

City markets hostage in hands of coterie

By Shahiduzzaman Khan

A huge gap between the prices of essential commodities in the wholesale and the retail markets persists due to manipulation by a section of dishonest traders.

A random survey of both the markets suggests retailers are 'obliged' to sell commodities at prices fixed by the group who control both the markets. If any retailer is found to sell commodities at a lower price, he may face the danger of being harassed by the coterie of traders who manipulate the market. It is difficult to go beyond 'the unwritten laws', says a retail trader.

Five kgs of brinjal sells at Tk 8 in the wholesale market, but in the retail market, one kg of brinjal sells at Tk 6 to Tk 8.

Five kgs of tomato sells at Tk 15 in the wholesale market but a kg of tomato is priced at Tk 8 in the retail market. Similarly, five kgs of green chilli sells at Tk 50 in the wholesale market but the retailers sell it at Tk 28 per kg.

Retailers buy five kg of onions at Tk 50 while they charge Tk 14 a kg. Five kgs of potato is priced at Tk 10 to 12 in the whole sale market but the retailers sell potato at Tk 4 per kg. Five kgs of carrot sell

at Tk 8 in the wholesale market, but one kg of carrot is charged at Tk 6 by the retailers.

The prices of different varieties of pulses differ in the same way in both the markets. A kg of masur variety sells at Tk 25 in the retail markets, it sells at Tk 28 to 30 per kg.

Prices also differ from market to market in the city.

Prices of beef and chicken have shown a downward trend. Prices of these two items soared at the start of Ramadan, but now beef is selling at Tk 50 per kg compared to Tk 60 two weeks before. A medium size chicken now sells at Tk 60 in the retail markets in place of Tk 75 to Tk 80 at the start of Ramadan.

Meanwhile prices of fish and lemon marked a phenomenal rise in both the markets after the start of Ramadan. Traders say there was no apparent reason for the spiral in price of lemon. The supply, though scanty, is being steadily maintained from the lemon-growing areas of the country. Lemon sells at Tk 16 to Tk 20 per four in the retail markets against its pre-Ramadan price of Tk 6 to Tk 8 per four. Traders say, as this is an essential item its demand has risen manifold and so did the price, surpassed all previous records. During the corresponding period last year the item was sold at Tk 8 per four.

As the rivers, ponds and canals have dried up, there is an acute scarcity of fish of all varieties. Hilsha, Ruhi, Kalta, Magur, Boal and other varieties are in short supply in the markets and the prices are exorbitantly high. A medium size Hilsha sells at Tk 50 to Tk 60 compared to Tk 40 to Tk 45 before the Ramadan. A medium size Ruhi is priced at Tk 200 to Tk 250. Price of other small varieties are also high.

After a slight increase at the start of the month of Ramadan, the prices of rice remained steady in the retail markets. Finer Aman varieties sell at Tk 16 to Tk 17 per kg while other Aman varieties sell at Tk 13 to Tk 14 a kg. Coarse varieties are being sold at Tk 12 to Tk 13 per kg.

Sugar price has shown a downward trend. It now sells at Tk 28 to Tk 29 per kg compared to Tk 30 to 32 during the start of Ramadan. Traders say smuggled sugar had flooded the local market and as such, the price came down. The local sugar mills are in real dilemma with huge stocks of unsold sugar. The price of molasses has risen to Tk 24 per kg compared to Tk 18 to Tk 20 a few days back.

Prices of baby food and powdered milk varieties remain static. Most of the tinned milk brands sell between Tk

Suranjit

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to attend the first sitting on April 5 under his chairmanship, he would adjourn the house for an indefinite period. After this statement, Sengupta said, members of parliament could move a resolution under article 74(C) of the constitution for his removal from the office of the Speaker.

He said the Speaker has abused his power by his statement and requested the Acting President to persuade the Speaker to choose an alternative for the sake of democracy as well as constitutional continuity.

Sengupta, a well-known parliamentarian, said the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, if they so wish, may remain absent in many ways.

In this regard, he referred to sub-article (2), (3) and (4) of article 74 of the Constitution and article 12 (2) of the Rules of Procedure wherein, he said, it has been clearly stated how the House would be conducted in their absence.

Article 12 (2) of the Rules of Procedure says: If at any time, at a sitting of parliament neither the Speaker nor the Deputy Speaker nor any person on the panel of Chairmen is present, the Secretary shall inform the house of that fact, and the House shall, by a motion, elect one of the members present to preside.

Sengupta hoped that the Speaker would voluntarily remain absent, otherwise the members of parliament would be compelled to take their own course.

"In view of the present political reality, he (Speaker) should not come to attend the House and pollute its atmosphere and make his position further ridiculous."



Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia Friday presented a rickshaw to Harunur Rashid, husband of Hasina who was killed in the recent anti-autocracy movement, at the Banani office of BNP. —PID photo

Khaleda: Reforms

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tural sectors in consistent with its political compulsion.

The Prime Minister also assured that stern action would be initiated to bringing about discipline in the banking and industrial sectors and eliminate wastage and inefficiency from the government sectors and corporations.

The Prime Minister pointed out that it had been found that budgetary and fiscal discipline and staggering financial mismanagement and corruption were motivated actions of the past regime. This action had left unhappy and accumulated problems which the new government is confronting, she said.

Begum Zia said the new government would need some time and cooperation from donor agencies like World Bank, IMF and Asian Development Bank to resolve this accumulated problem left over by the discredited Ershad regime.

Begum Zia said, "since we are a people's government, we will be able to accept the reform programmes as long as those are not imposing too much burden and inconvenience to the poor people."

The visiting World Bank delegation also met Finance and Planning Minister Saifur Rahman.

They discussed and exchanged views on different aspects of bilateral issues and matters of mutual interests particularly the financial and

industrial sectors credit programmes in Bangladesh.

He said industries would be brought nearer to the people rather people to the industries. In this regard he stressed the expansion of industrial investment all over the country according to the local potentials to bring the national economy as production oriented.

He also emphasised the need for increasing the internal resource mobilisation aimed at financing the production-oriented development programmes in the country.

The Finance and Planning Minister said the government would implement the primary and secondary education programme on priority basis making the programme universal for overall socio-economic development.

The meeting noted that the World Bank would assure all out support and assistance in implementing the primary and secondary education programmes and other development efforts in Bangladesh.

The construction of Jamuna Multi-Purpose Bridge also came up in the discussion. The World Bank official also discussed different aspects of trade and industrial policies, health and family planning programmes, IDA credit programmes and technical assistance in Bangladesh.

The mission chief of World Bank in Bangladesh, Willoughby and senior officials of World Bank, were present on the occasion.

Mother, child killed, 12 hurt in accidents

A mother and her one year old child were crushed under the wheels of a minibus on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Kauran Bazar last evening, reports UNB.

Rehana (22) was crossing the road near WASA building taking her one year old child in the lap when the speeding minibus knocked them down at around 7.30 pm, witnesses and police said.

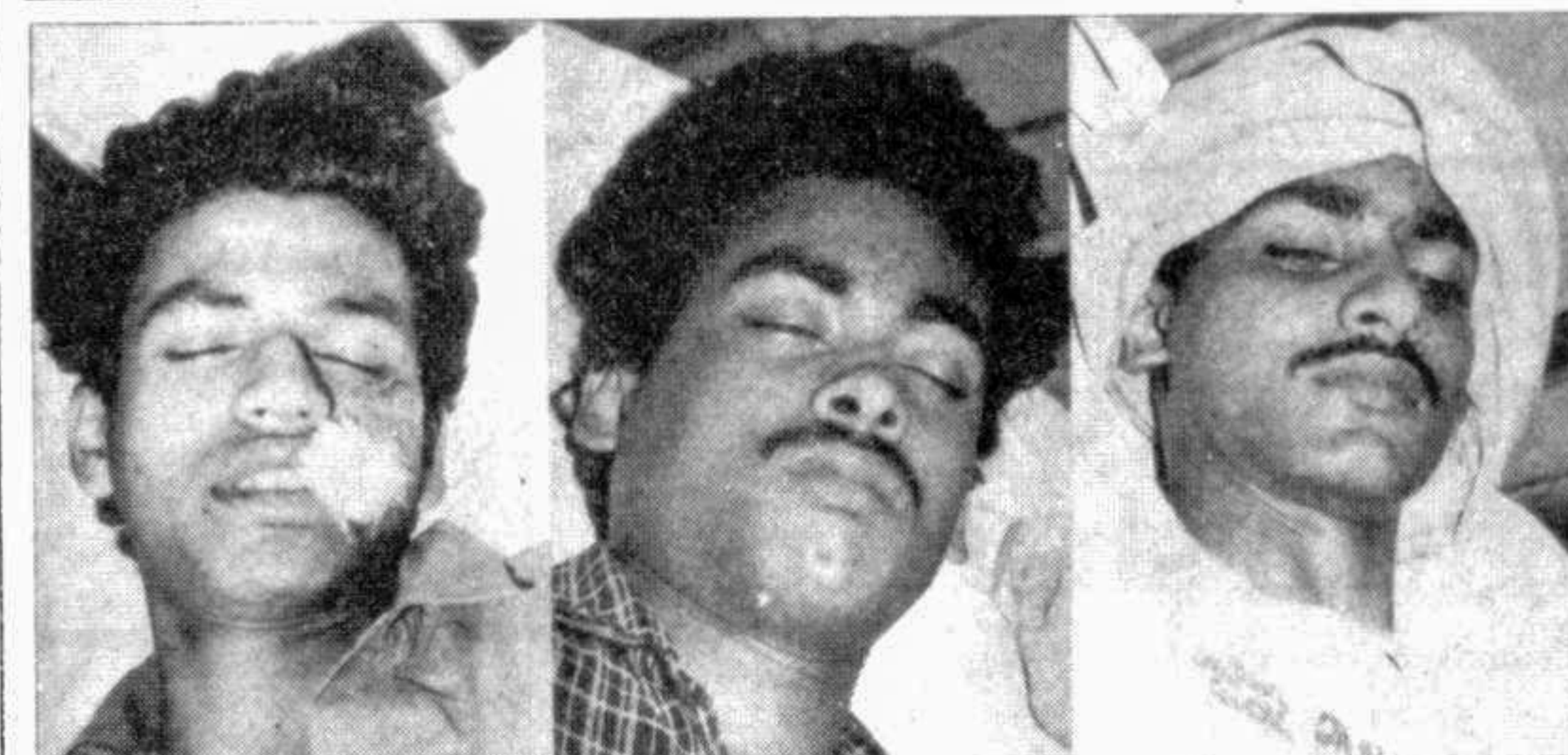
The agitated pedestrians and local people jumped into the spot and damaged a number of passing vehicles forcing the busy important road to close for traffic from Sonargoon crossing to Mohakhali rail crossing for more than two hours.

The bodies were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

In another incident, at least 12 people, including two women, were seriously injured when two minibuses collided near Asad Gate Friday morning, Fire Service sources said, reports UNB.

The injured passengers were rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

They were identified as Nanita Mondal (50), Ranubala (27), Abdul Rashid (28), Nurul Islam (26), Abdul Aziz (30), Kaidash Mondal (28), Krishna Chandra (30), Mizanur Rahman (35), Subhash Chandra (25), Dhamani Ali (35), Anil (27) and Shadhan Chandra.



Three Dhaka Medical College Students injured in Fridays clash at hospital. —Star photo

Iraqi troops

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Hammoudi, head of the Arab Desk at the Iraqi Foreign Ministry, he spoke to reporters at Cairo airport when he arrived to represent Baghdad at an Arab League meeting on Saturday.

Earlier report adds: The PUK spokesman said rebels had captured 150 pro-Iraqi Iranian dissidents, accused by Kurds of fighting as mercenaries for Baghdad, at Altin Kopr, a town about 25 miles (40 km) northwest of Kirkuk on the road to the city of Irbil.

About 150 of the mercenaries of Mujahideen Khalq who took part in the assault on the rebels were captured, he said.

Before Saddam invaded Kuwait last August Kirkuk produced one-third of Iraq's oil. It also controls a key pipeline. Iraq's Defence Ministry newspaper Al-Qadisiyah said on Friday that Kurdish rebels in the north were retreating in the face of a successful government force against them.

The government daily Al-Jumhuriyah said Iraq had foiled "the major parts of the conspiracy in central and southern Iraq", and would soon crush the revolt in the north.

The PUK spokesman also reported on Friday the capture of Shaykhan, a town about 60 km (40 miles) northeast of Mosul, Iraq's third biggest city. He said rebels were consolidating their grip on routes to Mosul, Saddam's last stronghold in northern Iraq. "Mosul is not less important than Kirkuk. Its capture would constitute a turning point in

the fight against Saddam," he added.

He accused Iraqi authorities of expelling more than 100,000 Kurdish women, children, and old people from the Kirkuk area and said thousands of men of fighting age had been seized.

Shi'ite opposition sources in Damascus said rebels had retaken Karbala and were fighting on in Basra and Najaf.

Both Karbala and Najaf are holy cities for Shi'ites.

The Shi'ite sources said Baghdad was under a State of Siege with daily demonstrations and clashes between rebels and Saddam's security forces and Republican Guards deployed in the city after what the sources said were reports of a coup plot.

The PUK spokesman appealed for immediate international humanitarian aid, especially food, "or thousands of Kurds would die of starvation."

He said Iraqi forces on Friday attacked Shamshamal town, some 60 km (40 miles) east of Kirkuk, with napalm and phosphorus bombs, killing and wounding many civilians.

Hindu-Muslim clash in India

NEW DELHI, Mar 29: Clashes between Hindus and Muslims continued for the sixth straight day today killing at least 10 people in eastern Indian town of Soro in Orissa state, despite attempts by police reinforcements to quell the violence, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, states AFP.

Schwarzkopf apologises to Bush

RIYADH, Mar 29: Gen H Norman Schwarzkopf, commander of US forces in the Gulf War, said Friday that he apologised to US President George Bush and that he supported the decision to end the war 100 per cent, reports AP.

Schwarzkopf seemed eager to repair any differences with Bush as quickly as possible. He made the remarks in an impromptu session after visiting the Joint Information Bureau of the US Central Command.

"I apologise to the President. I said I am extremely sorry that a poor choice of words on my part in any way would result in dishonour cast upon you," Schwarzkopf said a day after he spoke on the phone with Bush.

"He's my Commander-in-Chief and he said, I'm telling you, just forget it. It's not important."

The dustup began after comments that Schwarzkopf made in a US television Wednesday night in which he appeared to suggest that he had disagreed with Bush's decision to call a cease-fire to the war on February 27.

"Frankly, my recommendation had been, you know, continue the march. I mean we had them in a rout," Schwarzkopf said in the interview, taped March 20.

Bush, upon learning Wednesday of the General's comments, declared, "There was total agreement on when this war should end," and Defence Secretary Richard Cheney issued a statement saying Schwarzkopf "raised no objection to terminating hostilities."

But Friday, Schwarzkopf said: "If I could do the whole thing all over again, I know I would change the word 'recommend' to say 'I initially planned.' Because that's what it was."

On Thursday, Bush called Schwarzkopf and told him "this is much ado about nothing," according to deputy presidential press secretary Roman Popaduk.

The spokesman said Bush assured the General that "they're on the same wavelength and that this is one of those little irritants that ... shouldn't, you know, be come any big thing."

Popaduk had refused to say what Schwarzkopf told Bush.

Gram sarkar

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chief and eight members including two women.

Each 'palli parishad' was to be elected for a three-year term. However, the law also empowered the government to constitute 'palli parishads' with persons nominated by it.

The government of Ershad, however, could not constitute any 'palli parishad' in the one and a half years that followed the passage of the act.

'Gram sarkar', which also comprised one 'gram pradhan' and over ten other members, was formed by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government in 1980 under an executive order in 85 thousand villages.

The 'gram sarkar' was entrusted with different village-level developmental activities with the main emphasis on organising activities on the basis of 'voluntary labour'. Government officials at the erstwhile thanas had constituted the 'gram sarkars' in respective areas.

The 'palli parishad' act listed ten functions for each palli parishad. Which included increasing the agricultural and foodgrains production, population control and family planning, eradication of illiteracy and expansion of mass education, settlement of disputes to maintain peace and discipline, and lending cooperation to law enforcing agencies, development and welfare activities for villagers, and duties assigned by the government.

Reintroduction of 'gram sarkar' is a political commitment of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party.

China happy over Khaleda's assumption of premiership

Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen has said that China is happy that a new cabinet headed by Begum Khaleda Zia has been formed in Bangladesh and that Bangladesh's new Parliament is going to meet soon, reports BSS.

Mr Qian was addressing a dinner hosted by Bangladesh Ambassador to China Mr Farooq Sobhan in observance of the 20th anniversary of Independence and National Day in Beijing, according to a message received in Dhaka.

The Midnight File

Andreotti resigns

ROME, Mar 29: The grand old man of Italian politics Giulio Andreotti resigned today as head of Italy's 49th post-war government, plunging Italy into a crisis which could lead to early national elections. The crisis is likely to suspend approval of urgently-needed measures to rein in runaway public spending and delay cuts in the country's key interest rate, reports Reuter.

Hussein meets Mitterrand

PARIS, Mar 29: King Hussein of Jordan met today with President Francois Mitterrand for talks expected to focus on the post-Gulf war situation, notably the Palestinian question. The King, on his first visit abroad since the end of the war late last month, went to the Elysee presidential palace at midday today for the meeting, which was to include a working luncheon with Mitterrand, reports AFP.

Georgians to break with Moscow

TBILISI, Mar 29: The southern Soviet Republic of Georgia is expected to vote overwhelmingly on Sunday to break with Moscow, adding to president Mikhail Gorbachev's problems in holding together his fractious country. Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia predicted that his people would vote to restore the independence of their mountainous republic, crushed 70 years ago by the communists, reports Reuter.

15 killed in grenade blast

ARANYAPRATHET (Thailand), Mar 29: At least 15 Cambodian refugees were killed and more than 60 injured after two hand grenades were lobbed into a crowd of about 2,000 people at a Thai border camp. Most of the casualties were refugees attending a big dance party organised by camp authorities. The camp, about 65 km (40 miles) north of this border town, hosts mostly civilian followers of the non-communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) led by former Cambodian Prime Minister Son Sann, reports Reuter.

US servicemen face court martial

OLONGAPO (Philippines), Mar 29: Two American servicemen face court martial for allegedly trying to sabotage the US aircraft carrier ranger during the Gulf war, a US navy spokesman said today. Airman Apprentice Abdul Shaheed, 22, and Seaman Apprentice James Moss, 21, would be tried for mutiny and refusing to obey orders while the USS Ranger was deployed near the Gulf to fly sorties against Iraqi forces, reports Reuter.

Seven hacked to death in Africa

JOHANNESBURG, Mar 29: Seven Black men were found shot and hacked to death after factional fighting in south Africa's township battlegrounds. One corpse was found stabbed and hacked and a second had bullet wounds from an AK-47 assault rifle in Johannesburg's volatile Alexandra Shantytown, a police spokeswoman said, report Reuter.

To err is human

BEIJING, Mar 29: After an embarrassing mistake in which it published a message calling on Premier Li Peng to quit, China's official People's Daily has now blotted its copybook by declaring a revolutionary hero dead while he is still alive.

The Communist Party paper, in an article Tuesday praising old revolutionaries, said that Zhang Guojin before he died, lived for 22 years in the same ordinary red brick house facing the street.

The item clearly brought swift complaints.

On Wednesday, the daily prominently featured a boxed article on the still spritely Zhang Guojin, Deputy to the National People's Congress.

Former DU VC

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Prof Mannan, however, told UNB over telephone that he was forced by a group of youngmen to write the note.

Prof Mannan, now a member of the Public Service Commission, was asked to write and sign the statement after he was reportedly taken forcibly inside a cloth shop outside the New Market soon after he came out of his car at about 1 pm. He complied when the youngmen threatened to set ablaze his car.

Police later escorted the former VC to his residence.

Prof Mannan, who resigned from the post of VC in March, 1990, amid widespread trouble in the campus, said he was feeling insecure after the incident.

Eleven university students, mostly leaders of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), were expelled by the Mannan administration on Sept 19, 1987, for their alleged involvement in campus violence.

Comilla jail

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Nidarabad murder case of Brahmanbaria, was caught and sent to the condemned cell. He was escaped from the jail when the rebellious prisoners came out of their lockups and fought gunbattle with the guards on Wednesday. The jail authorities also transferred 14 prisoners from wards to cells.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) was ordered to withdraw from in and around the jail as the situation became normal. But the order did not come into effect till last night.

Jail authorities today handed over one more body of Wednesday's victims to his relatives. The authorities buried three other bodies.

A large number of people including women were seen waiting at the jail gate to inquire about the condition of their relatives in the jail.

Chittagong Divisional Commissioner M A Bari visited the jail this morning.

Lazy schoolboy snipes at academic qualifications

LONDON, Mar 29: British Prime Minister John Major has said he was a lazy schoolboy, but remains impressed by academic qualifications and says he learnt more in "the university of life," reports AFP.

"I was certainly pretty idle at school," the 48-year-old Major said in a television interview due to be broadcast on Monday. But I have never been over-impressed by academic qualifications. They are wholly useless, most of them."

The British Premier, son of a circus family, also says his arrival could have been "a mistake."

"My father was 65 or 66 when I was born and mother would have been in her mid-40s," so his arrival was at least "a surprise," he said.

In response to criticism that he does not have much personality and needs a more upbeat image, he said "people will have to take me as I am."

"I am not in the business of changing myself. I don't think it would be right."

Major, a former banker said being Prime Minister was not "actually harder work than other jobs he had had. But it makes 18 more difficult fixing in the things one likes doing, and spending time with the family."

His wife Nonie said last week that he was impatient for the arrival of the Easter holidays when he would have a chance for a rest.

Major also described his predecessor Margaret Thatcher, dubbed the "Iron Lady", and gently criticised for her uncaring image, as a "loveable character."

"There are innumerable acts of kindness that one could point to over the last few years," he added.

AL PP meet on April 3

By Staff Correspondent

A meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP) will be held on April 3 at 10 am at the Sangad Bhavan.

According to party sources, the meeting will finalise its strategy for the first session of the newly elected parliament, which begins on April 5. The deputy leader of ALPP will be elected in the meeting. AL chief Sheikh Hasina has already been elected leader of ALPP.

Meanwhile, about 30 AL MPs met at the Bangladesh Bhawan on Friday evening to discuss the preparations for April 3 meeting. In the meeting the AL MPs reiterated that the holding of election to 30 reserved seats in parliament will be unconstitutional since by-elections to 10 seats in parliament are yet to be held.

Editor : S. M. Ali