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## NEWS BRIEFS

### Chief Adviser visits Sayem, Sufia Kamal

Chief Adviser Muhammad Habibur Rahman yesterday visited former President Justice Abu Sadat Mohammad Sayem, Professor Emeritus Sirajul Haq and poet Begum Sufia Kamal. The Chief Adviser went to their residences in the morning and spent some time with the distinguished personalities, reports UNB.

### AL extended meet Apr 18

An extended meeting of the Awami League will be held on April 18 at 10 am at the Party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue. All executive committee and Advisory Council members and Presidents of the district and General Secretaries of the district and thana Awami League and former parliament members will attend the meeting, reports UNB.

### 23 firearms recovered

Police yesterday seized 23 firearms, some ammunition and explosives from different parts of the country during the arms recovery operation. The seized arms and ammunition included two revolvers, two pistols, 14 pipeguns, one single-barrel gun, three sawed-off one LG, 46 bullets and cartridges, 14 bombs. Police also arrested seven people on charges of possessing illegal arms and explosives, reports UNB.

### Body recovered in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Apr 12: Police recovered a bullet-ridden body of a young man last night from Nasirabad area of the city. The victim could not be identified immediately.

## AL demands at presidium meet

# Place defence ministry under Chief Adviser

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League yesterday demanded immediate placing of the defence ministry under the disposal of the Chief Adviser from that of the President.

"If the defence ministry remains under the disposal of President it might make the armed forces controversial," a resolution adopted at a meeting of the AL presidium said. "It has also raised confusion among the people about holding of a free and fair election," the resolution pointed out.

With Sheikh Hasina in the chair, the meeting, held at her Dhanmondi residence, was attended by the party's presidium members Sayeda Zohra

Tajuddin, Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan, Qamruzzaman, Tofael Ahmed, Abdur Razzak, Amir Hussain Amu and Dr Mohammad Selim.

The meeting felt that the President virtually expressed his no-confidence in the caretaker government by keeping the defence ministry under him. Keeping of the defence portfolio under the President is also contrary to parliamentary democracy and later the spirit of the Constitution, the resolution said, according to party press release.

Talking to this correspondent Tofael Ahmed said, "We discussed all aspects of the latest political development in the

country. The issue of the defence ministry came up very prominently in the discussion." Tofael said his party would continue to demand transfer of the defence ministry under the disposal of the Chief Adviser. It is very important now because the country is preparing for general elections.

The press release also said that illegal arms were not being recovered from across the country properly and that a free and fair election would not be possible without recovery of the arms and arrest of the arms holders.

The AL urged the caretaker government to probe why the

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## 3 parties may set common candidates against BNP stalwarts

By Staff Correspondent

Although the Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami are yet to decide on an electoral alliance, leaders of the three parties have already reached an understanding that they would set common candidates in the constituencies from which BNP stalwarts contest, sources in the parties said.

"We have so far reached an understanding that we shall set common candidates against the top ranking BNP leaders in the forthcoming general elections," a leader who usually attends the three party liaison committee meetings told The Daily Star yesterday.

When asked whether the three parties would eventually forge a general electoral alliance, the leader, on condition

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# 14 SC judges' posts vacant, 73542 cases pending

By Morshed Ali Khan

Posts of 14 judges are vacant for about a year while 73,542 cases are pending with the two divisions of the Supreme Court (SC), sources in the SC said.

The SC is composed of two divisions — the High Court (HC) Division, and the Appellate Division.

A total of 1,934 cases are pending with the Appellate Division where the post of one judge out of five is vacant. In the HC division 71,608 cases are pending with posts of 13 judges remaining vacant.

The number of pending cases is increasing rapidly creating a huge backlog. Lawyers and judges say it will be difficult to clear the backlog unless the government fills up the vacancies immediately and creates more posts of judges.

The cases include hundreds of constitutional cases, land

disputes, about 20,000 criminal matters including detentions and litigations of public interest, the sources said.

There is a government sanction for forty judges in the High Court Division, it was learnt. Over the last one year three sitting judges died and five went into retirement. At present there are 27 judges in the HC Division.

According to Article 94 (2) of the Constitution, the President appoints the judges. As per the procedure, the Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs prepares the list of prospective candidates and then the President decides. But traditionally the ministry refers it to the Chief Justice who in turn sends the list to the President.

At present the High Court Division is able to dispose of between 1,000 and 1,500

cases a month, the sources said. The Supreme Court has 104 weekly holidays and about three months' vacation a year.

"But the problem is that by the time we clear 1,000 cases, another 2,000 get stockpiled," said an official of the High Court Division. "Now about 100 judges are required to clear the cases."

Another official of the SC requesting anonymity said: "Hundreds of people are rotting in the jails for years without trial due to this situation in the SC." The situation in the lower courts is simply "horrific," he added.

"There are cases which require 15-20 minutes' hearing for disposal but we are unable to do anything since these cases do not reach the level to be heard and the suffering of the people mount," the official

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## Rupali Bank warehouse at Hatkhola gutted: 20 hurt



Fire servicemen extinguishing blaze at the Rupali Bank godown at Hatkhola in the city yesterday. — Star photo

By Staff Correspondent

At least 20 people including 12 fire service men were injured and a huge stock of chemicals, motor bikes, bicycles, tyres and tubes of motor vehicles and other goods were burnt in a devastating fire at a warehouse of the Rupali Bank in the city yesterday.

The fire broke out in the warehouse of the foreign exchange branch of the bank at the ground floor of a 7-storey building at Hatkhola, at around 11:20 am, fire service sources said.

The adjacent Hatkhola branch of the bank was also partially damaged in the fire, according to an official of the bank.

More than 30 drums with different chemicals, around 30 motorbikes, 20 bicycles, a huge stock of tyres and tubes of different types of motor vehicles and yarn were burnt, the sources said. Bank sources added that all the goods in the godown were insured.

Some firemen were injured when the drums exploded inside the godown, said an official of fire service.

Of the injured firemen, Majibur Rahman and Humayun were admitted to the Orthopaedic Hospital while Lakal was taken to the IPGMR in serious condition. The others were admitted to the DMCH, he said.

The cause of the fire and

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## Try killers of party workers at Ctg: BNP

The Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has urged the caretaker government to arrest the killers of its workers in Chittagong and take legal action against them to create an atmosphere conducive to holding free and fair polls, reports UNB.

The demand was voiced at a condolence meeting of the party, held in front of its central office here yesterday as part of BNP's Mourning Day programme to protest the killings.

The meeting, presided over by BNP Secretary General Barrister Salim Talukder, also urged the government to take effective measures for curbing terrorism "let loose by Awami League's armed cadre across the country."

A special prayer was offered at the meeting for the salvation of the departed souls of those killed in the port city during a meeting addressed by BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleida Zia on April 5.

The BNP Secretary General alleged that confusion has been created among the people about the neutrality of the caretaker government as it failed to take measures against 'identified' terrorists and hoodlums.

He reiterated the party's call to the caretaker government not to harass innocent people in the name of arms recovery.

Talukder said, "It was the Awami-BKs alliance terrorists who had killed our five workers in Chittagong."

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## SAARC Sectt needs to be reorganised, says Secy-Gen

The new SAARC Secretary General, Naem U Hasan, said in Dhaka yesterday that the regional forum would gear up its activities specially in the agreed areas of trade and economy, reports BSS.

Talking to newsmen at the Zia International Airport on his arrival here, on a four day visit to Bangladesh, the Secretary General said that the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) had entered into an important phase of its existence.

He said that during his visit to Bangladesh as the new Secretary General he would call on the President and the Chief Adviser and discuss the future activities of the forum. He said that he would also meet the Foreign Secretary.

"Bangladesh, he said, played a very active and key role in the formation of SAARC to promote regional cooperation among the seven South Asian countries."

Director General, at the SAARC Desk of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Humayun Kamal, Mrs Kamal, Pakistan High Commissioner, Kamar Elahi and Mrs Elahi, received the Secretary General and his wife at the airport.

Director at the SAARC secretariat, Liqueet Ali Chowdhury, also accompanied the Secretary General.

Asked what would be his

areas of stress as the new secretary general Naem U Hasan said the secretariat had to be reorganised to cope with the new responsibilities of increased cooperative activities being sponsored by the forum.

He also emphasised on increasing the relations between the SAARC and other regional bodies and the United Nations. He said that the SAARC had already established contacts with the other regional bodies as well as the UN.

The secretary general said that the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) had to put into effect to gear up economic, trade and commercial relations among the seven member countries following these decisions in this regard.

He said that economic, trade and commercial relations would actually be in the focus of SAARC cooperative activities as all the member countries already agreed to promote.

The Secretary General said that in the key area of South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement (SAPTA) a number of steps had already been taken to put the agreement into effect.

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## Indian EC panel's suggestions on Bangladesh polls

NEW DELHI, Apr 12: India's election commission on Thursday made suggestions to make national polls in Bangladesh transparent and end controversies, reports AFP.

Election commissioner G V G Krishnamurthy said he conveyed the panel's suggestions to Bangladesh high commissioner C M Shafi Sami when the diplomat met him for talks on holding free elections in Bangladesh in June.

"Bangladesh should also 'interact' with the seven member countries of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in order to bring transparency in its election system, Krishnamurthy told reporters after meeting with Sami."

"A group of Indian journalists who are experts in the coverage of elections should be invited to Bangladesh to oversee the elections there," the poll commissioner said in his list of suggestions.

India's autonomous election commission has introduced sweeping reforms in the domestic electoral practices, ending large scale ballot fraud and decades of misuse of government resources by ruling party contestants.

A non-party interim government headed by former Bangladesh chief justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman began to prepare for the parliament polls, the third to be held in Bangladesh, the country of 120 million people since 1991.

## JCD blamed Attack on Hasan Imam, car damaged

Film artiste and leader of Ghatik Dalal Nirmul Committee Syed Hasan Imam came under attack by some young men near the Jatiya Press Club here yesterday, reports UNB.

Imam's private car was badly damaged as angry activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of BNP, allegedly chased him and hurled bricks at his car at about 6:30 pm. He, however, escaped unhurt.

Talking to reporters at the Press Club, Hasan Imam blamed JCD activists for attempting on his life. "They attempted to kill me," he said.

He mentioned BNP's declaration from its public meeting in the capital on March 30 and said on that day JCD leaders read out a 'black list' of intellectuals who extended support to the ousted-Khaleda movement for installation of a caretaker government. The list included his name.

Narrating the incident, Imam said he came under attack while passing through the Tophkhana road to attend a meeting of Surya Sen Smriti Parishad at Chittagong Samity Office, located on a lane of the road.

He said some people from a JCD procession, which was coming to the Press Club, chased him throwing bricks which damaged the rear window.

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## Dacoity at Dhanmondi

By Staff Correspondent

A gang of five armed men looted cash and valuables worth over Tk 15 lakh from a residence at Dhanmondi in the city in the early hours of Thursday.

Dhanmondi police said a case was lodged in this connection and one Shamim was also arrested yesterday. According to the owner of the house, the dacoits decamped with 2000 dollar, national saving certificate worth Tk 12 lakh, 27 tolas of gold ornaments, three wrist watches and one diamond ring.

# Cong-I polls manifesto retains option of N-bombs

NEW DELHI, Apr 12: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao vowed Friday to win India's upcoming parliamentary polls and threatened to produce a nuclear bomb if Pakistan developed one, reports AFP.

Rao, 74, told his first news conference here in four years that he was confident his beleaguered Congress (I) party would get a majority in the April-May vote despite large scale disaffection and corruption charges.

He defended his scandal-marred five years in office and said his government would pursue the sweeping free-market economic reforms he started in 1991 if it retained

power. "I am thinking in terms of the Congress getting an absolute majority" in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, Rao said after releasing the Congress election manifesto at his party headquarters.

"I can think of nothing else," he added, when asked to comment on widespread predictions of a hung parliament.

Rao, looking a little ruffled as he answered volleys of questions, said opinion polls which warned of a possible defeat for the Congress, the country's oldest party, were off the mark.

You cannot gauge the mind

of the voter in this country," he said. "The Indian voter is a very sensible person. When it comes to brass tacks to voting, he is nobody's fool."

"We are confident we will get a majority," he added. The 40-page Congress manifesto expressed concern that Pakistan was developing nuclear weapons.

"They (Pakistan) have already inflicted four wars upon India," it said.

"In case Pakistan persists in the development and deployment of nuclear weapons, India will be constrained to review her policy to meet the threat."

Rao, who makes it a point

to attack Pakistan in most of his speeches mostly over alleged Pakistani support for Muslim militants in Kashmir, refused to elaborate.

"There is nothing to elaborate," he said. "This is a policy."

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, denies having nuclear weapons, and instead accuses its foe Pakistan of pursuing a nuclear weapon policy.

Rao dwelt at length on his government's achievements over the last five years, particularly in the economic sphere, and said he was not at all worried by the many defections and expulsions from

his party ahead of the ballot.

He denied charges of corruption levelled against him, but ducked questions about his promise to rebuild a 16th-century mosque destroyed by Hindus in 1992 and his links with a controversial Hindu holy man.

Rao, who faces a daunting challenge from the opposition and is contesting from two constituencies this time, is to resume his election campaign Friday in three of India's 25 states.

AP adds: A bomb exploded in a government building next to the election office in Kashmir today injuring at least 10 people, police said today.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the blast, but police officials said they suspected Muslim separatists who have vowed to disrupt balloting in Jammu-Kashmir.

The explosion at Anantnag town, 110 kilometers south of a state capital, Srinagar, ripped apart one of the walls of the building, officials at the state police control said.

Sporadic violence also has broken out in other areas of India, where candidates are campaigning for the parliamentary election, which begins April 27 and is held on five separate days to give security.

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## Bearish trend at DSE Share prices dip

By Rafiq Hasan

The share market at the Dhaka Stock Exchange became dull again last week when prices of a number of companies issues declined, bringing the All Share Price Index down.

The All Share Price Index dropped to 812.94 points at the closing of business on Thursday from 818.93 points on the previous week's closing day.

On an average, 56 issues suffered losses daily while 38 gained and 10 remained unchanged last week.

The market had surged during the first week of this month and gained a 22-point price index rise, as it opened after long closure last month.

Market operators and share traders said that prices of most of the shares went down because a number of local investors and some foreigners were selling their issues fearing that the political situation in the country might deteriorate again.

Chairman of the DSE Intiaz Hossain, when contacted, said prices of some shares went up and some fell because the market is 'adjusting'. It is called 'correction', not depression.

The sudden fall of prices was the result of profit taking trends among some short-term investors, he said.

Intiaz Hossain, however, disagreed that a bearish trend was prevailing in the DSE because the turnover of the bourse — both in volume and value — was increasing.

"Some foreign investors are selling out their shares at much lower prices which affected the market and turned it bearish," said the director of a leading security firm.

He said due to bullish trend in the previous week, a large number of share holders had come to the market last week expecting good profit by selling old shares and this created a selling pressure at the market.

A member of the DSE said the coming Eid-ul-Azha might affect the market as many shareholders are trying to collect money for the festival.

On Monday last, the All Share Price Index was shown as 838.33 points — 27 points increase — a record jump in the recent past and some newspapers had carried speculation.

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Aamir Sahail m-o-m

## Pakistan win desert duel

Sports Reporter

A brilliant innings of 105 by captain Aamir Sahail set the stage for Pakistan's comfortable 38-run victory over traditional rival India in the opening match of the Pepsi Cup in Sharjah yesterday.

Powered by Sahail's sensible knock, Pakistan mustered a combative 271 for 5 in the 50 overs after they were sent in to bat by Indian skipper Mohammad Azharuddin.

Despite the docile nature of the batsmen-favouring Sharjah pitch, India wilted under the spin-wizardry of the Mushtaq (Saqlin and Ahmed) to be all out for 233.

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