major tribal communities, began in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) yesterday.

The Chakma, Tripura and Marmas celebrate the festival to shed the sorrows of the outgoing year and welcome the Bangla new year.

The festival brims with joy and happiness laced with spiritual quests of the tribal people, who call it in different names.

The Chakmas call it Biju festival, the Tripuras Boishuk and Marmas term it Shangraing. The word Boishabi has been coined combining the three terms.

Although the festival relates to the three communities, all tribal groups and Bangalees celebrate it amid much enthusiasm.

All the hotels and guesthouses in Rangamati are booked now as several hundred visitors have flocked into the hilly resort to enjoy the festival.

The tribal communities have taken all-out preparations to celebrate the carnival.

The highlights of the occasion include Boishabi rally which was staged yesterday, a range of cultural shows, art exhibitions and Boli khela (wrestling).

The Chakmas, the largest ethnic community, celebrate the three-day festival in as many phases. As part of the rituals, young girls cleaned up their houses and floated flowers in water yesterday, young people would kill game and cook Pazon, a dish of seven vegetables, to feed guests. They believe the pazon is their hedge against diseases in the new year.

The celebration of the festival by the Tripuras begins with bathing the elderly people and offering them clothes. They believe the ritual would bring them good.

The highlight of the Marma

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A student of the Fine Arts Institute, Dhaka University, makes a papier-mâché yesterday on the eve of the Bangla New Year.

Suit to ban public place smoking

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A civil suit seeking a ban on smoking in public places, production of tobacco goods and advertisement of those in the electronic media and the press was filed with the First Joint District Judge's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

Five ministers and secretaries of the five ministries concerned have been made respondents in the suit.

Judge Altaf Hossain fixed May 15 for hearing of the suit.

The respondents are health minister Khondaker Mosharrar Hossain, food minister Abdullah Al-Noman, information minister Tariqul Islam, industries minister MK Anwar and Environment and

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Hearing on writ against indemnity act begins

UNB, Dhaka

Hearing on the admissibility of a writ challenging the constitutional legality of the Joint Drive Indemnity Act 2003 began in the High Court yesterday.

A division bench comprising Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury and Justice Nizamul Huq heard Barrister Amirul Islam, counsel for the petitioner.

Fatema Begum filed the writ as aggrieved by the death of her brother. In the petition, she alleged that her brother Abul Hossain Litu was tortured to death by the joint forces at his poultry farm at Savar during the Operation Clean Heart in October last year.

The hearing was adjourned till

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India face South Africa today

SPORTS REPORTER

After an uneventful start to the TVS Cup triangular tournament a real contest is expected when India take on South Africa in the second day-night match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The 50-over contest of the two heavyweights in world cricket will commence at 2pm. Bangladesh Television and satellite channel Star Sport will show the match live from the big bowl. Bangladesh Betar will provide ball-by-ball commentary.

India, fresh after a 199-run victory over hosts Bangladesh in the opening match on Friday, will certainly face a stern test against a new-look South Africa under Graeme

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Keeping tabs on caller

BTTB plans CLIP service for fixed phones

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

State-owned Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) is planning to introduce a system for all fixed line telephones that will enable a receiver to identify the caller's number.

The BTTB has already introduced the caller line identification protocol (CLIP) system for 14,000 telephones under the Maghbazar exchange which has gone digital recently. Subscribers there got the system for free, as will do new subscribers under Uttara, Mirpur and Sher-e-Bangla Nagar exchanges, sources said.

However, a committee has been working to fix a charge for the CLIP service to be realised with demand note fees. It may be Tk 500 or Tk 1,000 a connection, sources said.

But subscribers said the service should be free of charge as offered by some private mobile phone operators.

All the 1.16 lakh telephones installed by Canadian company Nortel Networks in the capital have the CLIP service.

"The BTTB has a plan to introduce the CLIP for all its digital phones in phases," a key official of the BTTB said.

BTTB has been working to finalise the CLIP project. Earlier, it requested vendors to provide necessary equipment to upgrade its switching system.

The move came on the heels of a crime spate, especially kidnapping, when telephones were used to demand ransom and issue threats. Subscribers often have to attend 'unwanted calls' since they do not know the caller's identity.

If a caller can be identified on the phone it would reduce the number of crimes as most abductors use telephones to realise ransom, a law-enforcer said.

Introduction of the service will also cut inconvenience.

Calls made from outside the capital and Chittagong by fixed phones do not show the CLIP on mobile phones, causing inconvenience and raising cost.

"It creates

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
April 13		6-19 pm
April 14	5-39 am	

Prayer Timings		
April 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-25	6-31
Esha	7-35	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation