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Pak military courts abolished

LAHORE, Feb 19: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif announced today that military courts, declared illegal by an earlier Supreme Court ruling, have been abolished, reports AP.

But in a televised address, Sharif bemoaned the sorry state of Pakistan, which needed the 'quick and cheap' justice that the army-run courts delivered.

"I just want to see peace in my country and my people secure," he said.

While there will no longer be army-run courts in Pakistan, Sharif promised that 'quick justice' still will be handed out, but now through civilian courts.

Pakistan already has in place special anti-terrorist courts operated by civilian judges. Unlike the military courts these are not characterised by speed. Under the rules that established the military courts, a case cannot run beyond eight days.

Cases before civilian courts can run months and sometimes years.

On Wednesday the Supreme Court declared military courts set up in Pakistan's lawless southern Sindh province were illegal, a ruling that was welcomed by human rights groups, lawyers and members of a military.

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Indian PM's historic bus trip to Lahore

Vajpayee-Sharif talks today

NEW DELHI, Feb 19: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee leaves here tomorrow for Pakistan, inaugurating the long-awaited bus service between Delhi and Lahore, reports BSS.

Vajpayee will fly to Amritsar from here in the afternoon. He will board the bus at Amritsar for the Wagah border in Pakistan.

The Indian prime minister will be received by his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif at Wagah and from there the two leaders will fly to Lahore by a helicopter.

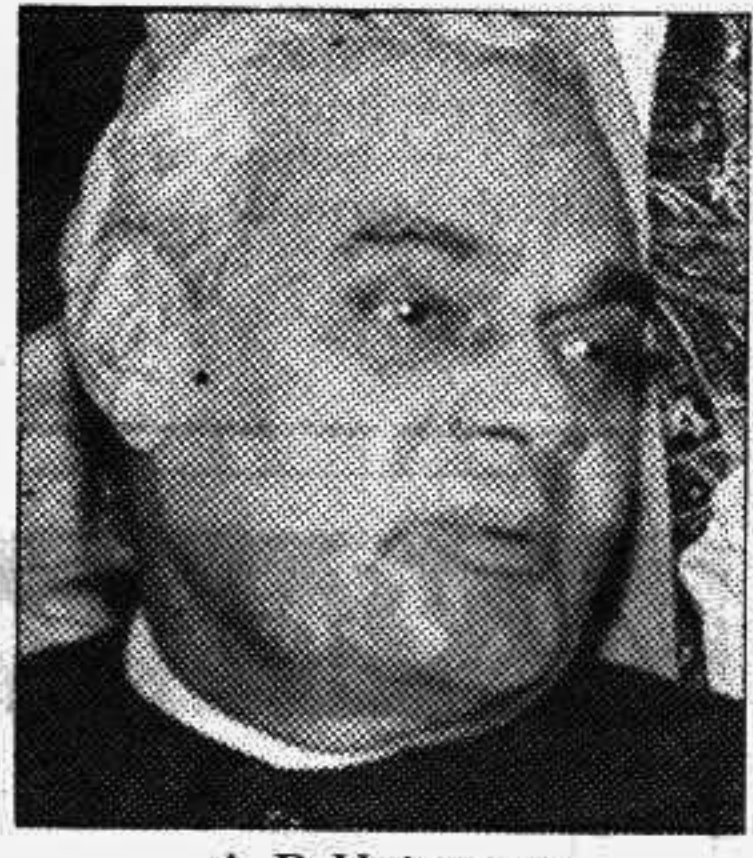
The visit dubbed here as "historic" as it would be the first meeting between the two prime ministers in last 10 years.

All bilateral issues, including the contentious Kashmir problem which caused two wars between the two South Asian neighbours will come up for discussion between the two leaders, Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh said.

Briefing newsmen here today, an official of the prime minister's secretariat, Ashok Tandon, said that Vajpayee would be accompanied by a high-level delegation as well as a number of Indian celebrities.

The delegation, he said, would include External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Punjab Chief Minister Prakash Singh Badal, Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dixit and Foreign Secretary K Raghunath.

The celebrities are: film star Dev Anand, Rajya Sabha member Shatrughan Sinha, lyricist Javed Akhtar, former Indian cricket captain Kapil Dev, former Indian hockey captain Zafar Iqbal, journalists Kuldeep Nayar and Arun



A B Vajpayee

Nawaz Sharif

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Khaleda protests arrest of city BNP leaders

BNP chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia has threatened to give a befitting reply to government's undemocratic activities, reports UNB.

In a statement yesterday, she protested the arrest of city BNP leaders Mohammed Mohon and Borhanuzaman.

Begum Zia said the ruling party is carrying out repressive action on opposition leaders and workers and harassing them by filing false cases, in a bid to establish autocracy in the country.

"Situation has gone to such extent that over 100 cases have been filed against one worker. The government has created a history by lodging 107 false cases against Mohammed Mohon, member secretary of Kotwali thana BNP during last two and a half years," she said.

She mentioned that ruling party's student leaders and workers at Jahangirnagar University have celebrated 100th day of repression on female students of the university.

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Fear of violence dampens election mood, campaign

By Nazmul Ashraf and Parveen Ahmed, back from Narsingdi

Fear of violence on the election day is a bit holding back electioneering ahead of the February 25 polls in Narsingdi municipality.

Although campaigning has not met any obstacles from the boycotting opposition parties as yet, many doubt the prospect of a peaceful voting as an opposition-called shutdown is due on the election dates - February 23-25.

Ruling Awami League-backed candidates dominate the race but there are a good number of contestants, including a chairman hopeful, belonging to opposition parties.

Abul Hayat Sarkar, joint secretary of the district Jatiya Party, is one of the five chairman candidates. Another candidate, Shamuzzaman, reportedly enjoys the blessings of local BNP which has many other members in the race for ward commissioners. Prominent among them are MA Dayan and Habibur Rahman Hobi, both in the party's local executive committee.

But the battle for chairmanship, as seen by many, will be between incumbent Abdul Matin Sarkar of AL and Abul Hayat Sarkar of JP.

Also in the race are 53 candidates for nine general seats of commissioner and 14 for three reserved seats for women.

During a day-long visit to Narsingdi town on Wednesday,

Narsingdi municipality

The Daily Star correspondents saw a festive look there. Big election symbols, banners, posters and wall writings were all around seeking votes for the candidates. There was continuous canvassing through loudspeakers and from election camps at different points.

At dusk, canvassers in colourful processions started thronging the streets of the town and candidates began door-to-door campaign.

Yet, all these seem to have failed to stir enough enthusiasm among voters, as should have been the case, because of widespread apprehension of violence on the election day.

Voters seem more or less ready to turn up at the election centres. But their turnout will largely depend on the situation

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Ershad leaves for Kathmandu

Jatiya Party chairman H M Ershad left here for Kathmandu yesterday afternoon to attend an international conference beginning today, reports UNB.

Prime Minister of Nepal Girija Prasad Koirala will inaugurate the conference, said a JP press release.

Ershad will present a keynote paper on "Strategy for the New Millennium" in the

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Prayer Timings

February 20		
Azan	Jamaat	
Fajr 5-27	5-31	
Zohr 12:15	1:15	
Asr 4-30	4-35	
Maghrib 6-00	6-03	
Esha 7-15	7-20	

Source: Islamic Foundation



Pictures of the Language Movement martyrs being put on display at different points in the capital by the Dhaka City Corporation on the eve of the Amar Ekushey.

Kazi Aref laid to rest

Kazi Aref Ahmed, central leader of JSD and valiant freedom fighter, who along with his four other party colleagues were killed on Tuesday at a public meeting in Daulatpur of Kushtia, was laid to eternal rest at the Shaheed Intellectuals graveyard at Mirpur yesterday afternoon, reports BSS.

Political advisor to the Prime Minister Dr S A Malek, Water Resources Minister Abdur Razzak, Fisheries and Livestock Minister and JSD President A S M Abdur Rab, Awami League President Amir Hossain Amu, JSD General Secretary Hasanul Huq Inu, JSD leader Nurul Alam Zia and a large number of grief-stricken people attended the burial.

Earlier, the fourth and last namaj-e-janaza for Aref was held at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque after Juma prayers.

The Gul Khawani of the slain leader will be held at his 14/3 Avoydas Lane residence after Asr prayers today, family sources said.

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47th anniversary of Language Movement tomorrow

By Staff Correspondent

All is set for the observance of Amar Ekushey with a grateful nation preparing to pay homage to the martyrs of historic Language Movement on the Shaheed Day tomorrow.

This year's Ekushey would be the 47th anniversary of the epoch-making event that led to the establishment of Bengali as a state language in the then Pakistan and eventually the emergence of an independent Bangladesh.

People across the country will pay homage to the martyrs and pledge afresh to make their dreams for a democratic order, exploitation-free society and economic emancipation of the masses a reality.

On February 21, 1952, the heroic sons of the soil including Salam, Jabbar, Barkat, Rafiq and Shafiq had made the supreme sacrifice for upholding the dignity of the mother tongue.

They embraced martyrdom when police opened fire on the students demonstrating under the banner of All-Party Students Action Committee against conspiracies of the Pakistani rulers to impose Urdu as the only state language.

The day is a public holiday and the national flag will fly at half-mast atop all government and private buildings.

With the clock striking 00:01 Saturday night, bare-footed people wearing black badges will throng the Central Shaheed Minar to pay homage to the martyrs. They will sing in a chorus: "Amar Bhaiyer Rakte Rangano Ekushey February... Ami Ki Bhulite Pari (Can I forget the blood of my brother...)

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Govt plans permanent trade fair venue

Star Report

The Ministry of Commerce is seriously considering a proposal to construct a permanent venue for the annual Dhaka International Trade Fair (DITF), a highly placed source said.

The DITF, an international event for promotion of local exports, has created much enthusiasm among exporters and importers at home and abroad.

"The Ministry is considering the matter a top priority as the temporary construction of pavilions, stalls and other structures involves huge cost and large employment of manpower," the source said.

"A permanent venue for the fair can save huge financial involvement and avert wastage of human resources every year," he said.

Public Works Department (PWD) constructs the preliminary fair ground and other amenities for fair goers and this requires a huge budget, the source said.

This year's International Trade Fair (DITF) '99 began on February 2 with entries from as many as 30 countries.

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Aref murder

Over 70 suspects arrested

In a combined operation against the outlaws, more than 70 suspects have been arrested following Tuesday's brutal killing of JSD leader Kazi Aref Ahmed and four other leaders of the party in Kushtia, reports UNB.

"More arrests will be made, and we're hoping that the terrorists would be tracked down soon," Home Secretary Saifur Rahman told the new agency last night.

He said police backed by paramilitary BDR personnel had launched the operation along the Kushtia-Chudangangajhenidah belt to flush out the "terrorists" from their hideouts.

Rahman said BDR troops assisting the police have been put on alert along the border so that the culprits could not sneak away.

In reply to a question, he said they were able to dig out some clues on the basis of preliminary report, but "we don't want to divulge that until CID investigation completes."

'Murder of JSD leaders pre-planned'

From A Special Correspondent

KUSHTIA, Feb 19: Police are now convinced that the brutal killing of five JSD leaders including Kazi Aref Ahmed Tuesday last in Daulatpur was pre-planned and was a result of internal party conflict. They are now pursuing some 'mysterious clues' to detect the killers.

The chairman of the Arta union parishad under Daulatpur thana, where the leaders were addressing a public meeting just before the incident, had left the meeting venue, according to eyewitnesses.

Police sources said that some central and ranking leaders of JSD might have been involved in the killing "because the incident was immediately communicated to BBC in London". The posters which were pasted in various places of the village announcing the meeting did not carry the name of Lokman Hossain, president of Kushtia district JSD, which seems mysterious. Both the district JSD president and its secretary were killed. A top central leader of the party who was supposed to address the meeting did not go to Daulatpur, creating suspicion among people, the sources added.

As to the absence of police, it is now learnt that request for police protection was actually not conveyed by the local authorities. It is suspected that the request was not deliberately conveyed by certain party leaders.

There has been no progress in the last three days except the arrest of 70 persons in connection with the brutal killings. They are now being interrogated.



Who wants to get left behind? Thousands leave the city as a virtual nine-day holiday started yesterday with the weekend followed by Shaheed Day, only one working day, opposition-called three-day hartal and another weekend. The photo shows home-bound people jostling to get into a train at Tongi station.

WB expert tells The Daily Star \$5m project for 'cleaner air' being finalised

By Shehab Ahmed

A World Bank environment expert has emphasised the need for private sector initiatives and expansion of credits for operators to have cleaner and fuel efficient three-wheelers to help reduce air pollution in urban areas including Dhaka city.

"The WB could help the private sector in expanding the cleaner and efficient technology to improve air quality with better vehicles," Carter Brandon told The Daily Star in an interview.

The government and NGOs could supplement the private sector initiatives to encourage auto-rickshaw operators and drivers to invest in cleaner and fuel efficient vehicles.

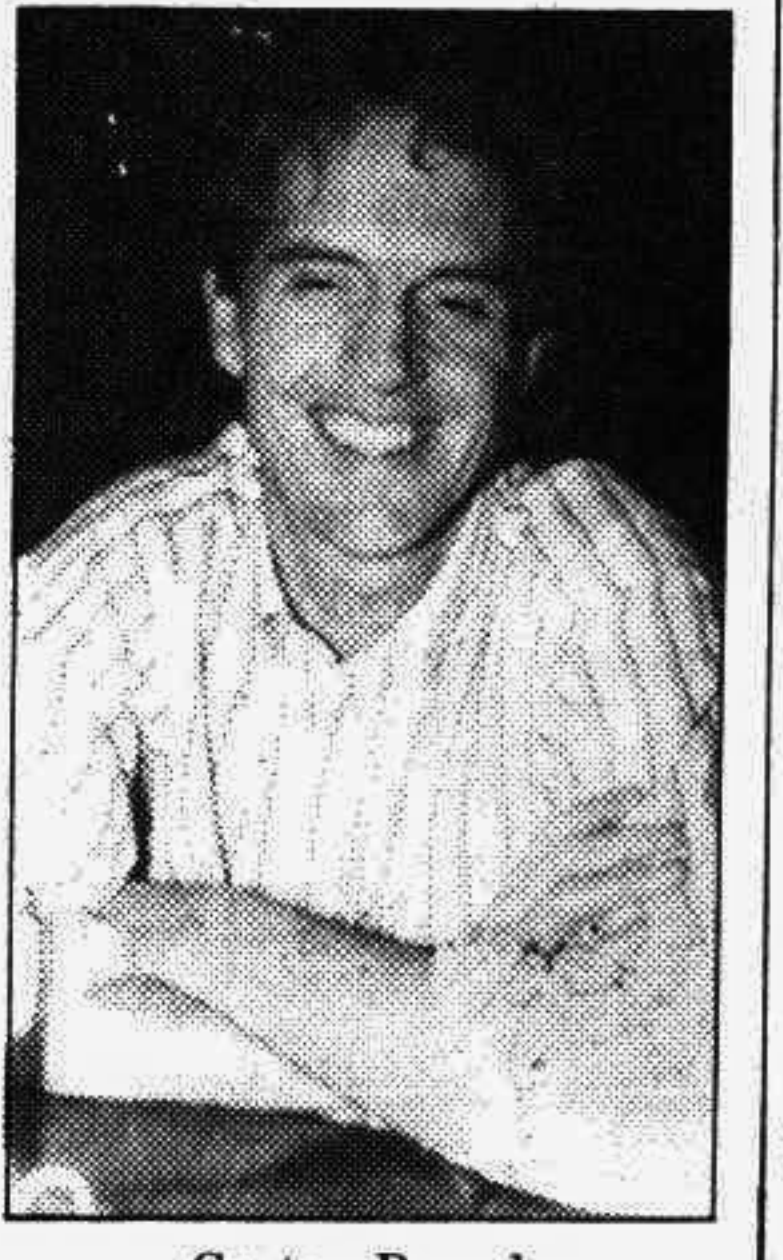
Brandon was in the city for talks with officials on the WB aided five million dollar Air Quality Management Project which targets cleaner air in Dhaka and other urban centres in the next three years.

Details of the project have been finalised and it is waiting for approval of ECNEC. It is likely to be 'fully operational' from July, he said.

The project is also 'seeking help' from oil companies for marketing better lubricants and unleaded fuel and efficiently monitoring their quality. Brandon said. The companies assured cooperation in this regard as they found it 'businesswise a good proposal'.

"If you recycle the lubricants, it is not good business for the oil companies," he said referring to recycled lubricants which are very popular among drivers of the two-stroke engine vehicles.

They use a certain percentage of engine oil with the leaded



Carter Brandon

Sagarmoy Ghosh passes away

CALCUTTA, Feb 19: Sagarmoy Ghosh, who became inseparable from 'Desh', the much-respected Bengali magazine which he edited for over 50 years till 1997, died at a south Calcutta nursing home today, reports PTI.

Ghosh, 87, who had been in hospital following respiratory problems, was released on Wednesday. But he was again rushed to the nursing home as his condition worsened.

He left behind his wife, a daughter and a son.

Born in erstwhile East Bengal, Ghosh had his early education in Santiniketan where he also excelled in the performing arts under the tutelage of Rabindranath Tagore. He soon made a mark in the local cultural scene, taking part in music, dance, recitals and plays performed by the Ashram troupe.

A voracious reader, Ghosh

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