

Thailand votes amid opposition boycott

AP, Bangkok
Thailand's prime minister urged citizens to ignore an opposition boycott of snap parliamentary elections yesterday, saying the vote was crucial to ending the country's deepening political stalemate amid demands for his resignation. Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra called the election three years early to reassert his mandate after weeks of persistent street protests against his government. But the vote was unlikely to satisfy critics who accuse him of corruption and abuse of power. All three opposition parties in Parliament boycotted the election, urging Thailand's 45 million registered voters to cast ballots but tick a box indicating they abstain from choosing a candidate. Thaksin has promised to step

down if his party Thai Rak Thai party receives less than 50 percent of the vote, an outcome seen as highly unlikely given his strong support among the rural majority. The opposition, however, hopes the boycott will make it impossible to fill all 500 legislative seats, which many legal experts say could make it impossible to convene Parliament and form a new government. Looking relaxed and smiling, Thaksin cast his ballot at a voting station near his residence in western Bangkok, accompanied by his three children. "This election is very important for the direction of the country because there is a split right now," he told reporters. "Voting is the responsibility of everyone who loves democracy. They must come out and vote." The opposition boycott turned

the election into a one-party race in 276 constituencies where Thaksin's party was running uncontested. The ruling party won an overwhelming mandate in elections last year and remains popular among rural Thais who have benefited from Thaksin's social welfare programs. But election law requires that uncontested candidates garner at least 20 percent of votes highly unlikely in some districts where Thaksin's party has little support. Any seats left unfilled could lead to several rounds of by-elections before a prime minister is chosen. Abhisit Vejjajiva, head of the main opposition Democrat Party, said the boycott sent a strong message. "What we did when we took the position was to make a statement, and we made a statement," he said, **SEE PAGE 15 COL 8**

Ghorashal unit-3 trips to worsen load-shedding

UNB, Dhaka
A 210 MW unit of Ghorashal Power Station tripped yesterday due to a technical fault aggravating the power crisis across the country. Power Development Board (PDB) officials told UNB that they had to go for about 800 MW of load-shedding during the peak hours due to huge shortage in generation. The PDB officials recorded the country's total electricity generation at 3,227 MW against the demand of 4,100 MW at 6:00pm yesterday. "But the extent of load-shedding will go up with the gradual increase in consumption during the peak hours," said another official. "The country regularly experiences load-shedding between 1,000 and 1,200 MW during the high peak hours." Earlier, the PDB authorities predicted that the power supply situation would improve by March 31 as they had expected to be able **SEE PAGE 15 COL 6**



Frequent power blackouts have forced traders in the capital's Elephant Road to use their own diesel-run generators to light their shops and showrooms. **PHOTO: STAR**

Faridpur road crash kills 8

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia
Eight people were killed when a passenger bus skidded off the road and fell into a ditch near Faridpur town on Faridpur-Barisal highway yesterday. Three people were also injured in the accident that took place at around 4:00pm at Bakhunda, about six kilometres off the district town. The Barisal-bound bus met the accident while trying to avoid a collision with a truck coming from the opposite direction. Four bus passengers -- Hayder Ali, 30, Billal Hossain, 38, Apu, 28, and Sumayya Parveen, 16 -- died on the spot. Three others -- Shajahan Sarder, 40, Fazlu Chowkdar, 50, and Hashem Mollah, 54, died while they were being taken to Faridpur Medical College Hospital and another middle-aged person, who could not be identified immediately, died on way to Dhaka. Among the three injured passengers, the condition of Minhaj, 23, is critical. **SEE PAGE 15 COL 6**

First nor'wester ravages 500 houses in Kurigram

A CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram
A nor'wester with hailstorm yesterday night damaged various crops in six upazilas of the district while demolishing around 500 houses and uprooting many trees. According to the local Agriculture Extension Department, 65mm of rain was recorded during this season's first nor'wester that continued for about three hours from 9:00pm. The affected areas are Bhitbarbandha, Hasnabad and Kaliganj unions under Nageswari upazila, Halokhana, Chogadha, Jattapur, Kathalbari and Begachha unions under sadar upazila, and Chinay, Rajarhat, Gharialdanga and Umarmajid unions under Rajarhat upazila. Some parts of Bhurungamari and Ulipur upazilas were also slightly affected. Around 477 hectares of boro paddy were damaged in Nageswari and 300 hectares in sadar upazila along with jute, wheat and vegetable. **PHOTO: STAR**



Despite five deaths in the last three months while cleaning manholes in the capital, two cleaners yesterday work in Kamalapur without any safety measures.

Charge sheet against Rahman being delayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet
Charge sheet in one of the two cases filed in Sylhet against 11 people including outlawed JMB chief Abdur Rahman and his accomplices is being delayed to 'remove the flaws through further investigation'. Extended time for submitting charge sheet in the sensational case ended yesterday but home ministry's Central Monitoring Committee during the final check detected some flaws and suggested some changes through further investigation, said an official. The case is now being transferred to the Detective Branch for further investigation. Superintendent of Police of Sylhet Ansar Uddin Khan said. Sub Inspector Waiulullah of Sylhet Kotwali Police Station filed two cases, one under explosives act and the other under arms act, after the surrender of the military kingpin at an East Shaplabagh house in Sylhet city suburb on March 2. **SEE PAGE 15 COL 4**

Two US pilots die as helicopter downed

4 GIs, 10 Iraqis killed in violence, 40 bodies found

AFP, AP, Baghdad
The US military yesterday announced the deaths of six of its troops across Iraq, including two pilots of a helicopter that was shot down by insurgents the day before. Insurgents blew up a small Shia mosque northeast of Baghdad yesterday, while police reported the discovery of nearly 40 bodies in several neighbourhoods of the Iraqi capital. Ten Iraqis were killed in violence Sunday, while insurgents blew up a Shia mosque northeast of Baghdad as sectarian tensions festered in the country, still without a government nearly four months after a key national election. The US military said the two pilots of the helicopter that crashed Saturday evening after coming under enemy fire were presumed dead. "As reported earlier the aircraft was conducting a combat air patrol. Military officials believe the crash was the result of hostile fire," the military said in its statement. The Apache Longbow helicopter went down Saturday at 5:30 pm (1330 GMT) southwest of Baghdad near Yussifiyah. Earlier Sunday, an Iraqi insurgent group claimed responsibility for

the attack in an unconfirmed statement published on the Internet. The violence came as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw made a surprise visit to press Iraqi politicians to speed up the formation of the government. Rice arrived in Baghdad with Straw, a day after visiting his home region in northwest England. The two were due to hold talks with Jaafari, who refuses to stand aside, and other leaders including President Jalal Talabani, a British official said. US officials make little **SEE PAGE 15 COL 7**

New US envoy arrives today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT
US Ambassador to Bangladesh Patricia A Butenis arrives today to take up her new diplomatic assignment. Butenis, the 12th US envoy in Bangladesh since America opened its diplomatic mission in Dhaka, is to arrive on a British Airways flight, said foreign ministry source. Chargé d' Affaires Judith Ann Chammas was in charge of the Dhaka mission since ambassador Harry K. Thomas left Dhaka on July 2, 2005. Butenis, who was deputy chief of mission at the US Embassy in Islamabad (2004-2006), was confirmed as envoy to Bangladesh by the Senate on February 16, and sworn in on March 17.

7-day agitation planned for power, fertiliser

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Jatiya Oikya Mancha and Bangladesh Tarikat Federation jointly declared a weeklong agitation programme during April 7-14 demanding uninterrupted supply of power for irrigation and fertiliser to the farmers. Terming the situation 'a national crisis', they demanded immediate stepping down of the four-party alliance government if they fail to ensure uninterrupted supply of those items to the farmers. They demanded diversion of electricity supply from urban to rural areas, if necessary, for ensuring uninterrupted supply of electricity at least from 10:00pm to 6:00am every day in the paddy growing areas. President of Bikalpa Dhara AQM

Badruddoza Chowdhury, President of Jatiya Oikya Mancha Dr Kamal Hossain and President of Bangladesh Tarikat Federation Moulana Najibul Bashar Maizbhandari in a joint press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday announced the programme. The government has failed to provide fertiliser, power and water to the farmers and the ministers concerned including the prime minister are responsible for the failure, Bikalpa Dhara chief and former president Badruddoza Chowdhury said at the conference. Expressing solidarity with the farmers during agitation programme, people will demonstrate across the country demanding the supply of power, water and fertiliser, Dr Kamal said. **SEE PAGE 15 COL 6**

4,385 Indian chicks seized in Sirajganj

UNB, Sirajganj
Some 4,385 smuggled Indian chicks were seized from different poultry farms in two upazilas of the district on Saturday night. Livestock Department officials and Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association leaders jointly raided several poultry farms in Sadar and Kazipur upazilas and seized the banned chicks. A case was filed yesterday with a Sirajganj court in this connection.

FACTORY FIRES

BGMEA launches awareness drive

UNB, Dhaka
The BGMEA launched an awareness-building campaign by conducting fire drills and inspecting fire fighting equipments in the wake of frequent fire incidents in factories. The inspectors reported yesterday that 40 garment factories have been inspected during the first day of the campaign on Saturday. The inspectors began the drive splitting into ten teams in different zones around 1:30pm and ended the first day's drive around 8:00pm. Stung by the tragedy in Chittagong KTS garment factory,

MEETING VENUE AL MP, 35 others hurt in clash with Chhatra Dal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal
At least 35 people including the local Awami League (AL) lawmaker were injured in clashes between the activists of the ruling BNP's student wing Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and AL's student wing Bangladesh Chhatra League over calling meetings at the same time and venue in Galachipa upazila of Patuakhali district yesterday. Kalapara upazila AL on March 22 called a meeting at Mamatazuddin High School field in Chalitabunia union under Galachipa upazila that was scheduled for 3:00pm yesterday but Chalitabunia union JCD later announced a counter **SEE PAGE 15 COL 3**

JCD calls off strike at RU

RU CORRESPONDENT
Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) called off its indefinite strike at Rajshahi University yesterday after Rajshahi city mayor reportedly urged the ruling BNP's student wing to do so. Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP came to the campus yesterday morning and met RU Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof Altaf Hossain and pro-BNP and Jamaat teachers at the VC's residence. After the meeting, the mayor came to the tents, where the JCD activists were preparing for **SEE PAGE 15 COL 3**

28 killed in Chinese factory explosions

AFP, Beijing
At least 28 workers were killed and 10 missing in China after separate blasts ripped through two plants dealing with dangerous explosives. At least 20 workers were killed, two injured and nine missing after an explosion at the Yantai Zhaoyuan 761 Company in eastern China's Shandong province late Saturday, Xinhua news agency reported. The plant handled the packing of explosives, it said. Rescue workers were still searching for the nine missing employees, the report said. Local officials in Xiadian township, where the factory was located, refused to comment on the blast, while phone calls to the

Outlaw leader killed in Rab 'encounter'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna
A regional leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (Janajuddho) was killed in an 'encounter' between members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his accomplices early yesterday at Bellabaria village under Baliakandi upazila of Rajbari district. The outlaw, Nilu Molla, 31, was arrested on Saturday at his village Barhovellabari under the same upazila with a shutter gun and 13 bullets. Two more shutter guns and five bullets were also seized after the encounter that continued for 15 minutes. A press release of Khulna Rab said, adding that Nilu Molla was wanted in several murder, abduction, rape, extortion and bomb attack cases filed with different police stations of Rajbari district.

Prayer Timing		
April 3		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation