

SL trying to restore peace, democracy

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President was delivering a talk on "Sri Lanka Today" before a select audience at the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BISS) in the city. She gave her views about her country's past and present political and economic situation, the long standing Tamil issue and also about the SAARC.

In her opening remarks, President Chandrika said that before her government assumed office in August last year "Sri Lanka was seething with violence and terrorism and its economy was considerably crippled due to corruption and misrule of 17 years." Nearly 50,000 people lost

their lives in violence and killings and sudden disappearances of people became a regular feature in the past years, she added.

"For several years there was absolute terrorism in the country," Chandrika stated.

She said that two of the three former presidents of her country in the last 17 years were authoritarian and were responsible for the unstable situation in Sri Lanka including weakening of the democratic process. Without naming any leader, she said that the last President of Sri Lanka was more relaxing perhaps because of his inability to rule the country.

In response to a question

she pointed out that fortunately the armed forces did not dabble in politics although the strength of the military have been considerably beefed up for internal security consideration.

She also refuted that there was any emergence of "Sinhalese nationalism" and said that whatever incidents of terrorism occurred involving the Sinhalese community, it was mostly state sponsored and not a single member from the mass of people joined voluntarily.

Dwelling on the Tamil issue, Chandrika said that her government had taken several steps to end the long-standing insurgency.

Speaking on the economic front, she said, her government was providing subsidies in the food sector and was giving emphasis on creating job opportunities for the youths. The President pointed that growing unemployment in her country with a population of nearly 70 million had contributed to youth uprising and the problem had reached alarming proportions.

Chairman of the Board of Investment Mokammel Haq, Prof. Ataur Rahman of Dhaka University, former ambassador Waliur Rahman and Editor of the Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, among others, participated in the discussion after the Sri Lankan President gave the floor to the audience.

Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman and Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar were present.

Director General of the BISS Maj Gen Golam Qadir delivered the welcome address while AKM Morshed, Chairman of the Institute, gave the vote of thanks.

Formal talks held

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for Foreign Affairs Lakshman Kadirgamar, Minister for Internal and External Trade, Commerce and Food Kingsley Wickremaratne, Secretary K. Balapatabendi, Sri Lankan High Commissioner in Dhaka S B Atugoda, Economic Affairs Adviser Dr. Lal Jayawardene and Foreign Affairs Adviser Jayanath Rajapaksa.

President Kumaratunga, in her comments, said her visit to Bangladesh was part of her government's policy of strengthening ties with the Asian, particularly the South Asian countries.

She pointed out that Begum Zia's visit to Sri Lanka last January had not only been fruitful but also gave a new direction towards enhancing the relations between the two neighbours.

The two leaders also discussed various means to make the SAARC more effective through implementing the decisions undertaken at earlier meetings of the seven-nation forum.

Expressing satisfaction at the progress of different programmes, they hoped that the Inter-Governmental Group meeting held recently in Islamabad would perhaps make the South Asian Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) operational soon.

Referring to environmental problems, Begum Zia termed the Farakka issue as the 'life and death' question for Bangladesh.

Officials said that the Prime Minister mentioned the disastrous desertification taking place in the northern region of Bangladesh due to unilateral diversion of the Ganges water by India.

The Bangladesh leader sought Sri Lanka's support in resolving the Farakka problem which has already had adverse

effects on the economy of one-fourth of the country.

The official talks on the second day of the three-day visit by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga also addressed other bilateral, regional and international issues of common concern.

The Lankan President conveyed her Prime Minister's invitation to Begum Zia to visit Sri Lanka.

PM: Banquet

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her Hare Road office last night. The Prime Minister referred to the business opportunities in Bangladesh, as explained by the local business leaders to the Sri Lankan President earlier in the day, for a meaningful cooperation between the two friendly countries.

Referring to the just-concluded World Summit on Social Development, she said the Copenhagen Declaration clearly recognised that priority should be given to eradication of poverty in all countries.

Begum Zia said South Asia, with one fifth of the planet's population, demands a forward movement in socio-economic fields. These are again dependent on inescapable requirements of peace, development and cooperation, she observed.

Begum Zia, was all praise for President Kumaratunga for her interest in making the seven-nation forum a more viable and effective institution.

She said, "Let us work together with our colleagues from South Asia to see that the spirit of the SAARC becomes reality."

At the forthcoming Delhi Summit, Begum Zia hoped that leaders of the SAARC countries would further widen the spheres of cooperation to transform into reality the Dhaka Declaration on poverty eradication in South Asia by the year 2002.

Conversion of green jute

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cultivation, they hoped. A scheme has also been taken up to motivate the farmers of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the command area of Karnaphuli Paper Mills, to cultivate jute as a cash crop, sources said.

Large-scale use of green jute for pulp-making will ultimately resolve the problem of scarcity of cellulosic raw materials and utilisation of the idle capacity of nearly 30,000 tonnes in the pulp and paper sector. This will further reduce dependence of the existing capacity utilisation on imported pulp to the extent of 15,000 tonnes approximately, the BCIC report pointed out.

The BCIC is the major user of fibrous raw materials in the country in the form of bamboo, wood and bagasse for production of pulp and paper in its four mills.

These mills need around 1,44,000 tonnes of bamboo wood, 87,000 tonnes of bagasse and 47,000 tonnes of gewa wood annually. But there has been a steady decline in the forest resources due to pressure of the growing population, it was pointed out.

Various studies at different research organisations have confirmed jute as a potential fibre with excellent cellulose content and it is possible to meet the growing demand of industrial grade paper and packaging materials with the use of green jute.

The BCIC recently conducted a survey in the different jute growing areas of the country to quantify production tonnage of green jute plant and unit price thereof.

Assuming that green jute is used in all paper and pulp producing units to the fullest capacity in replacement of bamboo, wood and bagasse, it would result in substantial saving per year, the report said.

All paper mills, however, do not have facilities for cooking green jute. Accordingly, necessary steps have been taken to

fabricate four digester at Khulna Shipyard Ltd and Chittagong Drydock - two enterprises of Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation.

While expeditious steps are being taken to process green jute at the four paper mills with necessary installation of digester simultaneously, renovation is going on at the Sylhet mills for producing 9,000 tonnes of jute-based pulp initially.

This pilot plant is being renovated with EEC grant and is expected to be completed by October this year, BCIC officials said.

The experience so far gained indicates strongly that the quality of pulp from green jute plant is better than the normal grade brown pulp of the Karnaphuli Paper Mills, they added.

Army officer hurt in blast

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Mar 29: An Army colonel was injured by exploding cocktails which hit his car while he was passing through the town late yesterday night.

Witnesses said that activists of two major political parties have been engaged in sporadic clashes for the last couple of days.

The injured, Colonel Asgar Quadri, was admitted to the Bogra CMH.

Earlier Col Asgar was given first aid at the district Sadar hospital.

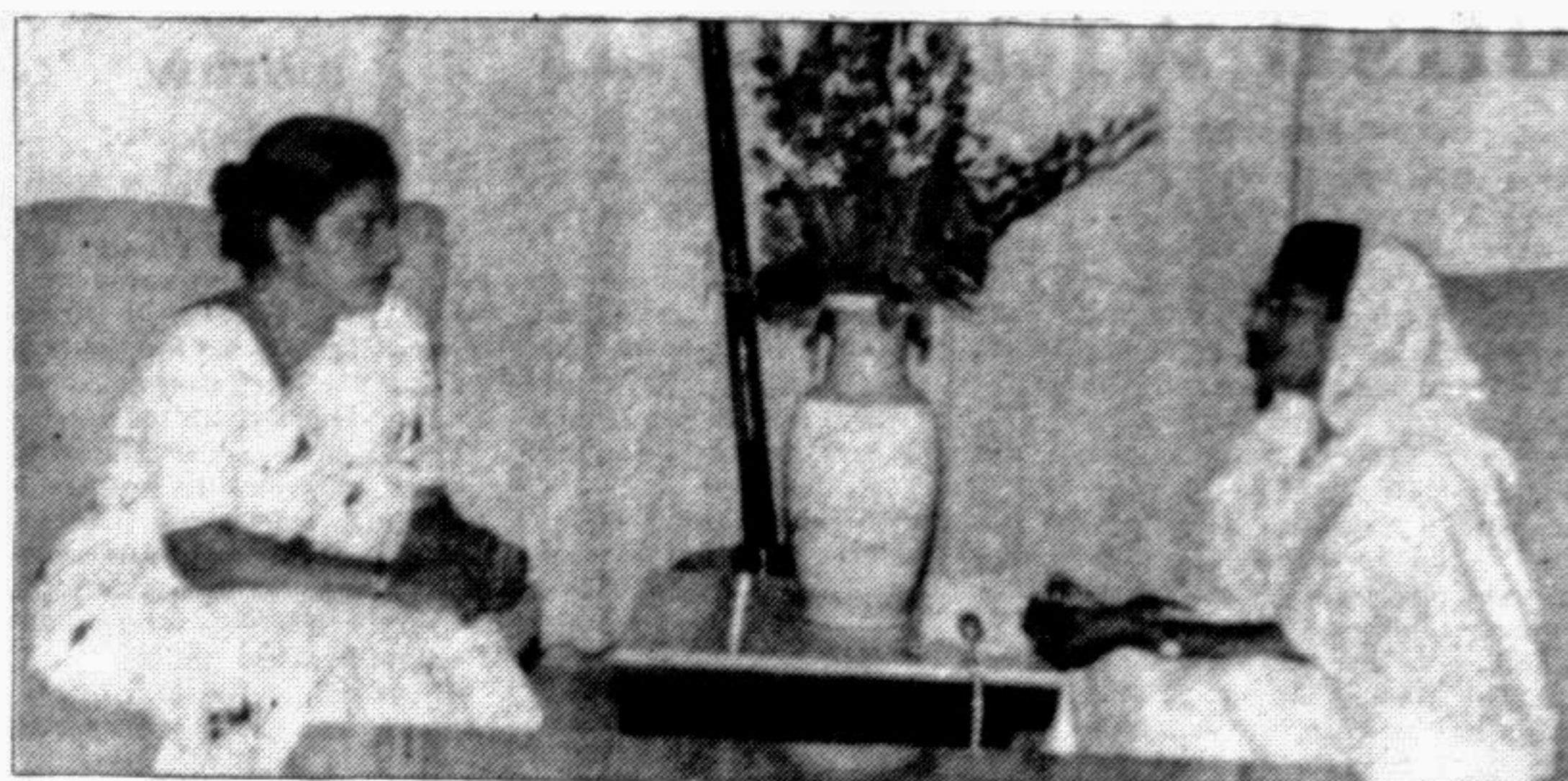
Natore police arrested eight persons in this connection.

JU syndicate by-polls today

By JU Correspondent

The by-elections for two posts in the Syndicate of the Jahangirnagar University will be held from 9 am to 1 pm today at the JU Teachers' Club.

Four candidates under the ranks of Associate Professor and Lecturer from two panels are vying for the posts



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina called on the visiting Sri Lankan President, Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, at the state guest house Korotoa in the city yesterday. — Star photo

CDP seminar in city told

Privatisation hindered by lack of political will

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a seminar in the city, yesterday said that there was a lack of political will to privatise loss-making public sectors like power generation and telecommunication.

The seminar on privatisation process, organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue was also attended by the principal economic adviser to the Sri Lankan President, Dr Lal Jayawardene.

Privatisation was necessary in the economy of Bangladesh because the successive governments have failed to govern in many sectors, the speakers said.

Discussing the privatisation process in Sri Lanka Dr Lal Jayawardene told the seminar that in his country, the social sector was deprived of proper allocations due to the loss-making public sectors.

Sri Lanka now needs foreign and private investments to feed the social sectors like health and education, the Sri Lankan economist said, adding, "We are now trying to attract foreign investments in small power projects."

The power and telecommunication sectors in both Sri Lanka and Bangladesh could attract foreign investments on the basis of build-own-operate (BOO) and build-operate-transfer (BOT), he said.

The seminar, moderated by economist Rehman Sobhan,

was participated by Board of Investment Chairman Mokammel Haq, Prof Nurul Islam, former finance minister M Syeduzzaman, Dr Mashur Rahman and others.

They said that although the authorities blamed trade unions for resisting privatisation of the power and telecommunication sectors, the trade unions were being backed by the ruling BNP. "So these trade unions cannot resist the privatisation policy of the BNP. Actually, authorities the concerned do not want to privatise these sectors," said the discussants.

The government is appointing committees after committees just to delay the privatisation process, it was noted.

The seminar said that the system loss in the power sector of Sri Lanka was around 20 per cent and in Bangladesh it was around 40 per cent. In Bangladesh, power sector was owned by the private entrepreneurs till 1958 and the percentage of system loss was around 20 per cent, the speakers said.

Light rains

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The highest rainfall of 27mm was recorded at Maidje Court, while 7mm fell at Conilla, 5 mm at Feni and 2 mm at Rangmat.



A WELCOME RELIEF: A man covers his head as he walks during yesterday afternoon's light drizzle in the city. — Star photo

Workshop on women & literacy opens Mobilisation of resources for skilled workforce stressed

By Staff Correspondent

Why have we been unable to raise the level of literacy in Bangladesh in over two decades? Why attempts to do so failed even in Sylhet, which is the most affluent district in the country?

Why was a community in Barisal driven to selling their own blood to raise money for a primary school?

These questions were raised by Rasheda K Choudhury at the inaugural session of a three-day workshop on Women and Literacy in the city yesterday.

The workshop, jointly organised by the Association of Development Agencies, Bangladesh (ADAB) and the UNESCO Institute of Education (UIE) Hamburg, Germany, is part of a regional process, the outcome of which is expected to contribute to the success of the Beijing Conference on Women later this year.

In her address, Ms Choudhury, Director of ADAB, said, there is need for political will to raise literacy in this country. Maintaining that we must avoid rhetoric and empty words, she called for mobilising resources and investments to create a skilled workforce and manpower for the nation.

Ms Carol Anonuevo, representing the UIE, Mahfuz Anam, Editor of The Daily Star, representing the media, and Md Irshadul Haq, Secretary, Ministry of Education also spoke at

the inaugural session.

The main objective of such workshops, according to Ms Anonuevo, is to allow different groups to come together, assess each other's work and share their experiences and ideas in an attempt to coordinate their efforts for raising literacy in Bangladesh. In India and Nepal, they organise training programmes and workshops aimed at raising the literacy level. There are plans to hold regional workshops in Asia, where the majority of the world's illiterate women live.

Mahfuz Anam stressed the importance of setting up a single universally acceptable model for achieving greater literacy. He also pointed out the unacceptable number of school hours per child per year in Bangladesh - 400 compared to China's 1400 and Sri Lanka's 700. He highlighted the necessary role of the relationship between government and non-government organisations in improving the situation. "Their critical alliance on the issue of literacy is our primary hope."

Irshadul Haq said development, technological or otherwise, could only come through education. The more educated we are, the more we can control our own lives and destinies and the more independent and autonomous we become," he said, speaking with reference to women.

Hasina

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The Awami League chief hoped that bilateral relations between Dhaka and Colombo would be further strengthened through this visit of the Lankan President.

The two leaders underscored the need for political stability free from state terrorism and for maintaining the democratic process to ensure development of the economically backward countries.

They also exchanged views on matters of bilateral interest and the present global situation.

Later, the two leaders had exclusive talks for an hour from 5:30 pm, Awami League office sources said.

Biswas accords reception to Chandrika

Visiting Sri Lankan President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga was accorded official reception by President Abul Kalam Biswas and Begum Biswas at Bangabhaban yesterday morning, reports BSS.

The chiefs of three services were introduced to President Chandrika Kumaratunga. She was presented a guard of honour by the smartly turned out members of the three services at the lush green lawn of Bangabhaban. She took the salute from the dais along with President Biswas. The band played national anthems of both the countries. Kumaratunga inspected the guard.

Later, President Biswas formally introduced Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to the Sri Lankan President. The Prime Minister introduced to Kumaratunga the members of her cabinet. Members of the diplomatic corps and high civil and military officials were also introduced. Sri Lankan President introduced the senior members of her entourage.

Bail prayers of 6 held during 'siege' rejected

By Court Correspondent

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) yesterday rejected bail prayers of six persons who were arrested on Tuesday during the opposition-sponsored 'Dhaka Siege' programme.

Charges of carrying explosives and rioting with police have been brought against them.

Launch dacoity in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Mar 29: At least four passengers were injured when a group of armed criminals committed a dacoity on the ML Mamun in Lohalia river under sadar thana of Patuakhali district early today.

Witnesses said, the Charbiswas bound passenger launch from Patuakhali came under attack by 10 to 12 dacoits around 3 this morning.

Grameen Bank manager robbed

CHITTAGONG, Mar 29: Unidentified miscreants robbed Tk 1.28 lakh at gunpoint from the manager of Grameen Bank branch at Baraiadala in Mirsarai thana today, reports UNB.

Police said the manager, after drawing Tk 1.40 lakh in cash from Mirsarai branch of Krishi Bank, was going to Baraiadala in an autorickshaw with two other people.

When the vehicle reached Baradaragar hat, four people stopped them and snatched the money from the manager at gunpoint.

Local people, after a chase caught two of the miscreants and recovered Tk 11,600 from them.

500 Turkish soldiers killed in Iraq

ANKARA, Mar 29: More than 500 Turkish soldiers have been killed in the army's operation against the separatist Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) in northern Iraq, the PKK said today, reports AFP.

The Midnight File

Two hanged for attempt on Naguib Mahfouz

CAIRO, Mar 29: Two Islamic militants were hanged today for the attempted murder of Nobel prize-winning novelist Naguib Mahfouz, the official agency MENA reported. Mohammed Nagui Mohammed Mustafa, 21, was sentenced in January for stabbing the writer in the neck in October, seriously wounding him. Mohammed Khodeir Al-Mahallawi, 22, was found guilty of having planned the attack. Both were accused of belonging to the outlawed Jamaa Islamiya, or Islamic group, reports AFP.

Jamuna Bridge project

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be no problem in meeting the timeframe. We will have to wait and see as work on the bridge does not begin until October next."

In a letter dated February 3, the consultants, Rendell, Palmer & Tritton (RPT)/NEDECO/BCL informed Hyundai that the piling design was deemed not in compliance with the specifications agreed upon earlier. The design was rejected on the ground that the pile wall thickness lacked "technical soundness," and the contractor was asked to change the design.

The two sides subsequently held a meeting to discuss the issue and later Hyundai sent a letter to the consultants explaining their contractual position regarding the piling design.

In the letter, the company disagreed "entirely" with the position of the consultants and insisted that it had acted in accordance with the contract "at all times."

Hyundai also pointed out that the project consultants, at no time, raised any objections about its proposal for alternate use of non-compact pile sections during post-tender and pre-contract negotiations when a number of other points were raised.

The contractor also noted that the tender proposals also contained "clear information" about the pile wall thickness and argued that all unacceptable exceptions or deviations should have been raised during the appraisal process and before the contract was awarded.

It also pointed out that such essential information in a tender proposal could not have been overlooked. "Thus, due to being misinformed and/or misguided as above and through our timely ordering of piling materials, we find ourselves in possession of thousands of tons of useless steel plates and in grave situation to meet the given completion date of the contract if the pile design be changed pursuant to your instruction..." Hyundai said in the letter.

Saying that it recognised the great concern about the possible delay, the company, however, agreed to take necessary steps to expedite the progress and complete the work within the contract period. But it noted that the

panels are: the John-Khasru panel of JCD, the Emu-Anwar panel of BCL (S-P) and the Amitab-Rabby panel of BSU.

AL body

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The Chief Election Commissioner, Justice Mohammad Abdul Rauf, the Election Commissioner, Justice Md Abdul Jalil, Secretary of the EC Secretariat AZM Shamsul Alam, Additional Secretary SM Zakaria, Project Director of ID cards and Additional Secretary Mohammad Omar Farooq and Joint Secretary Sayed Abdur Rashid of the EC were present.

The Awami League delegation included the party's Advisory Council member and convener of the election affairs committee Mozibur Rahman, Advisory Council members ASHK Sadek and AKM Fazlul Haq Mia, Working Committee member Md Rahmat Ali, Law Affairs Secretary Barrister KS Nabi and election affairs committee member Mahbubur Rahman.

Fertiliser

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The local administration was distributing 10 kg of fertiliser per head among the enlisted farmers.

But the farmers suddenly went on a rampage as a rumour spread that the quantity of fertiliser being distributed was less than what had been allocated and the officials were saving it to sell in the black market.

Witnesses said a group of agitated farmers attacked the TNO office and badly damaged it.

At one stage, police opened fire to disperse the mob, leaving the farmer dead on the spot. At least 75 people, including 25 policemen, were injured in the clash that ensued at about 2 pm.

Police fired some 30 shots and used teargas shells to disperse the mob. The farmers also exploded several homemade bombs, according to witnesses.

At least 12 injured farmers were admitted to Melandah Thana Health Complex. The injured policemen were sent to Jamalpur Police Hospital.

Police picked up 14 people from the spot.

contractual position and entitlements in relation to the time and cost impact due to the possible changes in pile design is being studied.

Hyundai concluded adding: "We entirely disagree with your allegations and views and we consider that we have at all times acted in accordance with the contract."

It is still unclear how and when the differences between the two sides are going to be resolved or how long would be the likely delay in completion of the project.

Meanwhile, the Executive Director of JMBA approached the Charge d'Affairs of the Republic of Korea in Dhaka and also wrote to the Bangladesh ambassador in Seoul seeking their help to resolve the differences with the Korean company.

The consultants and Hyundai have already sat for a number of meetings and they are again expected to meet soon to arrive at a mutually agreed upon solution. One source, who is privy to the meetings, said that an "amicable" solution is being sought.

Gaibandha lawyers boycotting courts

From Our Correspondent

GAIBANDHA, Mar 29: The lawyers of the Gaibandha Bar have decided to continue boycotting the courts of three magistrates here in protest against police firing at Mohimaganj and Gaibandha Sadar in which three persons were killed.

They have been boycotting the courts of magistrates Khalilur Rahman, Abdul Hakim and Abdul Mannan since March 27 demanding their transfer.

The magistrates ordered police to open fire on the farmers, demanding fertiliser DHAMECSU polls

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hatra Dal (JCD), the Awami League-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and the CPB-supported Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU) are contesting for 20 executive posts of the DHAMECSU. However, the BCU is vying for only eight posts including the posts of the Vice-President and the General Secretary.

The panels are: the John-Khasru panel of JCD, the Emu-Anwar panel of BCL (S-P) and the Amitab-Rabby panel of BSU.

Fertiliser seized

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In protest the JCD, Jhalakati district unit had earlier demanded immediate transfer of the police superintendent of Jhalakati. It has also called a half day hartal inn Jhalakati town tomorrow.

The BNP Jhalakati district committee has supported the JCD's programme.

Meanwhile, hundreds of farmers from different places of the district brought out a procession demanding fertilisers and arrest of the culprits responsible for the fertiliser crisis.

Rule nisi

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Communications, Home Affairs, Environment and Forest, Health and Family Welfare, Commerce, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministries.

The division bench comprising Justice AM Mahmudur Rahman and Justice Mahfuzur Rahman however, refused to pass any *ad interim* order of mandatory injunction.

The petitioner, in his submission, stated that though right to a safe and healthy environment has not been directly specified in the Constitution as a fundamental right, such a right is inherent and integrated in the "right to life," as enshrined in the Article 32 of the Constitution.

He submitted that the lead-laced gas emitted because of the use of leaded petroleum were severely affecting the lungs, liver, brain and the nervous system, resulting in high blood pressure, IQ and memory retention damage among children and damage to foetuses leading to deformed babies. The high sulphur content in the petroleum, and hence in the smoke, causes severe damage to the ecology, the petitioner added.

Dr Farooque was assisted by a team of BELA advocates comprising Mirza Quamrul Hasan MA Hakim, Mirza Hosain Haider, Saikia R Johan and Nahreen Parveen.