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by Kabir U Ahmad  
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**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Ashraf new acting BNP Secy General**

By Staff Correspondent  
Ashraf Hossain, a joint secretary of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), replaced Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan as the party's acting Secretary General last night, BNP sources said. Ashraf Hossain, who is also a whip of the BNP's parliamentary party, took over as Bhuiyan left for Rome last night. Bhuiyan is expected to return home next week.

**Bakerganj College bans politics**

From Staff Correspondent  
BARISAL, Oct 16: Student politics has been banned up to December 31 in the Government Bakerganj College of Barisal. The decision was taken at a joint meeting attended by general students, guardians, teachers and leaders of BCL, JCD and Chhatra Shibir.

**Police raid JU hall**

From JU Correspondent  
Savar and Dhamrai thana police jointly raided the Al-Beruni Hall of Jahangirnagar University last night but recovered only three rifle butts. Earlier on September 27 and October 3 the police raided three residential halls of the university following clashes between two factions of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) in which 10 persons were injured. So far, three students have been arrested in connection with the clashes.

**Indian TV spares, magazines seized**

RAJSHANI, Oct 16: BDR personnel of 14 Rifle Battalion seized 458 Indian television spares and different books and magazines worth Taka about one lakh and 25 thousand by conducting anti-smuggling drive at Baganbari village today. Later, the seized contraband were deposited with Rajshahi Customs office, reports BSS.



A pro-hartal procession passing by a contingent of riot police at the city's Purana Paltan crossing on the first day of the 96-hour hartal yesterday.

— Star photo

**Hartal paralyses life: 125 hurt in stray incidents**

## Two killed on first day

By Staff Correspondent

Two political party activists were killed — one at Brahmanbaria and the other at Kushtia — and at least 125 people were injured in sporadic violence at some place in the country on the first day yesterday of the Opposition called 4-day hartal.

The first day of the shutdown that paralysed life in the country excepting Rajshahi division, passed off by and large peacefully barring some stray incidents of bomb blasts and police-picket chase and counter-chase in the city and clashes between rival political activists at Brahmanbaria and Kushtia.

**Flood-hit Rajshahi division** and vehicles carrying relief materials there have been exempted from the hartal.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami called

the hartal to press their demand for dissolution of parliament and holding of elections under a neutral caretaker government.

At least 25 people were injured in police-picket

**Rickshaws to ply from 5-11 pm**

By Staff Correspondent

Rickshaws will remain outside the purview of the hartal from 5 pm to 11 pm today in the capital city and from 3 pm outside the city, says an Awami League press release.

Ambulance, medicine and food shops, kutcha bazar, vehicles carrying newsmen and newspapers, fire brigade, electricity, gas, water and conservancy services are also exempted from the hartal.

chase and counter-chase in the city. Police picked up 45 pickets. About 50 people were injured in clashes between activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Chhatra League at Brahmanbaria and another 40 in a clash between pickets and anti-hartal elements at Kushtia.

Sheikh Mohammad Shahnewaz, 24, Organising Secretary of Brahmanbaria district Chhatra League, shot and beaten severely, died on way to Dhaka.

The body was taken to the central Awami League office. Party leaders and workers brought out a procession in the city with the body.

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina placed floral wreaths on the body when the procession came near the Science Laboratory intersec-

tion where she also made a brief speech.

Pro-hartal activists exploded bombs near the Election Commission Secretariat and the National Broadcasting Centre at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar early morning yesterday.

Bombs were also hurled at a vehicle of a newspaper near the Abahani Club. Pickets at different places stopped press vehicles and demanded to see identity of journalists and other newspaper men.

An Awami League procession came under police action when several bombs were blasted while it was crossing the road in front of the Secretariat.

Party leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman and Mozaffar Hossain Chowdhury

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**Group of five discloses PM willing to hold talks with Hasina**

Star Report

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday told the group of five eminent citizens that "she was willing to meet face to face Awami League President Sheikh Hasina to discuss with an open mind to find a solution to the prevailing crisis."

The group, comprising former chief justice Kemal-uddin Hossain, Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed, Prof Rehman Sobhan, Fakhruddin Ahmed and Faiz Ahmed, met her for the second time at 7.30 pm yesterday at the PM's Tejgaon office, according to a press release issued by journalist Ataus Samad on behalf of the group.

During the hour-long meeting, the group conveyed to the Prime Minister the views of AL Chief Sheikh

Hasina for ending the persisting political stalemate over the question of holding general elections under a caretaker administration.

The group, in its bid to help resolve the impasse, had earlier met the Prime Minister on October 9, followed by a meeting with the AL president on October 14.

The group of five backed by a number of intellectuals, has been trying to create a congenial atmosphere for a dialogue between the two top leaders.

During the first two meetings with Begum Zia and Sheikh Hasina, the group had communicated its sense of urgency about the need for resolving the political stand-off.

At the meeting with Sheikh Hasina

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**US official meets CEC, AL leader**

By Staff Correspondent

Visiting Director of the US Department of State Lee O Coldrin is expected to meet Maudud Ahmed of the Jatiya Party, some government officials and leading personalities today.

Coldrin who served earlier as the Deputy Chief of the US mission in Dhaka and is in charge of the desk comprising Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh arrived in the capital Sunday on a four-day visit about the local situation.

He already met the Chief Election Commissioner Justice A K M Sadek and chief of Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) Fakhruddin Ahmed.

The career diplomat also had a meeting with Abul

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**BNP MP requests PM to dissolve parliament**

Ruling BNP's MP Major (Rtd) Akhtaruzzaman yesterday requested Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to dissolve parliament in November for holding elections by next January, reports UNB.

Akhter also requested the Prime Minister not to give further concession to the Opposition regarding the issue of caretaker government.

He was addressing a group of small traders, shopkeepers, day labourers, rickshaw-pullers of his Kishoreganj constituency residing in Dhaka.

Major (Rtd) Akhter criticised Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina's statement assuring the Prime Minister that her proposed caretaker government will not sent her (PM) to jail.

He alleged the Awami League chief is hatching conspiracy to create a constitutional crisis by demanding a fresh voters' list.

**One dies in blast**

From Staff Correspondent  
CHITTAGONG, Oct 16: One person was killed and two others were injured in a bomb explosion at a hill at Pahartoli Bastuhara colony here last night.

The explosion occurred when they were making bombs in an isolated place.

The dead was identified as Babul, 25 and the injured were Md Selim, 20, and Belayet Hossain, 21.

Police said that after the incident, the three youngmen were rushed to the hospital where Babul succumbed to his injuries.

**BNP's organisational week from Oct 22**

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party will observe organisational, publicity and public relations week from October 22, reports BSS.

All concerned have been requested to hold meetings, bring out processions and carry out publicity campaigns in all thansas during the week.

Meanwhile, the Dhaka Metropolitan committee of the BNP has taken steps to hold meetings at different places in the capital during this period.

It has also been decided to hold public meetings at all the political district headquarters from October 29 to October 31.

**BNP sees two options now**

By Staff Correspondent

Acting Secretary General of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Abdur Mannan Bhuiyan has said the opposition political camps need to reach an understanding on ending the political crisis through dialogue within a month.

Otherwise, the government would be left with no option but to take unilateral steps according to the Constitution, he said.

Bhuiyan also said his party believes that a solution to the persisting impasse was still possible if the contending camps could hold a dialogue without any prejudice against each other.

Replying to a question, the BNP leader said Prime Minister and party Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia would definitely write to Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina. But he could not give any possible date for sending the letter.

Bhuiyan, who is Minister for Agriculture and Food, was talking to a group of newsmen at his residence yesterday evening.

"We, the ruling party and

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**Impact of import growth  
Forex reserves fall by \$900m in 5 months**

By Inam Ahmed and R M Titumir

The continued growth in imports has depleted the country's foreign exchange reserves by some 900 million US dollars during the last five months.

The foreign exchange reserve, which stood at a comfortable level equivalent to seven months' imports, has now shrunk to about four and a half months' equivalent.

This is for the first time in the last five years that a declining trend has set in the foreign exchange reserve level.

The current reserve stands at about 2.6 billion dollars against a record high of 3.5 billion dollars in April this year, according to Bangladesh Bank.

The central bank's recent decision to devalue the taka was aimed at slowing down the growth in imports which had caused the depletion of foreign currency reserves.

But it is now feared that the recent trend in the economy may nullify the monetary policy as large food

import may be needed due to the foodgrain output deficit caused by the recent floods.

This will further dry up the foreign exchange reserve, economists say. Of the total outstanding letters of credit of Tk 9291 crore at the end of June 1995, the share of food alone is Tk 473.12 crore, according to latest Bangladesh Bank figures.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud of Dhaka University's Economics Department said, "Although the taka has been devalued twice in the recent past, the extent of devaluation is rather insignificant — less than one per cent. However, the decision to devalue is important in signalling a reversal of the favourable balance of payment of the last few years.

The decline in foreign exchange reserve is due to an import boom during 1994-95 unmatched by the lower export growth.

According to latest figures of the Bangladesh Bank, the

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**Killer govt must go: Hasina**

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina blamed Begum Zia's government for yesterday's killing of a student leader and urged the people to step up current agitation for its immediate resignation, reports UNB.

"The Khaleda government is responsible for the killing .... This killer government has no right to stay in power anymore," she said while addressing an instant protest gathering at the Science Laboratory crossing in the evening.

The body of Shahnewaz was kept inside the slogan-chanting agitated gathering while the Awami League chief was addressing them.

AL sources said Sheikh Mohammad Shahnewaz, organising secretary of the District Chhatra League, was shot at in Brahmanbaria town at about 11:15 am and he succumbed to his injuries on way to Dhaka.

The demonstrating Awami League activists held a brief protest meeting with the body in front of the Jatiya Press Club in the afternoon and carried the body in a procession to the Science Lab crossing.

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The Awami League brought out a procession in the city carrying the body of Sheikh Mohammad Shahnewaz, organising secretary of Brahmanbaria District Chhatra League, who was killed yesterday.

— Star photo

**One garbage cleaner for every 1720 citizens of Dhaka City**

By Reaz Ahmad

There is one garbage cleaner per 1,720 citizens in Dhaka city where some 3,000 tons of garbage is generated daily.

The Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), with its minimum manpower and material support is finding it difficult to ensure cleanliness in the city of 86 lakh people. The population increased manifold in the city in the last two decades but the number of cleaners and other facilities have not been raised proportionately. DCC officials claimed.

There were some 4,000 cleaners in early 70s when the city's population was less than one tenth of what it is now. In two decades, the number has been revised to

only at 5,124," said Komoleshwar Pal, Chief Conservancy Officer (CCO) of the DCC. Of the cleaners, 3,500 are regular employees of the DCC and the rest work on daily basis for Taka 50 per day.

Out of 208 garbage collecting trucks, 48 are out of order for months, he said. Besides the too inadequate number of garbage cleaners, a good number of posts in the conservancy department remains vacant for long, he claimed.

The DCC official said that in addition to its 2,000 pucca and 2,500 tin-made dustbins, some 44 demouldable containers, imported from India, have been placed at some garbage-prone points.

"The DCC is contemplating importing 260 more such containers in phases provided fund is available," he said but regretted that the city dwellers mostly dispose of garbage outside the container.

Another highly placed source in the DCC said that the authorities plan to privatise garbage disposal service could not be implemented yet as response from private entrepreneurs was not encouraging and there were other problems as well. However negotiations with a Japanese company for setting up an organic fertiliser plant at Matuail is in final stage. The plant will use garbage collected from the city.

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**Hasina's remark ridiculous, says Rafiq**

BNP standing committee member and Housing and Public Works Minister

Barrister Rafiqul Islam Miah yesterday described the comment of Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina that Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia would not be arrested in case of formation of caretaker government as absolutely ridiculous.

Talking to BSS, Barrister Rafiq said that Sheikh Hasina has no right to play with the prestige and dignity of the country's elected Prime Minister by making such obnoxious remarks.

Rafiq pointed out that Begum Zia was voted to power and she is neither an usurper of power nor had taken over by force. She would remain in power as long as she enjoys the confidence of the majority members in Parliament as

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**Detained Pak officers plotted coup?**

ISLAMABAD, Oct 16: Forty Pakistani army officers arrested last month face charges of conspiring to overthrow Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, news reports said today, reports AFP.

The army authorities detained a major general and a brigadier, with three dozen other officers on September 26. They acted on a military intelligence report that the officers were plotting to stage an Islamic revolution with the backing of fundamentalist groups, the reports said.

The arrests were confirmed by the prime minister on Saturday. But Bhutto refused to disclose what charges would be made against them.

A Defence Ministry official also refused to give the reasons behind the first such

large-scale arrest of senior army officers.

The news said all of the officers had been taken into custody on charges of "violating service discipline, hatching a conspiracy to overthrow the government by capturing the command of the Pakistan army."

A three-star general will be appointed to lead a court martial to investigate the charges, the paper said.

Qazi Hussain Ahmed, chief of the fundamentalist Jamaat-e-Islami Party, has criticised the arrests, saying that Major General Zaheer Ul Islam Ab-basi who is among the detained officers was a patriotic officer.

Another Jamaat leader, Hafiz Idrees, said if the arrested officers were involved in a conspiracy, Benazir must reveal the facts in parliament.

**Hartal to create heavy cargo congestion**

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Oct 16: Around 1,50,000 metric tons of imported cargo remained stockpiled at Chittagong port jetties due to suspension of delivery of goods during the hartal period today, port sources said.

Those goods include about 12,000 container cargo of 54,000 metric tons. Besides, 73,300 MT of cargo are lying inside the sheds and 17,000 MT dumped outside.

Port officials said there would be tremendous congestion in the port with the resumption of loading and unloading of cargo after the hartal.

Sixteen ships remained stranded at the port jetties and eight at the outer anchorage. Some more ships might join them in the next three hartal days.