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Cong willing to back new UF leader as Gowda agrees to step down

NEW DELHI, Apr 15: India's Congress (I) Party confirmed here today that the country's political crisis was over but warned a multi-party alliance bidding to form a government to choose its new leader carefully, report Agencies.

The political crisis has ended, Congress spokesman Ved Prakash said after his party announced late Monday that it would renew its backing to a United Front coalition government to avoid general elections.

The Congress at its central working committee meeting late last night welcomed the United Front's move to change Prime Minister Deve Gowda from the leadership and promised its full cooperation to form a non-BJP government at the centre.

With the new political development during the last 72 hours, the Congress said.

BNP team meets President, raises again issue of JS bodies

A three-member delegation of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday called on President Shahabuddin Ahmed and again raised the issue of delay in forming parliamentary committees, reports UNB.

During the meeting at Bangabhaban, the BNP leaders reiterated their proposal for proportionate representation of opposition parties in the parliamentary committees.

The delegation, led by BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan MP, included M K Anwar MP and Mr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain MP.

They expressed their appreciation for the government's efforts to form a non-BJP government at the centre.

Trading at Eid cattle market picks up

After a dull day in the Eid cattle markets in the city yesterday, trading picked up in the evening hours as large numbers of cattle started arriving.

Amid pouring rain, buyers and traders mingled in the muddy cattle markets. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) has set up 19 Eid cattle markets throughout the Metropolis this year. Loudspeakers were used near the markets to attract both buyers and sellers.

Prices of animals ranged from Tk 3,000 for a goat to Tk 1.5 lakh for a huge bull from Gaibandha. The asking price of goat weighing roughly 15 kg at the Dhanmondi cattle market was Tk 3,000. The trader, however, came down to Tk 2,800 when the buyer was about to walk off. Another buyer put the price of the same goat at around Tk 1,500. Nearby, a medium

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181 Hajj pilgrims killed, 800 hurt in fire

Bangladeshis safe, one dies in stampede

By Staff Correspondent

One Bangladeshi Hajj pilgrim died in a stampede following the fire near Mina yesterday, said an official at the Bangladesh Hajj Mission in Makkah last night.

The official, when contacted over telephone, identified the dead as Javed Ali Mondal of Jamalpur district.

"None of the tents for Bangladeshi ballottee pilgrims were damaged in the fire," the official said. "Only one tent of non-ballottee Bangladeshi pil-

grims was partially damaged." The official said that Javed Ali Mondal died during a stampede and there has been no other reports of deaths or injuries.

BSS adds: Forest and Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Awami League president member Amir Hossain Anu, State Minister for Religious Affairs Nurul Islam and Makbul Hossain MP visited the fire affected area of Mina im-

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MAKKAH, Apr 15: At least 181 people were killed and 800 injured in a fire that swept through the tent camps of pilgrims near Makkah today, Saudi officials said, report agencies.

The director of the Saudi Civil Defense Agency, General Mohamed Benali al-Saheli, announced the toll here.

Al-Saheli, cited by the official Saudi news agency SPA, said that 70,000 tents in Mina "were completely destroyed."

Another report quoting witnesses said at least 300 people died.

The witnesses said the dead were mostly Indians and Pakistanis. Ambulances, their sirens blaring, rushed scores of injured to hospitals.

Witnesses said they saw hundreds of bodies. Reporters for a local Saudi newspaper said at least 300 people died, most of them trampled in the panic caused by the fire.

Hundreds of thousands were left stranded by the fire on the arid plains of Mina outside Makkah, witnesses said.

The fire broke out as pilgrims gathered for the Hajj were beginning to move to Mount Arafat. There, they will stand together in prayer at dawn tomorrow.

More than 100 Indian pilgrims are believed to be among the dead, said Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Mohammad Hamid Ansari. "Our assessment is that the number of Indian dead runs into three figures."

At least 30 Pak pilgrims may have died in the blaze, Pakistan's ambassador to Saudi Arabia said.

"Thirty are believed to be dead. We fear they may all be Pakistanis," Ambassador Shaukat Amin, who visited the site of the fire told Reuters "there are probably more (dead) but I cannot speak for other nationalities."

A member of the Indian delegation in Makkah said camps housing Hajj pilgrims from India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia were ravaged by the blaze which swept through tents.

"All the Indian camp has been gutted, as well as

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Hasina in Mina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her entourage arrived Mina from Makkah yesterday morning to perform Holy Hajj, reports UNB.

According to a PID fax message, she performed Umrah on Monday night. She will proceed to Arafat this morning.

On her arrival at the Jeddah airport Monday she was received by the Deputy Governor of Makkah.

The holy Hajj begins in Makkah today. BTW will telecast the programme live.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina with Captain Akram Khan and other members of the Bangladesh cricket team at the civic reception at Manik Mia Avenue Monday.

Grand reception to cricket heroes

We dedicate victory to martyrs: Akram

By Staff Correspondent

"This is the victory of 12 crore people and I'm dedicating the victory to the memory of the martyrs of the Liberation War."

Akram Khan, captain of the Bangladesh cricket team, that earned rare honour for the nation by winning the sixth ICC Trophy in Kuala Lumpur, said this to the cheering crowd at a huge civic reception at the Manik Mia Avenue on Monday.

Manik Mia Avenue, the traditional venue for massive public meetings by the political parties, witnessed the largest-ever gathering of people who rose above all differences on the auspicious occasion.

The civic reception, accorded to the country's "Golden Boys," was attended by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her cabinet colleagues, top leaders of the ruling Awami League and the left-leaning parties, intellectuals, educationists, artists and lakhs of cricket fans. However, no leader of the opposition BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami participated in the government-arranged reception.

"Shubash (bravo) Bangladesh," shouted the Prime Minister, climbing the podium.

"Today I am presenting you the greatest gift of the (Bangla) New Year... our heroes... the new Tigers of Bengal," said a overjoyed Hasina who brought with her the victorious heroes before the human sea at the Manik Mia Avenue.

Red-and-green national flags, banners and festoons, reading congratulatory messages for the cricket heroes and the proud country, colourful balloons and portraits of the trophied cricketers flooded the spacious Manik Mia Avenue from Asad Gate to Farm Gate and the huge lawn of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. The whole area was crammed with cheering crowd.

In a sunny air, the whole area resounded with loud slogans chanting the names of Akram (the captain), Bulbul (vice captain), Greenidge (coach), Pilot, Shanto and other cricketers. Crowds were also seen dancing wearing decorated

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Hony citizenship for Greenidge

By Staff Correspondent

Honorary citizenship of Bangladesh will be conferred on Gordon Greenidge, the West Indian coach of the Bangladesh cricket team, for his contribution to bringing laurel for the nation.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina announced this at Monday's mass reception to the victorious cricket heroes at Manik Mia Avenue in the capital amid clapping by thousands of people who also chanted various slogans for Greenidge.

Greenidge trained the Bangladesh team to lift the title of the 6th ICC Trophy in Malaysia and book a berth in the World Cup cricket billed for 1999 in England.

The legendary West Indian cricketer took the responsibility of Bangladesh team as a coach on November 1, 1996 on a three-year contract.

Commentary

A grand opportunity missed

By Mahfuz Anam

In a tragic instance of failing to seize a God sent opportunity to build on the spirit of national unity brought about by our glorious victory in international cricket, the government and the ruling party showed a regrettable narrowness of vision and pettiness of mind. Instead of the civic reception at Manik Mia Avenue giving a much higher moral standing for our elected government, the way it was held made it look every bit partisan.

After our liberation in '71 nothing united the nation in the truest sense of the term then the outburst of happiness and jubilation that was triggered by the magnificent performance of our cricket team. And yet, when they returned to our soil we made them pawns of our petty politics.

We will be the first one to admit that compared to the tradition of partisanship in this country, Monday's civic reception was far less tinged with party slogans, party banners or portraits of party heroes. Even the speeches were not as one-eyed as we are used to listening.

However any comparison with the past is irrelevant and misleading because the event we were celebrating had no precedent. It was a "first" time event and the criteria of judging it will have to be totally different. And here the government and the ruling party totally failed to live up to the expectation of the people. In a sense the ruling

party showed disrespect to the occasion and to peoples' joy by not keeping it above all partisan political considerations. The most important question people attending the civic reception asked, why was the main opposition party absent? Was BNP invited? If so, how and by whom and at what level. Our information is that half hearted attempts were made at the initial stage, which were not serious to start with, and not followed up. Yes, some left parties (none of which have a single seat in the parliament) and

Separate cricket stadium to be built before WC

By Staff Correspondent

A national stadium, exclusively for cricket, would be built alongside the Tongi Diversion Road at Maghbazar in the city. "Directive has already been given to the authorities concerned for its construction," Hasina told the cheering crowd, while addressing grand civic reception accorded to the Bangladesh cricket heroes at the Manik Mia Avenue in city on Monday.

She said the ground would be prepared to facilitate the practice for cricketers long before the next World Cup.

A separate cricket stadium was a longstanding demand of the cricket fans.

bodies such as Sangskritik Jote were invited, and a feeling of going beyond Awami League was created. But frankly it did not look anybody.

The occasion was one of pure and undivided joy. In fact in addition to the glory of the event, people were also celebrating the fact that at last here was an event which went above and beyond all issues, "dates" and personalities that divide us. People wanted the joy of victory in cricket kept above politics. But their expectation was dashed from the very first instance when the 101 member National Reception Committee was formed on the evening of the 12th. Who chose these members? Why was AL Acting Secretary General made the chairman and the Dhaka city AL body secretary the member secretary of the National Reception Committee?

In the only meeting of the Committee held on 13th evening, left party leaders raised the question of BNP participation and urged that its leaders be contacted. We could not confirm that any attempt was made to contact the opposition. It is our view that with a National Committee like the one formed, and given the fact that no consultation was held while forming it, no self respecting opposition could join to celebrate any national event, leave alone one as important and high profiled as our cricket victory.

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BNP didn't get any invitation, says Mannan Bhuiyan

Star Report

The main opposition BNP did not receive any invitation for Monday's civic reception accorded to the members of Bangladesh cricket team at the Manik Mia Avenue in the city.

"Our party was not contacted at any level to be represented in the civic reception committee, nor to attend the reception at the airport or that at the Manik Mia Avenue," BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told The Daily Star last night.

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Dhaka, Delhi won't shelter 'terrorists'

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh and India have agreed not to give shelter to other country's "terrorists," like crossborder insurgents, in their respective lands, reports UNB. Both sides reached a consensus in this regard at a five-day Indo-Bangla border conference that concluded in New Delhi on April 12, said an announcement in Dhaka yesterday.

Bangladesh at the talks proposed that the Shantibahini camps set up in the Indian territory be evicted and the "terrorist" acts conducted from there be eradicated.

On the other hand, India sought cooperation so that the "terrorists" could not use Bangladesh land for unleashing

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Team due this month IMF to take stock of macro-economic situation

By Special Correspondent

An appraisal mission of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is arriving in Dhaka this month to review the macro-economic situation of the country, including the update on "culture of non-payment of loans", stock-market, balance of payment, aid disbursement, exports and disinvestment.

BGMEA reaction on US 'code of conduct'

By Staff Correspondent

The Ministry of Commerce and the Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday expressed mixed reaction to the "code of conduct" for garments manufacturers and buyers, proposed by the US administration.

A BBC World Service news bulletin at 6 am yesterday said the US administration has formulated a "code of conduct" for garment manufacturers and buyers and for "combating sweat-shop labour throughout the world." US President Bill Clinton has supported the proposed "code of conduct".

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The IMF mission, which will be in Bangladesh between April 26 and May 8, has already requested the government to furnish it with data on different macro-economic sectors, according to Bangladesh Bank sources.

The IMF requested information on non-banking financing of the budget and the impact of the downturn in the stock market," said an official of the Bangladesh Bank.

The queries the IMF has requested also include the status of sale of national savings instruments, evolution of government arrears to public enterprises over the last three fiscal years, and the measures to reduce these arrears.

The IMF also requested data on the "evolution of public enterprise arrears to banks to the government, and to other public enterprises over the last three fiscal years, and the outstanding stock of each category of arrears as of March, 1997."

On commercial banking, the IMF sought the report on performance of banks that have signed memoranda of understanding with Bangladesh Bank and audits of latest accounts of individual commercial banks.

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A group of people eating traditional panta bhat (watered rice) at the Ramna Park in the city on the Pahela Baishakh.

Pahela Baishakh celebrated

By Staff Correspondent

'Esho Hey Baishakh, Esho Esho,' the musical note of Tagore once again enthralled the hearts of Bangladeshis, rekindling the spirit of nationalism, on the first day yesterday of new Bangla year 1404.

As the year 1404 dawned, people of the country celebrated the 'Pahela Baishakh', first day of the new year, with a nationalistic fervour. People from all walks of life irrespective of caste and creed joined the traditional celebrations.

Baishakhi melas (fairs), colourful rallies, cultural functions and folk festivals were the main attractions of the day's festivities that synchronised this year with Bangladesh's emergence as a cricket power in the world.

In the city, the day's programme started with a traditional cultural programme at

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12 killed, 15 injured in Comilla road mishap

COMILLA, Apr 15: Twelve people were killed and 15 others wounded when a Dhaka-bound bus from Feni collided head-on with an ambulance at Chouddagram bazar here on Dhaka-Chittagong highway on Monday morning, reports UNB.

Police said the 12 people, including 10 vegetable vendors, were traveling by the ambulance from Dhaka to Feni. Eleven of the dead were identified as Babul, 25, driver of the ambulance, Hafez Ahmed, 35, an employee of Feni Nursing Training Centre, Rati Mistri, 50, Bojendra, 60, Narayan, 25, Narayan, 55, Milon, 40, Parimal, 30, Beharam Das, 40, Binod, 35, and Palash, 22.

The vegetable vendors are residents of Char Chandia, Char Dakkhin Furbo Chandia and Char Shahavikari villages of Sonagazi thana of Feni. They went to Dhaka to sell vegetables.

The bodies of the victims were handed over to their relatives after autopsy at Sadar hospital.

The injured were admitted to Chouddagram Thana health complex and Sadar Hospital. Police seized the bus, but its driver managed to flee away.

In another road accident, an unidentified minor boy was killed today at Lalpoil in Feni Sadar thana on Dhaka-Chittagong highway.

Another report from Manikganj adds: Four people were killed and 70 others injured in three road accidents on Dhaka-Aricha highway today, police said.

They said a Dhaka-bound bus tumbled into a roadside ditch at Nayadingi in Satoria thana of the district at about 9 am, killing three people and injuring 30.

One of the dead was identified.

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Bodies of two kidnapped children recovered in Ctg

CHITTAGONG, Apr 15: Patiya thana police yesterday recovered the bodies of two children who were allegedly kidnapped by miscreants two months ago, reports BSS.

According to district police, Chhuton Das, 12, son of Anil Das, and Chhuku Das, 8, daughter of Sunil Das, have been kidnapped by the miscreants on February 18 last.

Patiya police after massive hunt arrested one Milton in connection with kidnapping from Boalkhali on Sunday last. On the basis of his statement, police later arrested Sumon Biswas and Liton Chowdhury.

The three arrested persons

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3 rebel leaders for dialogue with Ershad

By Staff Correspondent

The three "rebel" leaders of the Jatiya Party who are challenging the leadership of HM Ershad have agreed to a dialogue with Ershad with some preconditions, according to party sources.

The presidium members of the party - Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury, Kazi Zafar Ahmed and Shah Moazzam Hossain - had decided not to continue politics under the party chairman, HM Ershad, according to reports published on April 9. Kazi Zafar Ahmed was also expelled from the party recently.

Talking to The Daily Star last night sources close to the three leaders said that they (the three leaders) had confirmed to a 11-member delegation of mid-ranking party leaders that they would join the dialogue. The

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Mild tremor jolts Sylhet, Bandarban, Cox's Bazar

By Staff Correspondent

A mild tremor shook Sylhet, Cox's Bazar and Bandarban districts Monday night.

No damage or casualty was reported.

Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet reports: A mild tremor was experienced in Sylhet Monday night at around 11-57 PM. There was no report of any casualty or damage.

UNB adds: A mild tremor shook the Bandarban hill district Monday night, but no casualty or damage was reported, district officials said.

In Cox's Bazar: According to the local Met Office, a quake shook the town at 11.58 pm and lasted for a few seconds.