

## Cabinet body reviews lowly law and order

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Cabinet Committee on Law and Order yesterday reviewed the situation and asked the home ministry to make all efforts to improve it.

The committee agreed in principle to form a separate force named Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) in place of the present Rapid Action Team (RAT) by amending the Armed Police Battalion Act, officials said.

It discussed how to form the RAB proposed by the home ministry, how it can be given a legal framework and strengthened to make it an effective force to combat crimes.

The meeting requested the law ministry to look into the proposal and make necessary changes.

The cabinet committee would then review the proposal before it is placed again before the cabinet, sources said.

Earlier, the proposal was sent back twice from cabinet meetings as various questions were raised on the formation of a separate force side by side the existing ones. Moreover, the cabinet found that some aspects of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

## Awami League to pick members after formation of all 39 JS bodies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid yesterday said the Awami League (AL) would submit the names of its lawmakers for parliamentary standing committees on different ministries after formation of all the 39 bodies.

"We demand chairmanship of the committees in proportion to party members," he said while speaking at a press conference at his Sangsad Bhaban office.

The Jatiya Sangsad appoints 50 standing committees -- 39 on different ministries and 11 on parliament affairs. The parliament has so far constituted 16 of the committees, only five of them on ministries.

Speaking on the party's participation in the upcoming budget session, he said the AL might join the session to protest if the government unveiled an anti-people budget.

"People elected us to mirror their views in the House and we will raise voices if taxation and budgetary allocations went against their interest," he said.

He, however, added that the AL was yet to decide on joining the budget session beginning on June 10.

AL Parliamentary Party will work out the decision after Leader of the Opposition and party chief Sheikh Hasina's return from abroad early

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Khosru arrested for 'mugging' in alleged set-up

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Sitakunda Press Club President Atahar Siddiqui Khosru who was recently freed after 21 days of abduction was arrested Sunday night in a mugging case.

The journalist undergoing treatment in hospital was arrested in connection with the snatching incident on April 28.

Mahbub Contractor filed the case accusing nine persons, including Khosru and his elder brother Ashraf Siddiqui.

Khosru alleged that the case was set up by his abductors in collaboration with police to upstage the kidnap case and get off scot-free.

The newsman was kidnapped on April 30 and dumped in roadside in a serious condition by his tormentors on May 21.

Since then he has been undergoing treatment at a Chittagong clinic under police security, sought by his family for fear of his life and ordered by a court.

Khosru was now undergoing treatment at the clinic under the custody of Sitakunda police.

Meanwhile, the situation of the journalist did not improve till yesterday and doctors said he was suffering from urinary problems due to internal injuries.

Before the arrest of the journalist, police were sifting through leads to prove that he was hiding in a hotel room in Dhaka in the 'arranged game of abduction'.

The police probe into such clues drew flak from local journalists who alleged that the drama was staged to save the culprits who abducted him.

Meanwhile, police took the manager and a boy of a hotel and a

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

# Current Bangladeshi passports invalid for US from Oct'04

## Only machine-readable documents will be acceptable for security reasons

NAZMUL AHSAN

The US State Department has banned Bangladeshi conventional passport beyond October 5, 2004, official sources said.

Only machine-readable biometrics passport having latest security features will be acceptable to the US authorities after the deadline.

Bangladeshi aspirants, both normal and red passport holders, willing to visit the US have to abide by the new directive issued as part of the US anti-terrorism measures.

The new requirement will also be applicable to other countries included in the US terror-risk list on January 16 this year, sources said.

Sixteen countries, including Bangladesh, were included in the list.

In a recent briefing held in Los Angeles, the US State Department informed the office of the Consulate General of Bangladesh of its latest decision.

Jane Tannenbaum, chief diplomatic liaison division, visa office, the US Department of State, conducted the briefing attended by

high officials of the Consulate General of Bangladesh.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has already informed the Ministry of Home Affairs about the latest US decision, sources said.

The number of Bangladeshi US visa recipients, both immigrants and non-immigrants, could decline once the biometrics passport is introduced, officials fear.

Neither the photo nor the signature of any passport holder will be pasted in the proposed biometrics passport unlike in the present sys

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

## Write for regional peace, PM tells newsmen

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called upon the journalists of the region to build up through their writings a powerful public opinion in South Asia in favour of peace, friendship, humanism and cooperation.

"Sharpen your pen against the narrowness, limited vision, conflict and dispute," she told a special plenary session of the two-day Third South Asian Free Media Conference at Sonargaon Hotel in the afternoon.

Editor of The Weekly Holiday Enayeturrahman Khan presented the keynote paper at the session, also addressed by Editor of News Today Rezauddin Ahmed, Mushahid Hossain of Pakistan, KK Katyal of India, Laxman Gunasekhara of Sri Lanka, outgoing President of SAFMA Gopal Prashad Thapalia and Secretary General of SAFMA Imtiaz Alam.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4



PHOTO: STAR

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks with Imtiaz Alam, secretary general of the Pakistan-based South Asian Free Media Association, at a conference at Sonargaon Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

# 3 brothers mowed down in Hathazari

## Another gunned down in Anwara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An armed gang shot three brothers dead at Charia Kazipara area of Mirzapur union under Hathazari upazila in the district yesterday.

Five others were injured in the shootout and two persons were arrested, police said.

The dead were identified as Abul Kashem, 50, Abul Bashar, 40, and Badsha Alam, 30. They were all sons of Abdul Khaleque.

The injured are Taher, 30, Junu Meah, 45, Aiyub, 25, Jamal, 32, and Nuruzzaman, 30. They are undergoing treatment at Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH), sources said.

According to witnesses, a gang 10 suddenly stormed into the area, got hold of Kashem and shot him. Hearing gunshots the two younger brothers Bashar and Badsha came out from their shop

to be spayed with bullets as well. The miscreants also chopped the victims, witnesses added.

Bashar and Badsha died on the spot while Kashem died on the way to the CMCH.

Five of those who had gone to help the brothers were hit by bullets.

The incident may have been a sequel to the long-standing enmity between Abdul Khaleque and former chairman of Mirzapur union Abul Kalam regarding land dispute.

The three brothers had reportedly helped police arrest an alleged criminal Alamgir, son of Kalam, on April 5 this year, sources said.

Hathazari police has arrested one Abul Hossain Bhola and his son Sekandar in this connection. In yet another incident, a young

man was gunned down at Dutkumar village of Anwara upazilla in the district on Sunday night.

The victim has been identified as Mohammad Kalu.

According to police, an armed gang of some 15 persons led allegedly by one Habibur Rahman attacked Kalu's residence at around 1:30am. They shot Kalu from point blank range and left the spot.

The victim was rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) where the doctors declared him dead.

Land dispute might have been the cause behind the incident, police believe.

A case was filed with the Anwara Police Station. So far no one has been arrested.



PHOTO: STAR

Under the cover of 'jote permit' -- a legal document to collect woods from private lands -- Rangamati hills are being denuded by illegal lumberjacks. This picture of teaks and other precious trees heaped at an illegal wood trading centre in Rangamati town was taken last week.

# Stripping Rangamati forests bare

PINAKI ROY and MONIRUL ALAM, Rangamati

A rising tide of illegal logging is stripping the Rangamati forests of their resources as the administration slumbers.

Fresh-cut teaks from Reankhyong, Alykhong Forowa, Shukkurchari, Arachari and Karnaphuli forest ranges under Chittagong Forest Department now flood Rajsthal log market in the district, despite a ban on felling of trees in force.

Wheeler-dealer wood traders in connivance with mammonish forest officials are wiping out the forest, locals say.

Pulp guards from the Kaptai Pulp Wood Range, abetted by nouveau riche traders from Chittagong, are engaged in the destruction, they alleged.

Meanwhile, scenes of high heaps of logs by roadsides and

trucks hauling those out of Rangamati town dominated the townscape.

But the army, Bangladesh Rifles, police and other departments concerned seem to be indifferent to illegal cutting of trees, locals allege.

The government imposed a ban on cutting all sorts of trees from the natural forest in 1986. The embargo was later extended till 2005 under the Forest Resources Preservation Plan of 1997 that envisages sustainable forests for the posterity.

But trees on 5,000 acres of Barkal Reserve Forest and on hundreds of acres in Reankhyong and Alykhong ranges disappeared in the recent past.

Unauthorised woodcutters also hauled all the teak, Garzan, Mahogany, Gamari trees out of the Kasalong Reserve Forest in a frenzy

of theft over the years, making a mockery of the preservation plan.

The forest department, however, dismissed the charge of its involvement in the theft, saying efforts to save the forest were hobbled by poor manpower and inadequate logistic support.

"We are seriously understaffed and under-equipped," said Salahuddin Ahmed, conservator of forest for Rangamati region.

"Our staff strength stands at 1,200 against 2,400 people required to protect the forest in the entire Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region.

"The loggers are equipped with sophisticated modern weapons and they easily outgun our guards, who carry anachronistic 303 rifles," he said.

"How can we protect the vast forests, especially its remote parts,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

## Seven killed as nor'wester lashes Rangpur, Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangpur

At least five people were killed and some 100 others injured as a severe nor'wester lashed eight upazilas of Rangpur district Sunday night.

Police control room said all five were killed on the spot at about 9:00pm when a big tree collapsed on the roof of a kitchen market at Baluyahat in Pirganj upazila where people had taken shelter to escape the violent storm.

The deceased are Shaju, 30, Abu Bakr, 35, Bimol, 40, Dulal, 35, and a 70-year old unidentified man.

Eyewitnesses said seven injured victims were rescued from inside the damaged structure and admitted to Pirganj Upazila Health Centre while 20 others were rushed to Pirgachha Health Complex.

A number of injured also underwent treatment at the Rangpur

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

# Govt given four more months to separate judiciary

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday gave the government four more months to implement its 12-point directive to separate the judiciary from the executive.

This is for the 15th occasion that the Supreme Court awarded time extension to the successive governments since it delivered the directive in 1999.

While the attorney general sought four months' extension, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed recently noted that separation of the judiciary would take at least six to seven years.

Disposing of the government petition for extension of time, the court observed that the govern-

ment has not specifically pointed out in which respect the proposed rules and the bill for amendment to the CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code), if implemented, would cause serious difficulty in implementing the directives.

The court held that the government itself initiated four draft rules and the Bill for amendment to the CrPC. The court only made certain modifications to make them consistent with the directives as the government failed to come up with satisfactory drafts for implementation of the verdict.

"The finalisation or implementation does not require any policy decision of the government regarding the members of the judicial

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

## SC rejects govt plea for jobs of judicial officials

UNB, Dhaka

The Supreme Court yesterday turned down a government plea for appointment of 152 BCS (judicial) cadre officials who were selected by the Public Service Commission.

The court observed that the BCS (judicial) cadre service had been declared null and void on December 2, 1999 as it is ultra vires of the Constitution in the judgement of Mazdar Hossain case.

The government petition has however been kept in record.

The selection of 152 BCS (judicial) cadre officials had been made for appointment as assistant judges.

Attorney General AF Hasan Arif strongly pleaded for permission for

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

# India drops precondition for talks with Pakistan

REUTERS, London

India will not demand a complete halt to cross-border militant strikes before talks can begin on normalising ties with Pakistan, Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha said in an interview published yesterday.

Britain's Financial Times newspaper said the remarks by Sinha represented a shift in policy. He described a halt to attacks as a precondition of a "successful outcome" to the talks, but not a requirement before talks can begin.

"If this was a precondition

then (Prime Minister Atal Behari) Vajpayee would not have extended the 'hand of friendship' to Pakistan last month," the paper quoted Sinha as saying.

"But for the dialogue to succeed it is essential that cross-border terrorism comes to an end."

The two nuclear-armed neighbours came close to war after suspected Pakistan-based militants attacked the Indian parliament in late 2001. But they have announced steps in the past month to ease tensions.

Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali said last

week that Islamabad and Delhi were moving toward the resumption of peace talks.

India has demanded a halt to attacks, but Pakistan says it cannot control all militants that operate across the Line of Control (LOC) that divides the disputed region of Kashmir.

Sinha suggested India could accept that Pakistan may not control all militants, provided Delhi was satisfied that Islamabad was reining in groups it did control, the FT said.

"If there are elements which are outside their control and which are

crossing the LOC despite their best efforts to stop them, then we should cooperate with each other to curb their activities," he told the Financial Times.

"It would be a simple thing. They get information that such and such a group has escaped their net... we have channels of communication through which such information can be passed."

India accuses Muslim Pakistan of training and arming separatist rebels who have been fighting Indian rule in Kashmir since 1989. Pakistan denies this, saying it provides only political and moral support.

# Explore domestic market to sustain SMEs

## Centre for Policy Dialogue, The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo dialogue told

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Pro-people and environment-friendly industrial policy is necessary to achieve desired performance in the industrial sector.

Speakers at a regional consultation meeting of the National Policy Review Forum-2003 in Narayanganj yesterday also emphasised the need to explore domestic market to ensure sustainability of the industries, small and medium units in particular.

The dialogue on 'Industrial Policy' was organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo.

CPD Chairman Prof. Rehman Sobhan said Narayanganj had been the pride of the country for long for being the country's pioneer business hub. But that has changed.

"The famous jute industries are de-industrialised and garments have taken its place," he said.

Prof. Sobhan suggested that a local government-based strategy

should be adopted to boost the industrialisation, especially for small and medium enterprises. "Central government cannot do everything alone. You have to do it yourself in association with the local government."

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) President Monjurul Hoq chaired the dialogue and Prothom Alo Editor M o t i u r

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4