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DIALOGUE ON ELECTORAL REFORMS

BNP proposes committee with equal representation

AL asked to name five 14-party leaders: Non-MPs allowed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP at last responded to Awami League's queries yesterday, inviting it to nominate five representatives of the 14-party opposition combine to a 10-member committee to discuss the opposition's caretaker government and electoral reform agenda.

In reply to a letter sent nine days ago by Abdul Jalil, AL general secretary and coordinator of the AL-led opposition line-up, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan proposed constituting the committee with five members from each side of the political divide.

Mannan Bhuiyan's letter, which came after a day of police-opposition skirmishes over a 14-party sit-in programme around the Secretariat, asked the AL to name policymaking-level leaders of the

opposition coalition as the committee members. "We wouldn't have any objection if you want to nominate non-MP leaders, too, for the greater interest of the discussion," it added.

BNP Office Secretary Moftiqul Hasan Tripti, accompanied by Assistant Office Secretary Ahmed Musa, handed over the letter to Abdul Jalil at his Gulshan residence at 4:00pm yesterday. Bhuiyan's emissaries stayed at Jalil's house for about 15 minutes, when AL leaders Obaidul Kader and ASM Kamal were also present.

Now comes the Jamaat question

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP while agreeing to allow non-legislator leftist opposition leaders to be on a proposed 10-member committee to discuss the opposition's reform proposals also wants the four-party coalition partners to participate in it.

Tension arose over whether or not Jamaat—BNP's biggest alliance partner—will participate in the government-opposition political dialogue as the BNP secretary general yesterday sent letter to the Awami League (AL) general secretary, asking for five representatives irrespective of their legislative and party status.

Quake in Iran kills 70, wipes out villages

AFP, Tehran

At least 70 people were killed when a powerful earthquake struck western Iran early yesterday, destroying whole villages and sending frightened residents fleeing from their homes, according to the latest toll.

Another 1,265 people were injured in the quake which hit the border with Iraq with a force of 6.0 on the Richter scale, state television quoted the Iranian interior ministry's natural disaster committee as saying.

affected areas between the cities of Doroud and Brujerd digging through the rubble of their mud-brick homes.

About 330 villages suffered 40 to 100 percent damage, Lorestan provincial governor Mohammad Reza Mohseni Sani was quoted on state television as saying.

"By nightfall we will be able to give an accurate number of the casualties and the damage inflicted by the quake," he added.

State television reported that rescue workers have been sent to the most devastated areas in the province near the border with Iraq and that the number of casualties was expected to increase.

Survivors are in urgent need of food stuff, blankets and medical supplies, interior ministry public relations director Mojtaba Mir-Abdollahi told AFP, but said there was "no need for international aid."

"Currently the hospitals of the province are packed with injured, and the wounded are now being sent to neighbouring provinces," Mir-Abdollahi said.

"According to the inspection done by the local governor-general's office, the death toll is not expected to reach 100 people," he added.

Iran sits astride several major

Police sue 42 BCL leaders, activists

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Ramna police yesterday filed a case against 42 leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of Awami League (AL), for 'assault on the police' at Doyel Chattar during Thursday's foiled sit-in programme of the 14-party opposition coalition.

Sub-Inspector Shah Alam of Ramna Police Station filed the first information report (FIR) accusing the BCL men of attacking the police with iron rods and sticks 'in a bid to obstruct the police from carrying out their duties and with an aim to kill'.

The accused include BCL President Liaquat Sikder, General Secretary (GS) Nazrul Islam Babu,

Meaningful reforms talks needed for credible polls

Gastright tells Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John Gastright yesterday underscored the need for a meaningful dialogue between the government and the opposition over electoral reforms to ensure free, fair and credible elections in Bangladesh.

After over an hour-long meeting with Leader of the Opposition in Parliament also Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence, Gastright said the government should create an environment for the dialogue in the interest of strengthening

democracy in the country.

The US official said he also discussed the problem of militancy with the opposition leader. "Some good steps have been taken with the arrest of militants and now they should be tried and the process of trial and uprooting the militant organisations from Bangladesh should continue."

Appreciating Hasina for her leadership and for returning to the parliament, Gastright said he had an excellent conversation with the opposition leader on a wide range of issues concerning Bangladesh and its people and the future of the country.

Briefing journalists on behalf of the AL president, her Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said they discussed electoral reforms, militancy and the overall political situation of the country.

The opposition wants reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission for strengthening the country's democracy, he said. Terming the process a continuous one Saber alleged that the government is trying to buy time to avoid a decision.

He said there is a clear difference between remarks of Mannan

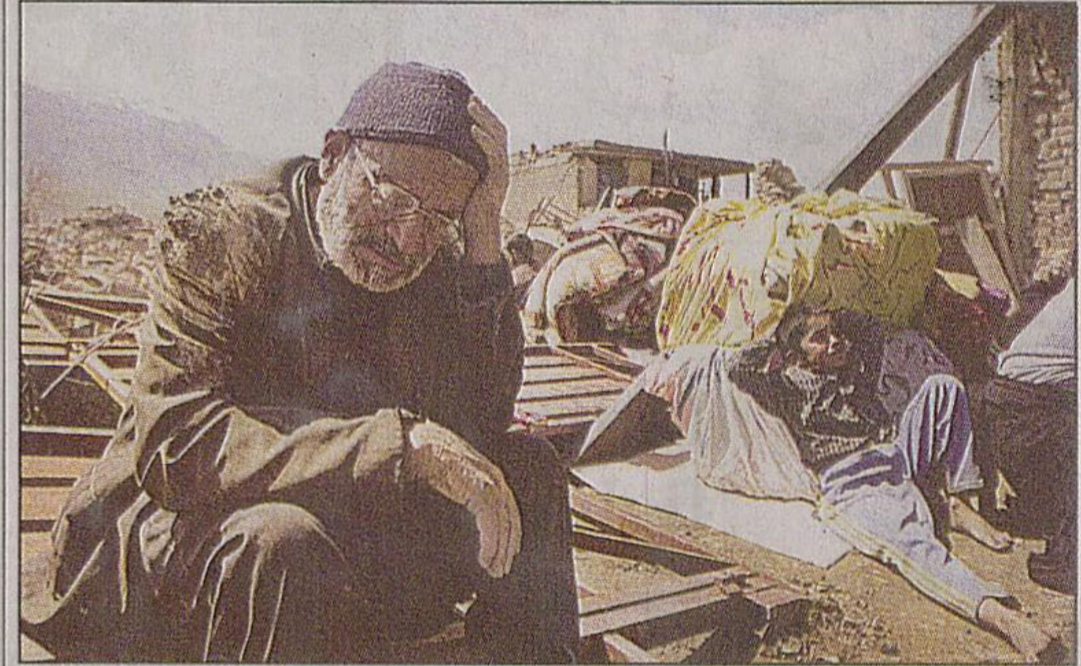
15 hurt as JCD, Shibir clash at CMC

CU CORRESPONDENT

At least 15 students were injured in a clash between the activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) at a hostel of Chittagong Medical College (CMC) at Chatteshwari road early yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the trouble began at around 1:00am when JCD activist Parvez, also a third year student, was observing his birthday playing music loudly in his room on the first floor of the hostel.

Some ICS activists, who were studying in the adjoining rooms, protested playing of music in high volume. The protest resulted in an altercation between the ICS and JCD men.



Members of an Iranian family sit amid debris in Khaleq Ali village, near the city of Brujerd, after a powerful earthquake struck Lorestan province of western Iran early yesterday.

Outlaw killed in 'shootout' in Chuadanga

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An armed cadre of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) was killed during a "shootout" between his accomplices and members of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Jugrhuba under Alamdanga upazilla of Chuadanga district early yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, members of the anticrime elite force arrested Rezaul Huq alias Kalu at 9:30pm on Friday. He was an FIR-named accused in six murder cases, said a press release issued by Rab-6 yesterday.

On his confession, a Rab team along with Kalu set out for Jugrhuba at around 3:45am yesterday to recover hidden firearms and



Dhakabasi, an organisation of the residents of Old Dhaka, arranged a kite festival on Dhaka University ground yesterday to celebrate the Independence Day.

Cellphones seized at ZIA, one arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law enforcers at Zia International Airport (ZIA) arrested a man with 1,270 smuggled cellphones as he along with some ZIA employees were trying to put those on a vehicle yesterday.

Habibur Rahman alias Nasir, 45, a passenger of Dragon Air from Hong Kong, landed at the ZIA at 1:10am carrying two cartons stashed with different models of Nokia cellphones.

Customs sources said Habibur was trying to load the two cartons onto a container carrier parked in the apron area of the airport.

"Instead of putting the cartons on the conveyor belt, he was trying to load those onto the vehicle," said

Cotton farming ignored though it can boost RMG

PORIMOL PALMA

Wide-scale cultivation of cotton still remains a far cry, although business leaders think growing its high-yielding varieties could turn the country into one of the world's most competitive readymade garment producers, mainly by boosting the sector's backward linkages.

Cotton is a basic raw material for both the textile and RMG industries. But the country produces a maximum of only one lakh bales of cotton a year. Compared to that, the country's cotton consumption is more than 20 lakh bales a year, according to Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA).

But, the government has not taken any effective step to increase cotton production by providing research and subsidy facilities. Failure in introducing high-yielding varieties has contributed to marginalisation of cotton production, Cotton Development Board (CDB) officials said.

"If the cotton-producing countries don't produce more than they themselves need for their textile and garment industries, they are not going to export. In such cases, we'll be in trouble," said Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) President Fazlul Haque.

The Bangladesh RMG sector

already enjoys some competitiveness in the global market and a boost in the production of local cotton could make its backward linkage industry even stronger, making the sector highly competitive, he said.

"The whole appearance of the garments industries would be different if enough high-quality cotton could be produced locally," said Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) former president Annisul Huq.

The business bodies concerned in the sector however never thought of developing local cotton production, assuming that the

ONE OF TWO SYLHET CASES Charges to be pressed against JMB chief, 10 others tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

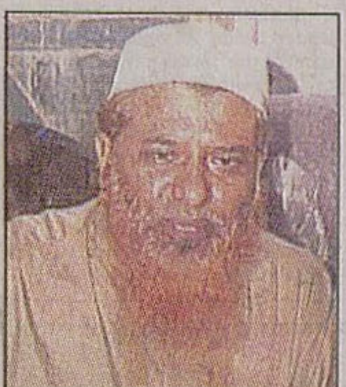
Charge sheet in one of the two cases filed in Sylhet against the outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Abdul Rahman and his accomplices is likely to be submitted in the court tomorrow, officials said.

Charges under the explosives act will be brought against 11 people including Abdul Rahman, his family men and accomplices, who were arrested on March 2 at an East Shaplabag house in Sylhet city suburb.

The charge sheet also includes the names of former Amir of Habiganj district Jamaat-e-Islami Moulana Saidur Rahman and Shabbir Ahmed of Brahmanbaria.

They are accused of supplying money and other logistics for the JMB chief and activists.

Shabbir Ahmed gave confessional statement before a magistrate admitting his link with the JMB men.



Abdul Rahman with others.

A chequebook was also found in the name of Moulana Saidur Rahman, who is still evading arrest.

Saidur's son ex-Shibir leader Shamim was held in Habiganj after the August 17 series blasts.

JMB's Ehsar member Abdul Aziz Hanif, also a former Shibir man, who was caught with Abdul Rahman, admitted his complicity with series blasts in Sylhet city in a confessional statement before a magistrate.

Police also arrested the manager of Islami Bank, Lalidighirpar

ARRESTS, BEATING OF ACTIVISTS JCD calls indefinite strike at RU

RU CORRESPONDENT

Rajshahi University Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) yesterday called an indefinite strike on the campus in protest of Thursday's police attack on its activists.

The decision was taken at a meeting held at the Sher-e-Bangla Hall yesterday afternoon with unit Joint Convener Nuruzzaman Likhon in the chair.

On Thursday, policemen at a camp on the RU campus beat JCD activists loyal to Convener Masudur Rahman Rana as they entered the camp premises chasing Anwar Hossain Nipu, member of an opponent faction of JCD. Earlier on the day, JCD followers of Golam Kabir beat Masud over formation of the Bangabandhu Hall committee.

The police arrested five JCD members during the clash. They also beat Ali Asgar Khokon, RU correspondent of the daily Janata.

After the meeting, the JCD activists brought out a protest procession on the campus, demanding resignation of RU Vice-Chancellor (VC) Prof Altaf Hossain and Proctor Prof Enamul Haque for allegedly not stopping the police attack.

They also demanded immediate release of the arrested JCD activists. JCD Joint Convener Mamun-ur-Rashid alleged the VC and proctor were "always" extending support to the JCD faction that had beat up Masud.

The JCD leaders also complained that the VC and proctor have completely failed to ensure students' security on the campus.

Masud filed a case, accusing Golam Kabir of attacking him in Motbar thana area while Nipu filed a case, accusing 30 unidentified persons, including five JCD activists.

The Rajshahi Metropolitan Police also filed a case for attacking the police with arms.

When contacted, VC Altaf Hossain said a meeting of the syndicate members was called yesterday evening to form a committee to probe the incident.

JCD leader Ruhul Kuddus Saran told newsmen that they will not withdraw the strike until the VC and proctor resign.

Journalists in Rajshahi city will also hold a procession and rally today, protesting Thursday's police attack on Ali Asgar Khokon.

Announcement

Today's edition of The Daily Star includes a four-colour 32-page special supplement in tabloid size on the 7th O&A Level Award Presentation Ceremony for the students who achieved outstanding results in the June 2004 and June 2005 sessions. There is no extra charge for this supplement.



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