

**Khaleda accuses AL of grabbing Hindu property**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Urging the Hindu community to vote for BNP-led four-party alliance in the coming election, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday said the Hindus should come out of the fold of Awami League (AL).

Criticising AL for 'wrong doings', she said, "Awami League believes the Hindus belong to it and consider them as its vote bank."

The BNP chairperson also said everyone wants to live in harmony but 'a certain political party' wants to make the country dysfunctional by keeping the people illiterate just for capturing power easily.

"Awami League thinks that the Hindus will vote for its candidates without taking into consideration whether they did any good for the Hindu community," she said accusing AL members of encroaching on lands and other properties of the Hindus.

She was addressing a ceremony on Banani Model School premises on the occasion of a rather large number of people of Munshiganj-1 constituency led by Ranajit Chakrabarty joining her party. BNP leaders claimed that about 6000 people joined their party.

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**FENI MARGINAL FIELD**

**Gas sale deal with Niko approved after 2 years**

SHARIER KHAN

After two years of delay and disagreements, the government yesterday approved the gas sales purchase agreement (GPSA) with Canadian company Niko Resources for purchase of gas from the Feni marginal field, Niko officials said.

But as promised by former energy ministry adviser Mahmudur Rahman, the GPSA is not addressing any issue related to compensation for the Tengratia gas field blowouts.

"The compensation issue has apparently become so quiet that it seems Bangladesh did not lose anything in the two rounds of blowouts," regretted a Petrobangla official. Two rounds of official investigations blamed Niko's poor operation and negligence for the blowouts in 2005.

The GPSA, initiated by Petrobangla and Niko back in July

and cleared by the law ministry recently, fixes Feni gas price at \$1.75 per thousand cubic feet (mcf).

As per this price, Petrobangla till this month owes Niko and its local partner Bapex gas price of around \$22 million.

Previously, Petrobangla was forced to make an illegal payment of \$4 million to Niko's account though all payments should be made to a joint account held by Niko and Bapex.

The then state minister for energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain had forced Petrobangla to take Feni gas from November 2004 without fixing any price. The price issue remained unresolved as Niko was seeking a high tariff of \$2.35 per mcf, and Petrobangla did not see any justification to pay more than \$1.75. The stalemate ended when Niko finally accepted the Petrobangla price in April this year. Niko officials said with the

finalisation of the GPSA, it will now prepare new billing for the gas sales.

Meanwhile Bapex sources said Niko and Bapex have not created a joint bank account. "Before that can be done, the GPSA has to be made effective because Bapex is owned by the government and we have been told by Bangladesh Bank that there has to be a gas sales agreement first to allow us to open a joint bank account," noted one source.

Without this joint account, Niko will not be able to receive arrears from Petrobangla, said a Petrobangla official.

Niko on the other hand have kept on sending monthly gas sales bill to Petrobangla for record.

The Feni field was used in the past and then abandoned till Niko undertook a re-drilling programme there under an unsolicited joint venture agreement (JVA) with

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PHOTO: STAR

Guardians struggle to enter the premises of Motijheel Ideal School in the capital to receive their kids after the admission test yesterday.

**Bar parties with less than 2.5pc votes from next polls: Ex-CEC**

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties bagging less than 2.5 percent of total cast votes in the parliamentary elections should be barred from contesting the next polls, former chief election commissioner (CEC) Justice Abdur Rauf said yesterday.

He urged President Iajuddin Ahmed to incorporate the condition through a new clause into the Representation of the People Order (RPO) 1972 to maintain discipline during elections.

The former CEC made the suggestions while addressing a roundtable on 'Democracy Protection and Acceptable

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PHOTO: STAR

Foreign diplomats and representatives of donor agencies led by British High Commissioner Anwar Choudhury meet BNP leaders at the party's election office at Banani yesterday to discuss matters relating to election.

**AUG 17 BLAST 9 accused in Barisal case acquitted**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Barisal Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal yesterday acquitted all of the nine accused in one of the 12 cases lodged in connection with series bomb blasts at 18 places of Barisal city on August 17, 2005.

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**Cop's murder linked with his investigations**

Suspect police

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police are yet to arrest the criminals involved with Tuesday night's murder of Sub-Inspector (SI) Mizanur Rahman of Gulshan Police Station and believe that the

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**Outlaw leader killed in Rab 'shootout'**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A regional leader of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Lal Pataka faction was killed in a 'shootout' with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) at Debipur village under Gangni upazila in Meherpur yesterday.

The dead was identified as

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**Bush may increase Iraq troops**

*New US defence secy jets in Baghdad; 15 killed in suicide attacks*

REUTERS, Baghdad

Robert Gates made his first visit to Baghdad as US defence secretary yesterday to chart a fresh strategy in a war President George W. Bush has now said America is not winning.

He made the surprise visit after US President George W Bush said yesterday that he plans to boost the size of the army and Marine Corps in Iraq.

Gates and General Peter Pace, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were scheduled to meet American commanders and Iraqi political

leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

"The whole purpose is to go out, listen to the commanders, talk to the Iraqis and see what I can learn," Gates, sworn into office two days ago, told reporters on the way to Baghdad.

The former CIA director's visit follows a Pentagon report that said violence in Iraq was at an all-time high. At least 15 people were killed in yesterday's violence.

A suicide attacker ploughed a car bomb into a police checkpoint protecting Baghdad University yesterday, killing at least 11 people

and wounding 30 more, medical officials said.

Shortly afterwards another car bomb killed four people and wounded seven when it exploded outside a government passport office in the Kasr neighbourhood in the north of the city, according to a security official.

Medics at the war-torn Iraqi capital's Yarmuk and Ibn Nafis hospitals said most of the casualties in the campus attack were students, while a security official said three national police officers were killed and seven wounded.

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**Arrestee admits to dumping jeweller's body**

COURT CORRESPONDENT

An arrestee in the jewellery trader Turya Ghosh Roni murder case yesterday confessed to a magistrate that he, along with four others, took part in the dumping of the trader's dismembered body at Rampura in the city.

Metropolitan Magistrate Nani Gopal Biswas recorded the statement of the arrestee, Abu Sayeed of Barisal, after investigation officer (IO) Inspector Nazrul Islam from Detective Branch (DB) produced Sayeed before him at 11:30am.

The others that took part in the dumping were Al Mamun alias Mamun, Farhad Alam alias Hira,

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**ELECTORAL ROLL CORRECTION 5,000 more Rohingyas drafted in voter list**

MUAZZEM HOSSAIN SHAKIL, Cox's Bazar

Around five thousand more Rohingya refugees have been included in the 'corrected' voter list in six upazilas of the district while thousands of eligible voters have not been enrolled or excluded from the list for their allegiance to certain political parties, locals and sources in the parties alleged.

District election officials admitted to The Daily Star that over 1 lakh Rohingyas are already on the voter list and a large number of others might have been enrolled while correcting the updated list that ended on Monday.

District Election Officer Toyfique Elyahi Chowdhury said they are verifying correction of the voter roll.

The Relief and Refugee Repatriation Commission Office also did not rule out the possibility of many Rohingyas being on the 'corrected' voter list.

"At least 3,00,000 Rohingyas are living illegally in different areas of Cox's Bazar district. I guess many of them have been put on the list," a commission official said.

But in CCT the operation of the sophisticated cranes has been handed over to a private company while most of the back up services remained at the hand of Chittagong Port Authority (CPA).

As a result, the gantry cranes operate only 4-5 hours a day and remain idle rest of the time as the port operators do not supply sufficient number of trailers and straddle carriers as back up services, said the sources.

Besides, the port operators are making delay to carry export containers and it forces the ships to stay longer at the yard.

"If the four gantry cranes operate full time, the CCT alone can handle all the container ships anchored at the Chittagong Port, said a high official of the CPA requesting anonymity.

Due to inefficiency of the CCT, the container ships are also being handled at general yards and New Mooring container terminals of the port, he said.

The private operators have been

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**SEDITION CASES**

**Accused lawyers furnish bail bonds**

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Eminent lawyers Barrister M Amir-Ul Islam and Barrister Rokonuddin Mahmud and six others accused in two sedition cases furnished bail bonds to the Additional District Magistrate's (ADM) Court, Dhaka, yesterday.

The others are Barrister Tania Amir, former Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) vice-president Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, former SCBA secretary Advocate Enayetur Rahim, Advocate Mohammad Khasruzzaman, Advocate Subrata Saha and Advocate Sheikh Awasafur Rahman.

The lawyers along with Advocate Abul Baset Majumder, SCBA Secretary Advocate Amin Uddin and a number of lawyers appeared before the court at 3:30pm and furnished the bail bonds.

ADM Syed Lokman Hossain passed the order upon a bond of Tk 50,000 each with two guarantors, of which Advocate AHM Imrul

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PHOTO: STAR

Dust from the dug up road at Paribagh in the capital obscures sight even in daylight, much to the nuisance for vehicles and passers-by. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

**BDR, BSF trade gunshots on Satkhira border**

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) traded gunfire on Hijaldi border in Kalaroa upazila early yesterday morning.

The Indian border guards of Gunarajpur camp under Swarupnagar Police Station of North 24 Parganas district fired four bullets targeting the BDR Hijaldi camp, prompting the BDR personnel to retaliate by firing 30 bullets.

After the incident, the BSF

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Prayer Timing		
December 21		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-25	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-24	5-27
Esha	7-00	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation