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PM hails AL for decision to join JS

Defends existing caretaker system

UNB, Comilla

Welcoming the main opposition party's intention to join parliament, ending a prolonged boycott, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia urged them to place their demands in the House as per rules of procedure as parliament cannot be conducted with "physical force".

"It is good to come to parliament—say what you need to say. There are rules of procedure in parliament. If you can have it accepted in parliament, we have nothing to say," she told the opposition while addressing a public meeting at Comilla Town Hall ground yesterday.

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Civil admin getting political colour

Large-scale promotions, appointments on 'political considerations' likely in coming months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With barely nine months left of the BNP-led ruling coalition's tenure and the general elections approaching, the government is allegedly going for large-scale promotions and appointments on 'political considerations' virtually turning the civil administration into a political administration.

This is breeding frustration and resentment among an increasing number of government officials, greatly hampering smooth func-

tioning of the administration.

Allegations are rife that officials loyal to the BNP and its major coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami are being rewarded with more lucrative and important posts.

Last week 378 senior assistant secretaries were promoted as deputy secretaries and sources said more promotion is coming in May. Despite having requisite qualification, about 200 officials were ignored for promotion this time too.

POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION Since coming to power, the coalition government is putting officers loyal to it in key posts. While a section of public servants took part in anti-government movement under the banner of Janata Manchha in 1996, the ruling alliance now wants to make sure it has officials of its choice in important positions.

Sources pointed out that the ministries are being by and large controlled from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), making for establishment of political influence

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3 die while cleaning up sewerage line

50 hurt as locals clash with cops

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Three persons died of asphyxia in an underground drain at Hazaribagh in the city as they went down to clean it up after the local commissioner refused to clear the clogged sewerage line.

At least 50 locals were later injured in a clash with the police when they prevented the law enforcers from taking the dead bodies to hospital for autopsy.

The dead are Sanwar Hossain, 28, Koramat Ali, 30, and Rahman Ali, 28—all caretakers of shanties at Rayerbazar living at Sultanganj of the same area.

Locals said five caretakers, including the three, got down into

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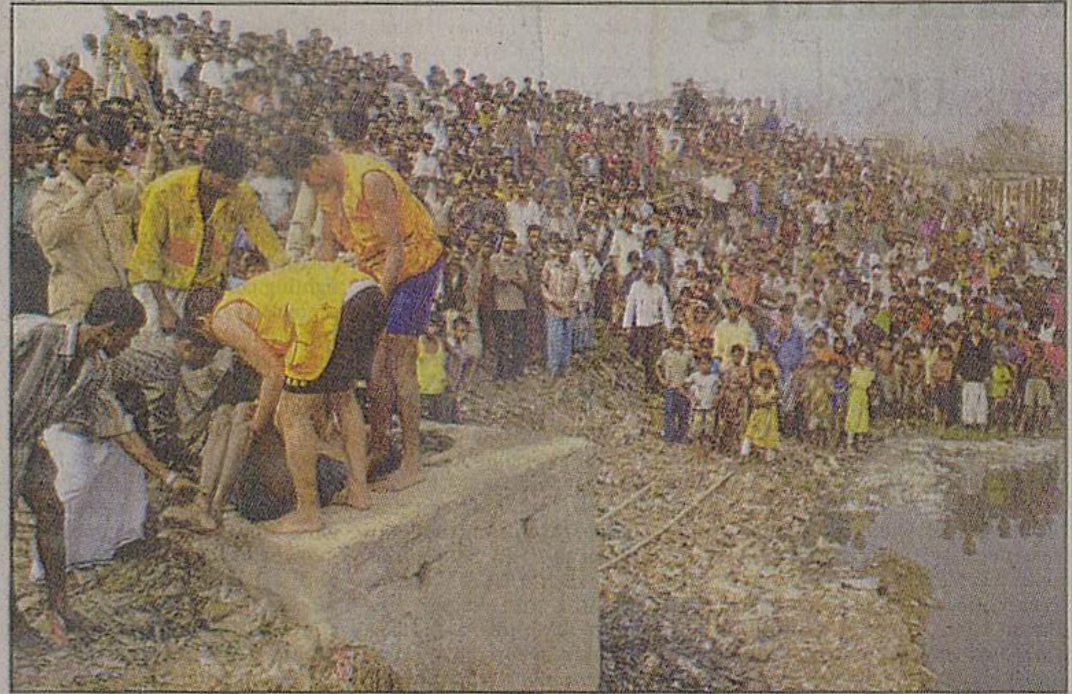


PHOTO: STAR

Firefighters and locals pull out a body through a manhole in Hazaribagh as a large number of onlookers gather at the spot yesterday. Three people died inhaling poisonous gas as they were trying to clean up a clogged sewerage line.



PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

This recent picture shows a gigantic shoal emerged in the almost dried up Brahmaputra near Charjatrapur in Kurigram.

KIBRIA MURDER CASE

SC stays proceedings as trial starts in Sylhet

STAR REPORT

The Supreme Court yesterday stayed for three weeks all proceedings of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria murder case hours after its trial began in the Speedy Trial Tribunal of Sylhet through framing of charges.

After hearing a petition filed by advocate Abdul Majid Khan, complainant of the case, chamber judge of the Appellate Division Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury passed the order and asked the petitioner to file a regular appeal by this time for a full-bench hearing in the Appellate Division.

Advocate Majid, Habiganj district Awami League's organising secretary, in his leave-to-appeal

petition sought a stay on further proceedings of the murder case and challenged a High Court order that had rejected his plea for further investigation into the sensational case.

On May 4, 2005, Majid prayed in the district judge court for further investigation. As the court discharged the petition, he filed a writ petition in the High Court and sought cancellation of the charge sheet and a direction for further investigation into the case.

An HC division on November 21, 2005, rejected the petition and directed him to settle the matter in the trial court. Against this directive, Majid filed the application in the Appellate Division yesterday.

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GAS PRICE

Talks with Tata end without agreement

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

The fourth round of negotiations between the government and the Tata Group ended yesterday without any fruitful result as they failed to reach a common platform on the gas price issue.

The Indian conglomerate had submitted their proposal on gas prices but the government team did not accept the prices saying that those are much lower than the government's expectation.

A government high official who participated in the meeting said the prices proposed by the Tata Group are three to four times lower than what the government is demanding.

Tata Sons Executive Director

Alan Rosling said the government officials have sought imaginary prices for gas, which are unrealistic. "I think Petrobangla's expectation is different from the reality. There is a wide gap between the two parties," he said after the meeting.

Replying to a question about their next plan, he said, "I think nothing is finished yet."

Tata Group Resident Director Manzer Hussain said they will wait for further reaction from the government.

"We have placed a separate set of prices for gas for our steel, fertilizer and electricity projects which are much higher than the prices practiced internationally."

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CARETAKER, EC REFORMS

ALCWC sits today to set strategies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC) sits today to set strategies of the party and proposals for reform in the caretaker government and Election Commission that will be placed in parliament soon.

The crucial meeting of the party's core members will be held with Opposition Leader and party chief Sheikh Hasina in the chair. Party lawmakers will also join the meeting to be held at the party's Dhanmondi office at 10:00am.

The ALCWC members will discuss the ways the party should table the proposals of reform in the caretaker government, EC and

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Govt commits to raise fuel prices

Agrees to meet 3 more conditions to get 6th PRGF tranche from IMF

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Though the government denies any intention to increase the fuel prices, it has already committed to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to do that within this fiscal year (FY).

The government also has promised to prepare a report for the IMF showing the revenue losses due to not adjusting the gas and petroleum prices, and outlining the

measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of a further adjustment of oil prices on the vulnerable groups.

In a 'memorandum of economic and financial policies' placed before the IMF board on its February 3 meeting, the government said, "In view of the substantial surge in energy prices since the beginning of FY05, we recognize that further price adjustments are needed, especially for kerosene, diesel, and gas."

"Increases in domestic prices already implemented have reduced the monthly operating losses of BPC (Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation) from levels experienced in FY05. In addition, we intend to make further price adjustments this fiscal year to further reduce and eventually eliminate these losses," went on the memorandum.

In the memorandum, the

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SC upholds HC injunction on mass arrest

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday upheld a modification a High Court (HC) order that imposed injunction on blanket arrests by the law enforcers ahead of the opposition's long march towards Dhaka on February 5.

After hearing a stay petition filed by the government, Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice Amirul Kabir Chowdhury also extended the time to four weeks in place of two weeks for submitting the report detailing the names and particulars of the persons arrested on February 3, 4 and 5 under Section 86 of Dhaka

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Gang guns down 4 over city rivalry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Assailants hunted down and killed four youths and injured two others over previous enmity in South Badda in the capital yesterday.

The dead are Alauddin, 25, Tajul Islam, 32, Masum, 32 and Rubel, 32, while the injured are Jalal Uddin Rumi, 30, and Kamrul, 23.

Locals and witnesses said up to 12 armed youths turned up around 5:30pm and killed the four one after another at different spots in five minutes.

The armed youths first gunned down a maimed Alauddin in front of his house in Shimultala. As Tajul

tried to protest the attack on a disabled person, they shot him and left him dead on the spot.

The attackers continued their hunt for more targets and found Masum a few hundred yards away in Nanibari, locals said. They opened fire on him and left the scene for Al Mobin CD-VCD Corner.

Rubel was sitting inside the VCD shop where the gang went on the rampage. They opened fire on Rubel and Kamrul, owner of the shop, and vandalised furniture and valuables.

Locals suspect the youths came

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ATTACK ON AHMADIYYAS

HR bodies to form human shield to resist bigots

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Human rights organisations will form a human shield to prevent the International Khilafat Movement Bangladesh from attacking the Ahmadiyyas at Dhanikhola of Trishal in Mymensingh on February 10.

At least 13 organisations will participate in the programme, said Sharif Kafi of Bangladesh Development Partnership Centre (BDPC), one of the participants, at a press conference at the Jatiya

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JOURNO HARUN KILLING

All 3 accused acquitted on weak evidence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Khulna Divisional Special Trial Tribunal yesterday acquitted all of the three charge-sheeted accused in journalist Shaikh Harun-ar-Rashid murder case.

Judge Mohammad Abdus Samad delivered the verdict, the first one in a journalist murder case in Khulna.

The acquitted are Mohammad Shahin, Shaikh Moktar Hossain alias Baby and Mohammad Amjad Hossain alias Kala Amjad.

Kala Amjad was killed by rivals on July 13 last year in Khulna city while Moktar Hossain Baby has been absconding after his release on bail from the High Court last year.

Mohammad Shahin, who was

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STAY LOCAL