

GRAND RALLY IN DINAJPUR TODAY

# Govt against reforms as it wants to rig polls: Hasina

HASAN JAHID TUSHER, from Dinajpur

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged the BNP-Jamaat-led government is conspiring to snatch peoples' right to vote instead of accepting the opposition's proposals to reform the Election Commission (EC) and caretaker government system. "They [the government] don't want to accept our reform proposals as they know very well people won't vote them in the next election for their immense corruption and misrule," she said. Hasina, also the Awami League chief, was addressing a roadside

rally at Chandaikona bus stand in Sirajganj on her way to Dinajpur, where she is scheduled to address a grand rally of the opposition 14-party today.

Hasina said the government is reluctant to accept the proposals knowing they would not be able to rig the election then. She placed the reform proposals in the House on February 12.

Thousands of AL workers and supporters welcomed the AL chief on way to her three-day visit to a number of northern districts. Hasina greeted the AL workers from her motorcade at different spots.

She alleged the coalition government came to power "through massive rigging in the 2001 election and are conspiring again to rig the next election."

She urged all to build resistance in every village and ward to "foil the conspiracy". She also asked the people to check the current voter list whether they have been included or not.

She expressed deep shock over the deaths of garment workers in a fire in Chittagong on February 23 and demanded compensations for the families of the dead and injured.

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Charred bodies covered with cloth being taken away under army guard, left, people holding pictures of missing relatives approach the Chittagong Medical College Hospital morgue.



PHOTO: STAR

## Compromise meet on Kansat not held

UNB, C'nawabganj

A meeting to resolve the crisis over Kansat killing could not be held here yesterday.

Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP, also minister-in-charge of the district, convened the meeting at Shibganj Upazila Parishad auditorium in the morning with government officials, public representatives, representatives from different professions and leaders of Palli Bidyut Samity.

Golam Rabbani, convenor of the district Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Committee arrived on the upazila parishad premises at about 10:30 am.

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# Arms, ammo recovered in Bandarban

MANIRUL ISLAM, Bandarban

The Bangladesh Army yesterday recovered a cache of arms and ammunition, including one AK47 and M16 automatic rifles each, from Kanamajhi Hill under Ali Kadam upazila in the district.

The cache also consists of 550 bullets, three radio antennas and six pairs of army uniform.

Acting on a tip-off, three platoons of army personnel led by Lt Col Azimullah Bahar cordoned off the Kanamajhi Hill area, some 13 kilometres away from Ali Kadam upazila, at around 10:00am and

made the recovery.

The army members, however, could not arrest anyone during the raid.

The law enforcement agencies have recovered a huge amount of explosives, firearms and ammunition from the remote forests of Naikkhonghari upazila in the last two years.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrested three Arakan rebels and seized a big cache of arms and ammunition, including light machine gun (LMG), AK47, M16 rifles, from the remote forests of

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AUG 17 BLASTS

## Charges pressed against 3 JMB men in Gaibandha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Police on Thursday pressed charges against three ehars members of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) in connection with the August 17 bomb blasts in Gaibandha last year.

The JMB men -- Ziaur Rahman Badal alias Reaz, 19, Abdul Kaiyum, 22, and Harun-ur-Rashid, 20 -- had earlier confessed to their crimes before a magistrate.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Reaz at Ayub Ali Ansari mosque near the LGED office at Sukhnagar on January 23. Following his statement, the Rab arrested the other two at Shaghat upazila bazaar and handed them

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ARROYO SURVIVES ANOTHER COUP ATTEMPT

# Emergency in Philippines, army general arrested

AP, Manila

Gloria Macapagal Arroyo declared a state of emergency Friday, saying she had quashed a coup plot but that the Philippines still faced a "clear threat" from treasonous forces.

Clashes erupted as riot police used water cannons to disperse about 5,000 protesters defying a ban on rallying at a shrine to the 1986 revolt that toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos.

Police then used truncheons and shields to rout a stone-throwing group trying to gather for a second protest. Several people

were arrested; others were left bloodied.

Amid a massive security clampdown, the military barricaded its camps to keep troops from joining the demonstrations and detained an army general allegedly involved in the takeover plot. The military has played major roles in two popular uprisings and has a recent history of restiveness.

While she vowed she was in control, Arroyo clearly was worried about events getting out of control as her opponents tried to hijack events surrounding the 20th anniversary of the revolt against Marcos.

The commemorations were cancelled, presidential spokesman Ignacio Bunye told a news conference, adding that the military has been ordered "to prevent and suppress lawless violence."

Many Filipinos see the four-day "people power" revolt on Feb. 25, 1986, as their country's proudest moment.

Arroyo, who survived two earlier coup attempts, said her action was the result of ongoing efforts by the political opposition, along with both the extreme left and the extreme right, to bring down the elected government.

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## 'US sided with Pakistan in '71 because of its foreign policy'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Renowned American academic Daniel Chirot yesterday said the United States was on Pakistan's side, opposing the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 because of its foreign policy back then.

A professor at Henry M Jackson School of International Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle, Chirot made the observation at a discussion on genocide and political killing.

"The US sided with Pakistan during the Liberation War as it wanted to improve its relations with communist China, which was then having very close ties with Pakistan. On the other hand,

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PHOTO: STAR

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar talks to the dealers at a Badamtali fertiliser depot in the capital yesterday.

## GUJARAT RIOT 9 Hindus get life for killing 14

AFP, Mumbai

Nine Hindus were convicted yesterday of killing 14 people in an arson attack on a bakery during anti-Muslim riots in India's western Gujarat state in 2002.

All nine were sentenced to life in prison by Judge Abhay Tipsay after being found guilty of setting fire to the Muslim-run Best Bakery in Gujarat's Baroda town.

Eight other people were acquitted Friday while four accused are still on the run.

The Best Bakery incident came amid a wave of bloody reprisals for the deaths of 59 Hindus in a train coach allegedly torched by Muslims in February 2002.

Witnesses testified that hundreds of Hindus came to the bakery carrying swords and petrol bombs

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# Iraq slaps curfew to help stem violence

REUTERS, Baghdad

An emergency curfew for yesterday's Juma prayers helped quell sectarian violence that has killed some 200 people around Baghdad, keeping much of the Iraqi capital deserted as leaders work to avert civil war.

In a critical test for the Shia-led government and its US-trained forces after two days of killings between Sunnis and Shias, police and Iraqi soldiers were deployed in force, turning back motorists unaware of the ban announced overnight.

But in the sprawling Shia slum of Sadr City, the streets teemed with people who defied the curfew after radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr called on his Mehdi Army militia to attend Friday prayers but banned attacks on Sunni Muslims.

"We are not enemies but brothers," Sadr said in a statement.

"Anyone who attacks a Muslim is not a Muslim and he who assaults sacraments and mosques shall get his just punishment."

Reprisal attacks on dozens of minority Sunni mosques and about 200 killed around Baghdad alone in just over 48 hours following Wednesday's suspected al-Qaeda bombing of a Shia shrine have seen the United States and United Nations joining efforts to avert all-out civil war that could wreck US hopes of withdrawing troops and inflame the entire Middle East.

Washington and the Shia-led Iraqi government have blamed al-Qaeda's Sunni militants for the destruction of the Golden Mosque in Samarra, saying they are seeking to spark just such a conflict. A militant grouping led by al-Qaeda

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## Khulna criminal killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Notorious criminal Abul Kalam alias Bachchu Shaikh, 45, was killed in an encounter between police and his accomplices at Masni Balvadrapur under Kachua upazila of Bagerhat district at midnight on Thursday.

When police arrested Bachchu at Kachua Bazar, his accomplices opened fire, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate.

Police said Kalam was caught in the crossfire and died instantly. They recovered a gun, four live cartridges and six bullets from the scene.

Son of Shaikh Aftabuddin of Gopalpur village under Kachua upazila, Bachchu was wanted in several criminal cases lodged with different police stations in Bagerhat district.

Meanwhile, passengers caught

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# Mass wedding of many teenage girls sparks protest

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Different women's organisations yesterday protested the dowry-free mass wedding of many teenaged girls in presence of a deputy minister at Kishoreganj of the district last Wednesday.

Marriage of such teenaged girls is not only deplorable but should also be resisted, representatives of the women's rights bodies said, adding that they will soon launch protest programmes against this.

Local NGO Unnayan

Gobeshana Foundation (UGF) arranged the mass wedding of 101 girls at the Kishoreganj Stadium.

Deputy Minister for Food, Relief and Disaster Management Ahsan Habib Dulu was the chief guest of the programme also attended by BNP lawmaker from Syedpur-Kishoreganj constituency Amzad Hossen Sarkar, Nilphamari Deputy Commissioner Rabintra Nath Roy Chowdhury and former advisor of caretaker government Faiz Ahmed.

Ahsan Habib Dulu and Amzad

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PHOTO: STAR

Deputy Minister for Disaster Management Asadul Habib Dulu (second right) attending the function of 'mass wedding without dowry' at Kishoreganj Stadium in Nilphamari yesterday.

# Housewife, farmer killed in Kushtia

## Trader abducted for ransom

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A housewife was slaughtered after gang rape in Daulatpur upazila on Thursday night while a farmer was shot dead in Kumarkhali upazila in the district yesterday.

Criminals abducted a trader for ransom in Kumarkhali upazila on Thursday.

As housewife Soheli, 23, wife of Rokon Sheikh of Chardaulatpur in Daulatpur upazila, was going alone to her father's house at Charjolapara at around 8:30pm on foot, a gang stopped her and took to a nearby field. They slaughtered her after gang rape.

Local people found her body yesterday morning and informed the police who sent the body to Kushtia General Hospital for autopsy.

Criminals shot dead farmer

Faruque Hossain alias Korban, 32,

of village Joynabad in Kumarkhali upazila yesterday.

A gang of four waylaid Faruque when he was returning home from Joynabad Bazar at about 2:00pm. Two bullets pierced his chest as the criminals fired point-blank.

The gang fled the scene before people rushed to the spot.

Faruque succumbed to his injuries on the way to the local health complex.

Armed criminals picked up Achintya Kumar Biswas, 30, owner

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## Tremor in Ctg, Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chittagong port city and Sylhet experienced a moderate earthquake early yesterday.

Sources at the Geo-physical Observatory Centre in Chittagong said the tremor jolted the port city and its adjoining areas at 02 hours 06 minutes 36 seconds (BST) and lasted for 43 seconds.

The magnitude of the tremor was 4.88 on the Richter Scale and its epicentre was 417-km off the

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Prayer Timing		
February 25		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-05	6-10
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation