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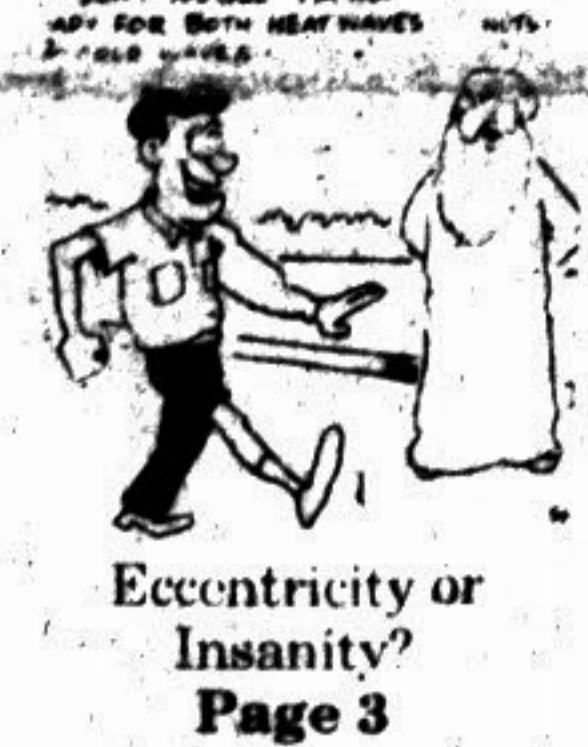
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**NEWS BRIEFS**

**Hanif's Thai visit cancelled**  
 Mayor of Dhaka Mohammad Hanif cancelled a trip to Thailand in view of the prevailing political situation in the country. He was invited as guest of honour to a conference on "City Development", to be held in Bangkok March 11-14. DCC sources said yesterday, reports UNB.

**2 drown in Barisal**  
 BARISAL, Mar 9: Two persons drowned when a trawler carrying about 30 passengers sank in the Char Horia river under Mutadi thana today. Police sources said that other passengers swam ashore. The trawler sank when it ran onto an emerging char in the river, reports BSS.

**West Bank security chief sacked**  
 GAZA CITY, Mar 9: Palestinian President Yasser Arafat has sacked West Bank Preventative Security chief Jibril Rajoub. Palestinian security sources told AFP today. He was replaced on Friday by Colonel Hussein al-Sheikh, a top police official in the West Bank town of Ramallah.

**China to expel 2 Taiwanese newsmen**  
 BEIJING, Mar 9: China will expel on Sunday two Taiwanese journalists it claims were caught this week while illegally videotaping military targets, the official Xinhua news agency reported today. The two journalists, news reporter Sui An-Yeh and cameraman Chang Chi-Wei of the state-funded Taiwan Television Enterprise (TTV), were detained on Thursday in the southeastern province of Fujian which faces Taiwan. Xinhua said, reports Reuters.

**Cancel Feb 15 polls: DUTA**  
 The Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) yesterday urged the authorities to cancel the February 15 farcical election and resolve the current political deadlock, reports UNB.

In a joint statement, DUTA president Prof. ATM Zahurul Huq and General Secretary AAMS Arefin Siddique also called for releasing the detained political leaders and journalists.

## Hasina, others respond positively

# President invites opposition leaders for talks today

Star Report

President Abdur Rahman Biswas will have separate meetings with the leaders of major opposition parties at the Bangabhaban today in a bid to resolve the lingering political impasse.

The President sent letters to leaders of the political parties and groups represented in the Fifth Jatiya Sangsad last night inviting them to "preliminary discussions", official sources said.

Further discussions are expected to take place in the following days. The ruling BNP would also be invited to the talks, the sources added.

Those invited to today's meetings include: Awami League, Chief and former Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina, acting Chairman of Jatiya Party Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, Secretary General of Jamaat-e-Islami Matur Rahman Nizami, Workers Party General Secretary and LDF leader Rashid Khan Menon and NDP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury.

The leaders accepted the invitations. Opposition sources said.

Prime Minister and BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia on Friday night had requested the President to invite the political parties to sit for dialogue.

AL President Hasina will be the first to meet the President at 11 am, followed by the other leaders, who all headed their respective parties or groups in the last parliament.

Earlier, the President had also telephoned Sheikh Hasina at about 11:30 am yesterday to extend the invitation for talks, Opposition sources said.

He also talked to BNP Joint Secretary General and Food and Agriculture Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan when he called on him at the Bangabhaban yesterday evening.

Senior AL leaders later at a meeting at the Dhanmondi residence of Hasina decided to accept the presidential invitation, party sources said.

A statement from the party said that Hasina favoured resolution of the crisis through discussion.

"I have already communicated my views to the President and requested him to fix a time for discussion," the statement quoted her as saying.

Jatiya Party leaders indicated a positive response to the presidential initiative, but said that they would take decision in this regard at a meeting today at 9 am at the Gul-See Page 12 col 8

## Commentary

# Khaleda Zia climbs down, will Sheikh Hasina?

By Mahfuz Anam

Finally a semblance of national consensus is at hand. Everybody — belonging to the ruling and the combined opposition parties — is agreeable to respond to an initiative by the President, which he thankfully took last night. (If he had done so earlier, using the moral authority of his office, as suggested by us, the nation may have been spared much turmoil and agony.)

We commend the Prime Minister for her quick and decisive action in asking the President to take initiative for a dialogue, and we also thank the opposition for welcoming the move. After the death of

this and NO that, and of uninterrupted acrimony and mutual insult, even a hint of YES is music to our ears.

The acceptance of a non-party government to supervise all future polls, and holding of the next election within the shortest possible time were, by themselves, big climb down for the ruling party, and especially for the Prime Minister. For somebody who steadfastly rebuffed the idea for three long years, to suddenly turn around and say 'yes', eating humble pie and kissing her 'aposheen Neetri' (uncompromising leader) in a gesture, indicates a new speak of sincerity and a genuine desire to solve the present political problem.

This newspaper, on numerous occasions, criticised the Prime Minister for being inflexible, ego-centric and for putting party and self interest above the country. In the same spirit, we praise her today for putting the welfare of the nation, its poor millions and the near collapsing economy above her party and self. We thank her for taking the counsel of consultation and not of combat, for adopting words of healing and not of hurting, and for opt-



**SMASHING SIDHU:** India's man for every crisis - Navjot Sidhu positions himself for yet another cracking drive during the battle royale against Pakistan in Bangalore yesterday. Sidhu's mastery 93 won him the man-of-the-match award as India eliminated the world champions. — APP/UNB photo

# India win a thriller

BANGALORE, India, Mar 9: Mohammed Azharuddin's India stormed into the World Cup semifinals with a rousing 39-run victory over arch-rivals Pakistan here today, reports AFP.

The defending champions sorely missed the all-round talents of their injured captain Wasim Akram as the Indians, fired up in front of 45,000 frenzied home fans, dazzled under the Chinnaswamy Stadium lights.

Man-of-the-match Navjot Sidhu hit an aggressive 93 and Ajay Jadeja smashed 45 off 25 balls in the slog over as India, taking first strike in perfect batting conditions, piled up a mammoth 287 for eight.

Pakistan, given 49 overs to overtake the score after bowling an over short in the stipulated time, managed only 248 for nine in reply despite a blistering start by openers Aamer Sohail and Saeed Anwar.

The pair silenced the partisan home crowd by putting on 84 in just 10 overs, but the initial blitzkrieg was too good to last as India hit back to set up a semifinal clash against Sri Lanka at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta next Wednesday.

Bangalore boys Venkatesh Prasad, Anil Kumble and Javagal Srinath shone on their home turf by grabbing seven wickets among them, to set a famous victory — only the fifth by India in their last 27 meetings against Pakistan.

Bonfires were lit in the overflowing stands — and around the entire jubilant nation — to celebrate the home team's win as police threw a security blanket around the dressing rooms of the two teams.

Sohail cracked 55 off 46 balls and Anwar hit 48 off 32 balls to begin Pakistan's chase in spectacular fashion.

But Prasad who conceded 24 runs in his first two overs, came back strongly in his second spell to grab three quick wickets and reduce Pakistan to 132 for four by the 21st over.

The tension-filled encounter was highlighted by Prasad's enthralling duel against Sohail.

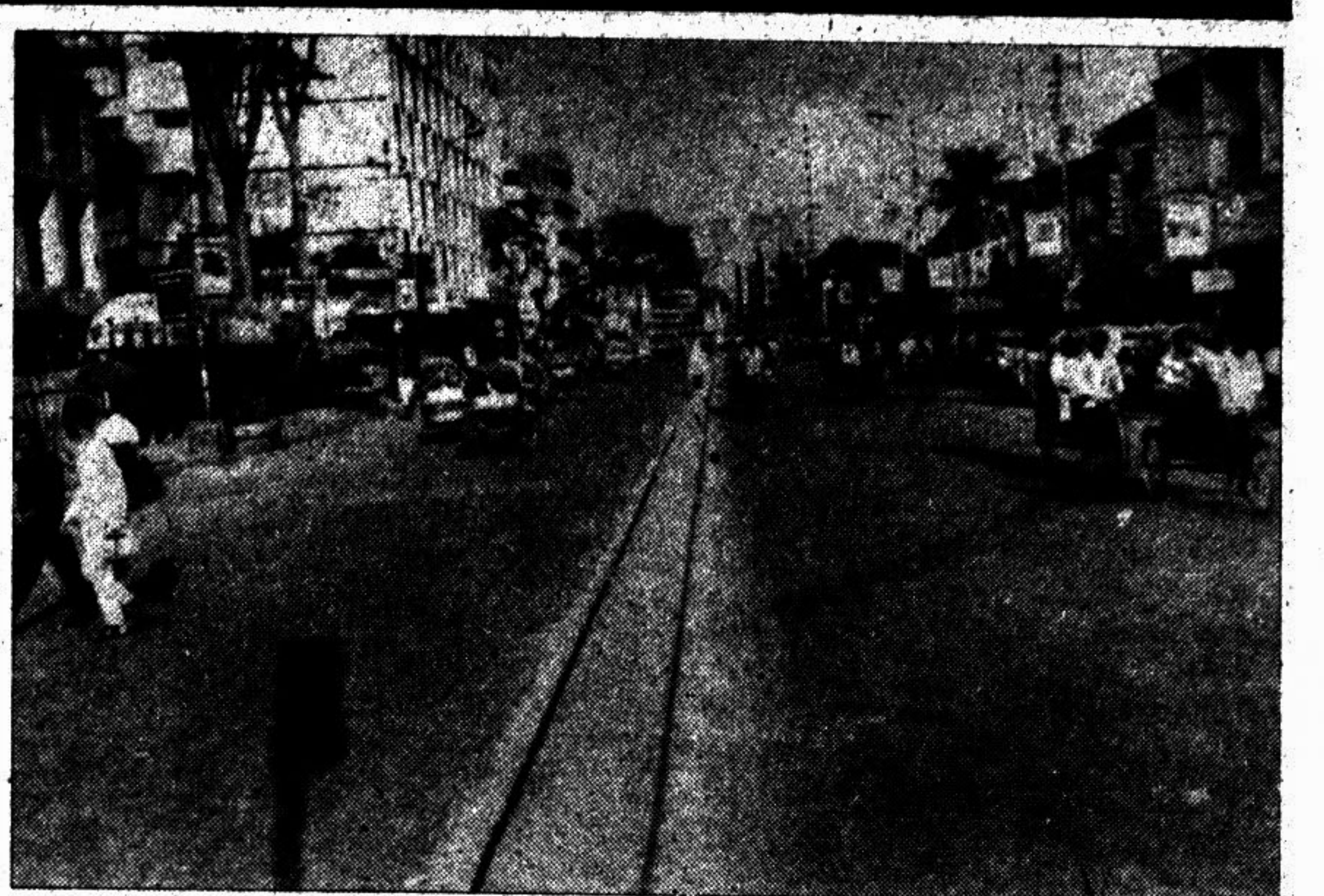
Having been smashed for a boundary and taunted by the batsman to fetch the ball, Prasad uprooted Sohail's off-stump with the next delivery and pointed the way to the pavilion.

Old warhorse Javed Miandad and Rashid Latif gave Pakistan a ray of hope with a 47-run partnership of 43 balls for the sixth wicket which took the score to 231 for five by the 43rd over.

But Latif was stumped off Kumble when 57 more were needed and Miandad was run out for 38 in his final international appearance as Pakistan faded away against the determined Indians.

Kumble and Prasad shared six wickets, while Srinath and left-arm spinner Venkatapathy

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The road from Purana Paltan crossing to Dainik Bangla inter-section in the city on the first day yesterday of the Opposition's non-cooperation movement. — Star photo

# 250 hurt: Sec 144 in two places 3 killed in Ctg on first day of non-cooperation

By Staff Correspondent

Three persons were killed in Chittagong and at least 250 people injured in different parts of the country in acts of violence and clashes on the first day yesterday of the Opposition's non-cooperation movement that paralysed normal life and road-rail communications.

A hartal-like situation prevailed in the capital and elsewhere in the country on the day.

Opposition activists, joined by a mob, attacked the deputy commissioner's office in Netrokona with cocktails. Section 144 was clamped in Kishoreganj and Moulvibazar after Opposition activists clashed

The Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami called the indefinite non-cooperation movement demanding cancellation of the February 15 polls, resignation of the government and fresh elections under a caretaker government.

In the city, at least 50 people including 5 policemen were injured in clashes and other acts of violence including bomb explosions. Police picked up 21 people from different areas of the city.

All motorised vehicles were off the roads. A few minibuses and double-deckers were seen plying in some specific routes with few people.

A powerful bomb explosion partially damaged a bridge Fulbita on the Dhaka-Aricha highway making it unusable.

**Rail link severely disrupted**

Railway communication was severely disrupted across the country on the first day yesterday of the Opposition's indefinite non-cooperation movement.

The engine and a compartment of a Sylhet-bound train from Chittagong derailed at

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## Bearish trend at DSE reflects investors' frustration

By Rafiq Hasan

Trading at the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), already facing a state of uncertainty due to the persisting political crisis, remained closed yesterday, the first day of the Opposition launched non-cooperation movement.

The DSE floor witnessed trading only on one day in the last week of February due to hartals and other agitation programmes of the opposition political parties. Honorary Secretary of the DSE Shafiq Khan said.

Although the bourse witnessed an active trading last week, it did not prove that the situation had improved, he told The Daily Star.

Marginal increase in trading was seen because many small investors sold out their previous stock of shares and bought some new shares fearing that the floor might be closed for several weeks, the DSE official pointed out.

The stock exchange is closely related with every socio-economic changes in the country. So the market cannot remain unaffected in the present political situation, said Khurshid Alam, former Chairman of the DSE.

The bourse may plunge into a deep crisis if the political situation does not improve immediately as the investors have already been withdrawing money from the market and fresh inflow of money has stopped since long, he added.

The recent bearish trend and slide in the share price were the reflection of the frustration among the investors and operators, he mentioned.

M A Huq Howlader, a councillor and former Honorary Secretary of the DSE, said I am totally frustrated about the future of our share market as it is going to be locked up for a long time.

He said that many blue chip shares were suffering from price fall since the beginning of political uncertainty in the country.

"Until and unless the country's politics takes a turn towards stability, the investors would not come to invest their money with full confidence," Howlader said.

A small investor, Salim, said "Share market is one of the main income sources to many people like us. If it does not operate we face serious economic hardship."

Some other small investors Sharif, Hamid and Abu, also expressed similar views.

The situation on the DSE floor, however, improved slightly last week as all share price index and market capitalisation

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## CEC ready to step down if all parties want

By Staff Correspondent

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Justice AKM Sadeque said yesterday that he would step down if all the political parties thought that he was an obstacle to a free and fair election.

Talking to a group of newsmen at his office, the CEC said that he had done everything to ensure a well-participated election but it was unfortunate that the major parties kept away.

He admitted that he did not get all-out support from the professional or political groups within his office and outside despite his utmost sincerity in holding a free and fair election.

Justice Sadeque said that he would make an important announcement regarding his stand in the present context "within the next three days."

It is learnt from an EC source that the EC secretary had not been attending office for weeks now. The CEC also confirmed it saying that he had not seen the secretary for a month. He (secretary) was ill and was staying at home, Justice Sadeque added.

Another EC source, referring to the meeting of some Awami League leaders with the CEC on Thursday, said that the CEC was addressed by some AL representatives, "very rough and vulgar words were used" during the meeting.

# ME crisis likely to overshadow EU meet

PALERMO, Sicily, Mar 9: European Union foreign ministers met here today for talks intended to focus on the future shape of the union but set to be overshadowed by the crisis in the Middle East peace process, reports AFP.

In the countdown to Wednesday's anti-terrorism summit in Cairo, the EU has come under intense pressure from the United States and Israel to abandon its policy of "critical dialogue" with Iran.

Washington has accused Iran of direct involvement in the recent wave of bombings carried out by the militant Palestinian group Hamas and is seeking European support for its strategy of isolating the Tehran government.

Israeli Premier Shimon Peres earlier this week told the visiting French and German foreign ministers to cut all ties with Iran.

But the major EU powers — Britain, France and Germany — are unconvinced that Iran is

directly involved in the Hamas bombing campaign and fear that the US approach will simply consolidate the position of anti-Western hardliners in the country.

The ministers were not expected to focus on the Middle East until Sunday. Today's working lunch and afternoon discussion was due to be taken up with preparations for the upcoming inter-governmental conference (IGC), which is to reform and streamline EU decision-making in preparation for the expansion of the union from 15 to 25 states or more over the next decade.

The IGC will be formally launched by EU leaders at a summit in Turin, Italy, at the end of this month. Negotiations are open-ended but are expected to be wound up some time next year.

At the heart of the debate is the extent to which member states are willing to relinquish or pool sovereignty in the

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# Row over bank loan: Husband kills wife, UP member

From Our Correspondent

GAIBANDHA, Mar 9: Two persons were killed and seven others, including a union parishad chairman injured by a man who had a quarrel with his wife over a bank loan, reports UNB.

At one stage the husband struck his wife with a sharp weapon and set their house on fire. Meanwhile, some neighbours, including chairman Mahabub Rahman and a member came to rescue her. But Anwar Ali also attacked them. His wife Amina Begum and UP member Dulamtia, 45, died on the spot. Seven others sustained injuries. Three of them were admitted to Rangpur Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Later local people caught the killer and handed him over to police.