

\$93.6m fighters turn \$117.9m

Opposition smells a rat in discrepant claims of price; Hafiz Uddin unsure now about his earlier written statement in parliament

SHAKHAWAT LITON

The 16 fighter planes, first claimed to have been purchased for \$93.6 million from China, are now revealed to be costlier by \$24.3 million, kicking up controversy over the defence purchase.

The air force headquarters in a report placed to the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry yesterday said the fighters have been priced at \$117.9 million, a figure substantially higher from what had been claimed in February in parliament.

Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, who is also in charge of the defence ministry in parliamentary affairs, on February

22 informed the Jatiya Sangsad that the government in the fiscal year 2004-05 had signed an agreement with China to procure 16 fighter planes at a cost of \$93.6 million.

He said this in a written reply to a lawmaker's question. Referring to the discrepancy in the prices, Hafiz Uddin last night told The Daily Star, "I can't remember exactly what I said in parliament. The ministries concerned usually prepare the answers we place in parliament. And sometimes we are too busy to verify those."

The minister however said he will confirm what he had actually said about the purchase after examining the official documents.

The air force chief who placed the report to the parliamentary body said the negotiations concerning the procurement were confined to the governments of Bangladesh and China.

But the main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmaker claimed that a third party must have been involved in the process and pocketed a huge commission from the purchase.

"I am sure a third party was between the two sides and took commission from the procurement," AL lawmaker Col (retired) Shawkat Ali told reporters after the meeting.

Asked about the difference

20 journos hurt in cop attack at Ctg stadium

OUR CORRESPONDENT from Ctg

Cricket took a back seat on the opening day of the second Test between Bangladesh and Australia as police swung into an uncalled for action against the on-duty journalists, injuring at least 20 media-men of different national dailies and satellite televisions at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Of the injured, Anurup Titu of the Royal Hospital and underwent a surgery after CT scan in the afternoon. His condition was learned to be critical.

Two more journalists, Ruhul Amin Rana of Jai Jai Din and Rabi Shankar of Ajker Kagaj were also wounded and were taken to the hospital for treatment.

Trouble brewed in the morning when in an unprecedented incident in international cricket the

start of play was delayed by ten minutes due to a sit-in protest by on-duty journalists in the middle of the ground for merciless beating of fellow photojournalist Shamsul Haq Tunku of Bengali daily Prothom Alo.

However, that incident at the entrance of the stadium in the morning was only the tip of the iceberg.

Scenes of pandemonium enveloped the field of play during the lunch break as the police led by DC (Port) Ali Akbar set themselves upon journalists, who were demanding unconditional apology from Sergeant Anwar -- the man in uniform responsible for beating up Tunku in the morning.

The assault for a second time started as Akbar suddenly punched veteran photojournalist Jahirul Haque on his face and kicked him continually. As Jahirul fell down on the ground, the cops became more

Mujibnagar Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The historic Mujibnagar Day will be observed today, commemorating the formation of Bangladesh's first government at the Baidyanathola mango grove in Meherpur on this day in 1971.

The place was later renamed Mujibnagar as a tribute to the hero of the country's independence, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was declared the president of the government-in-

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

Jamaat leader held for JMB link

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, Dinajpur and Rangpur

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) yesterday afternoon arrested a Jamaat-e-Islami leader at Dinajpur Railway Station Bazar for his alleged links with Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB).

Dinajpur Jamaat unit Ameer Aftab Uddin Mollah said Abdul

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

REFORMS DIALOGUE BODY

AL sends names of 5 representatives BNP to respond soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League-led 14-party opposition combine yesterday sent a letter to the BNP secretary general, naming its five representatives and asking him to form the proposed 10-member committee to discuss electoral reforms.

Receiving the letter at 7:05pm, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan thanked the Awami League (AL) for its quick response. "We will respond as soon as possible after reading the letter and discussing it with the party chief and other leaders," he said.

The five AL Presidium members nominated for the 10-member committee are Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil MP, Suranjit Sengupta MP, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP and Kazi Zafrullah MP.

The AL in its letter said it agrees with Bhuiyan that the content of the dialogue should be limited to

the opposition's reform proposals for a free and neutral parliamentary election. And it is for that reason that "we have urged to form the committee with members from the AL and the BNP on behalf of the 14-party and four-party respectively so that fundamentalist forces... which have created profound crisis for the democracy and existence of the state cannot create any complexity in the discussion," the AL said.

"We are committed to the 14-party for the content and decision of the discussion. Similarly you should not have any problem to take responsibility of the discussion on behalf of the four-party," the letter signed by AL Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader reads. "We hope that you will not include any name in the committee that may hamper the dialogue," it adds.

The AL urged Bhuiyan to put up

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Kansat cheers peace deal, turns normal

SHAMIM ASHRAF and ANWAR ALI, Kansat

The inflamed Kansat yesterday started on its way back to normalcy with the demonstrators withdrawing their strike as the government bowed to all their demands except one, resignation of the local BNP lawmaker.

The villagers' forum, Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Parishad (PBUSP), signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) yesterday afternoon with a high-powered government negotiation committee at Rajshahi Circuit House.

State Minister for Tourism and Civil Aviation Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, convener of the five-member ministerial level committee, and Sangram Parishad Convener Golam Rabbani signed the agreement, bringing an end to the three-and-a-half-month strife that claimed no less than 17 lives.

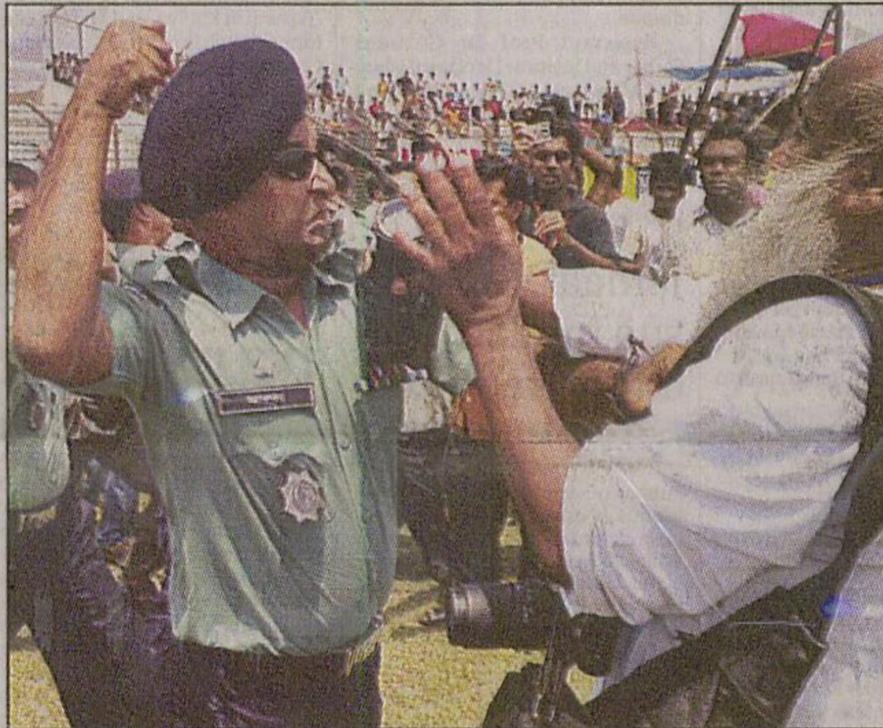
Rabbani led a 27-member

PBUSP team to negotiate their demands that had resulted in unprecedented mass-agitation against electricity problems and irregularities. Three PBUSP joint convenors -- Golam Aref Tissa, Jahir Choudhury and Joynal Abedin, two lawyers of Rabbani and 22 other PBUSP leaders were the rest of the team members.

While the other members of the government committee were Rajshahi City Mayor and Minister in Charge of Chapainawabganj District Mizanur Rahman Minu, Housing and Public Works State Minister Alamgir Kabir, Food and Disaster Management Deputy Minister Asadul Habib Dulu, and Chapainawabganj-2 Lawmaker Syed Manzur Hossain.

Besides, the Rajshahi divisional commissioner, deputy inspector general of police of Rajshahi range, and Chapainawabganj deputy commissioner and police super

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Sexagenarian photojournalist Jahirul Haque, left, tries to defend himself from the punch of CMP Deputy Commissioner (Port) Ali Akbar at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium during the first day of the second Test match between Bangladesh and Australia. Three policemen, right, pound the veteran journalist to the ground.

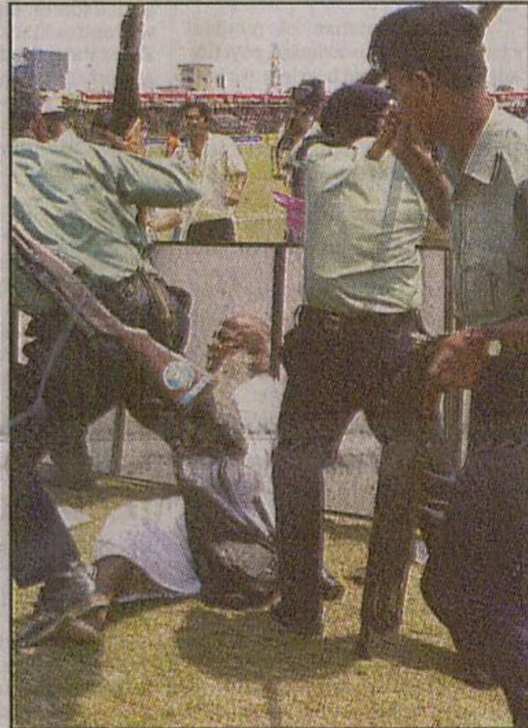


PHOTO: STAR/AFIP

Clean candidate now a national demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Citizens' Committee 2006, a platform of civil society members, yesterday said nominating "clean" candidates for the next general election has now become a national demand.

"A cross-section of the people in the society now demands that candidates to be nominated by different political parties for the forthcoming election should be clean," Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, member secretary of the committee, said at a press briefing at the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) office in Dhaka.

The Citizens' Committee members are not going to participate in politics but want to strengthen it as

more acceptable and sound, he said, adding that the civil society wants to mount pressure from outside and ensure a transparent and fair political process free from corruption.

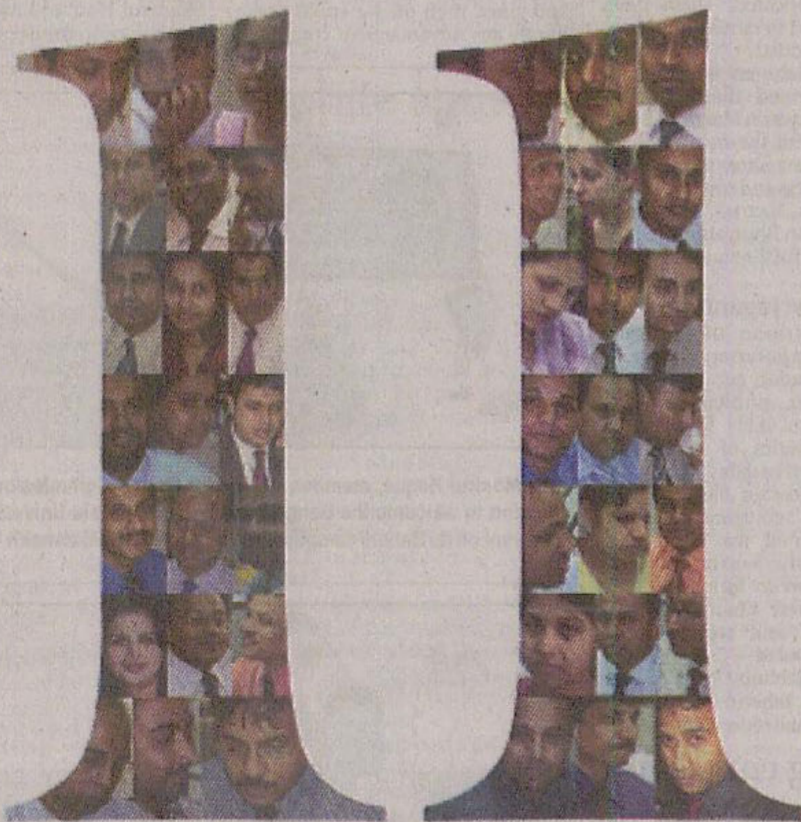
The committee was formed with Prof Rehman Sobhan as convener on March 20 following a dialogue organised by the CPD, The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo. It held its first meeting on Saturday to

discuss activities and a realistic vision statement.

Debapriya said the High Court (HC) order given in May 2005 directing the Election Commission (EC) to collect information about nominated candidates in the form of affidavit and disseminate it to

SEE PAGE 15 COL 4

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