

Ex-cabinet secy Halim joins BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

ASM Abdul Halim, who faced criticism for his involvement with political activities during his job as cabinet secretary, joined the ruling BNP yesterday formally just after a month of his retirement from the topmost position in the administration.

The former secretary presented a bouquet to Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her office and joined her party.

On December 31 last year, Halim spoke at a political meeting of BNP at Islampur in his home district of Jamalpur that evoked sharp reaction in the administration and political arena. Even local BNP lawmaker Sultan Mahmud Babu strongly protested his activities.

He also reportedly participated in other political activities in his hometown in the name of monitoring development work that created widespread controversy.

Local BNP leaders had alleged that Halim was doing all these to get BNP ticket for contesting the next general elections. Halim's

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Game over for Thai Rak Thai as Thaksin quits

REUTERS, Bangkok

Deposed Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra quit as head of the Thai Rak Thai (TRT) party yesterday, signalling the de facto collapse of a political machine that had dominated the country until last month's coup.

"It's game over," said Bangkok-based political analyst Piroon Chatwanichkul. "Who would want to take over a shop whose political credibility has gone bankrupt?"

In a hand-written letter to party colleagues from London, where he has been in exile since the September 19 putsch, telecoms billionaire Thaksin said he was resigning to "preserve the future of everyone who loves the party."

"I would like to thank everyone for their dedication to the party and their love and care for my family and I," he wrote. "And last of all, I would like to apologize to the people and party members who did not want me to quit."

His departure triggers the automatic dissolution of the 119-strong

executive of Thai Rak Thai ("Thais Love Thais"), although it does not mean its end as a political entity.

However, with members quitting in droves ahead of army-led anti-corruption probes into Thaksin and his cabinet, there appears to be no way back for a party whose popularity was based largely on its leader's star appeal and enormous wealth.

"TRT sinking like Titanic," the Nation newspaper said in a front-page headline after more than 70 of its members of parliament jumped ship on Monday.

Although none of them gave reasons for their resignation, the paper suggested they were hoping to avoid a five-year ban on politics likely to be imposed on members of any party that was dissolved for breaking electoral law.

Sweeping to power in 2001 on a platform of cheap public health care and rural loans, TRT reached its zenith four years later when it won three-quarters of the 500 seats in parliament.

Critics said that, immune to any form of censure, the party took

Thailand's traditional money politics to new levels by twisting government policy to the benefit of Thaksin and his family and friends in big business.

A mish-mash of political philosophies, TRT emerged from the ruins of the 1997 Asian financial crisis as a vehicle for popular anger against international markets and institutions such as the International Monetary Fund.

However, as the economy bounced back, it evolved into a pro-business, pro-privatisation and pro-foreign investment party that pushed for free-trade deals with Japan and the United States despite vocal opposition from social groups and unions.

January's tax-free sale by Thaksin's family of Shin Corp, the telecoms conglomerate that made him Thailand's fourth richest man, proved to be the last straw, triggering

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



Some rhesus monkeys sitting on the rooftop of a house at Gendaria in the capital as a bleak future awaits them. Due to habitat loss and lack of food, the number of this species in the area has declined significantly over the years. Animal rights groups will hold awareness programmes to mark World Animal Day today.

PHOTO: STAR

Nobel Physics Prize goes to Big Bang backers

AFP, Stockholm

US scientists John C. Mather and George F. Smoot won the 2006 Nobel Physics Prize for their work on the Big Bang theory on the origin of the universe, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences said yesterday.

The pair were honoured for "their discovery of the blackbody form and anisotropy of the cosmic microwave background radiation," the jury said.

Under the Big Bang theory, the cosmos was formed from a cataclysmic explosion that happened about 13.7 billion years ago.

The timescale and geometry are measurable by shockwaves called cosmic microwave background (CMB) that continues to wash over us.

Mather, 60, is a senior astrophysicist at Nasa's Goddard Space

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

8 US soldiers killed in Iraq violence

AFP, Baghdad

At least 17 US soldiers have been killed around Iraq since Saturday, including eight in a single day in Baghdad, the US military announced, saying the toll had brought "a tragic day."

The toll represents a dramatic spike for US casualties in Iraq which generally average no more than a couple of wounded a day, especially for the Baghdad-based forces.

"I don't have any comparative figures," said Lieutenant Colonel Barry Johnson, who declined to say whether the toll was an increase. "We have tragic days and this was a tragic day."

Monday saw four soldiers killed when their vehicle was obliterated by a roadside bomb in northwest Baghdad, as well as four soldiers killed by small arms fire in various other spots throughout the city.

Since August, there have been many more US soldiers operating across Baghdad as part of the "phase two" of the Iraqi government's four-month-old Operation Together Forward to restore stability to the war-torn capital.

US soldiers, together with Iraqi security forces, are flooding some of the city's most troubled neighbourhoods and engaging in house-to-house searches for unlicensed weapons and insurgents.

Seven of the other US casualties since Saturday have been in the western Al-Anbar province, the centre of a fierce anti-US insurgency that generally claims the lion's share of fatalities.

Since the summer, there has been an increase in US deaths there as well, though US military sources in the province say this is because

SEE PAGE 15 COL 8

Morshed shocked at 'proposal' for talks at envoy's residence

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday deplored the proposal for a government-opposition dialogue on a "highly sensitive political issue" at an ambassador's residence.

"This is very unfortunate... I am sad that how any political party could think of going to another country's embassy and use them as arbitrator," he told reporters at the foreign ministry, following dramatic developments surrounding the proposed dialogue on electoral reforms.

He made the remarks when asked to comment on the US ambassador's reported invitation to Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and Abdul Jalil to tea, and a talk for that matter, at her residence.

"I don't think the American

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Opposition shied away from dialogue

Says PM

UNB, Monohordi, Narsingdi

Prime Minister and BNP chief Khaleda Zia yesterday said her party wants to sit for discussion on reforms but the opposition does not want it.

"They shied away from discussion," she said addressing a public meeting at Monohordi Degree College ground in Narsingdi.

Khaleda urged the main opposition to return to the path of election and democracy from the path of "indiscipline and conspiracy" if they want to retain their seats in parliament.

She again asserted that the general election will be held in 2007 according to the constitution and people will participate in the polls. "None has the right to snatch

people's democratic and voting rights," she told the rally.

Criticising the opposition's threat to wage movement during the next caretaker government if their demand for reforms was not met, Khaleda said the administration would take action against such "indiscipline and anarchy."

"There is no scope, and none will be allowed to create anarchy," she said. She alleged that the opposition, having failed to launch movement against an elected government and not getting public support, now wants to wage movement against a constitutional government in the interim period.

Khaleda said the four-party government would hand over power according to the constitution, after

Eid-ul-Fitr, to a caretaker government.

The prime minister told the gathering that now two streams of politics are prevailing in the country - one is for development, production and public welfare, and another for anarchy and destruction.

She said people will remain in favour of development, peace, production and public welfare.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Science and ICT Minister Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury and local MP Sarder Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, among others, addressed the meeting.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated the newly constructed

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Russia warns US on placing missile defence system in Poland

AFP, Moscow

Russia warned the United States yesterday against basing elements of a planned missile defence system in Poland, saying this would undermine strategic stability and require a "corresponding" response from Moscow, Interfax news agency said.

"This could have a negative impact on strategic stability, regional security and the relations between states," Interfax quoted ministry spokesman Mikhail Kamynin as saying in an interview.

"Such a new situation objectively requires corresponding measures from us," Kamynin said.

He did not specify what those measures would be. Russia, however, announced earlier this year that it was supplying Belarus - an ex-Soviet republic wedged

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

UN rights expert presses govts over 'war on terror'

AFP, Geneva

A United Nations human rights expert yesterday pressed a host of governments, including the United States, to extend formal invitations to allow him to assess their record in the "war on terror."

Martin Scheinin, the UN watchdog on human rights and counter terrorist measures, said he was still waiting for an official response from Washington to his request to visit the United States.

Algeria, Egypt, Malaysia, the Philippines, South Africa and Tunisia were also still to reply to similar requests, he said.

Scheinin said he had held talks with officials from several of the countries last week.

"Five of seven of these states are members of the Human Rights Council," the 47-nation UN panel which is currently in session in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6



PHOTO: STAR

Visiting UK Chief Treasury Secretary Stephen Timms MP, right, talks to journalists at a press conference at the residence of British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury, left, in the capital yesterday.

Millions at risk due to misspent aid in Africa

AFP, London

A leading aid organisation warned yesterday that millions of Africans are at risk of starving due to misspent emergency assistance by Western governments.

CARE International UK called for a "drastic overhaul" of the international community's funding of emergencies, which it says saves lives but does little more, sometimes leaving people worse off than they were before.

"It is a disgrace that money is still given too late and for such short periods, then spent on the wrong things to truly fight emergencies," said Geoffrey Dennis, chief executive of CARE International UK.

"There is no excuse, when by spending money more intelligently, we can bring an end to all but the most unpredictable food crises," he added.

A CARE report said that more

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7

Fatah faction threatens to kill Hamas leaders

REUTERS, Gaza

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, an armed wing of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah faction, threatened for the first time yesterday to kill Hamas leaders, including exiled political chief Khaled Meshaal.

The threat marked an escalation in the power struggle between Fatah and the ruling Hamas movement after two days of internal fighting in the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank in which 12 Palestinians were killed and more than 100 wounded.

In a statement sent to Reuters, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades said it

held Meshaal, Palestinian Interior Minister Saeed Seyam and senior Interior Ministry official Youssef al-Zahar responsible for the deaths.

"We in al-Aqsa announce, with all might and frankness, the ruling of the people in the homeland and in the diaspora, to execute the head of the sedition, Khaled Meshaal, Saeed Seyam and Youssef al-Zahar, and we will execute this ruling so those filthy people can be made an example," the statement said.

Meshaal is based in Damascus, while Seyam and al-Zahar are in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas legislator Mushir al-Masri

said al-Aqsa was "pouring oil on the fire" between the rival groups.

He said Hamas would "not show mercy" if any of its leaders were targeted by what he called "the leaders of the internal coup."

A spokesman for the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in Gaza declined to say whether the statement represented the views of the entire group or certain factions.

The spokesman described the statement as a "natural response" after Seyam ordered his forces to take to the streets of Gaza on Sunday to confront striking policemen demanding overdue salaries.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 7



Table with 4 columns: Ramadan, Oct, Sehri, Iftar. Rows for dates 10, 11, 12.

Table with 3 columns: Azan, Jamaat. Rows for Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib, Esha.

Source: Islamic Foundation