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Pre-hartal clashes in city

Star Report

At least four mini-buses were set on fire, a number of other vehicles damaged and about a dozen people wounded as clashes broke out between pro and anti-hartal activists last night in different parts of the city.

Opposition parties had earlier staged demonstrations, some with lathis, hockey sticks and torches, to garner support for their respective calls. It left the city streets virtually deserted in the late evening.

Gunfire and home-made bombs were used during the violence in Mahakali, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Kamalapur, Dhamondi and old quarters of the city.

Trouble broke out after gunmen had opened fire and hurled bombs near Golapshah mazat and Pir Yatami Market at a torch procession of BNP at

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Commercial bldg being built on Peelkhana Lake

By Staff Correspondent

A portion of Peelkhana, headquarters of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR), will be open to public for the first time as the authorities are constructing a six-storey commercial complex within its boundary.

About three acres of land will be sliced out from the famous Peelkhana Lake for the 22,000 square feet complex. The earnings from the project would be used for various welfare purposes of BDR, sources said. This is also for the first time that BDR has taken up a grand project to support welfare activities for its personnel, the sources said.

Having pumped out water from that part of the lake, workers are now doing the piling work on the lake's dry bed. An earthen barrage has been erected across the waterbody to

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Preparations for hosting D-8 summit reviewed

Preparations for the second summit of the Development-Eight (D-8) were reviewed at a meeting in the city yesterday with Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad in the chair, reports BSS.

The meeting took stock of the overall situation with regard to the preparation of the summit, Azad told newsmen at his chamber.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will preside over a meeting today in this connection.

The meeting sought opinion of different ministers on the Dhaka declaration to be adopted at the conclusion of the summit.

The senior officials of the member countries will start arriving from tomorrow to take part in the commissioners' (officials) meeting. The two-day meeting of the commissioners will be followed by the council

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Prayer Timings

February 23	
Azan	Jamaat
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

Municipal polls begin today amid tension

By Staff Correspondent

centres the day after.

A three-day staggered municipal election begins at 8:00 this morning amidst mounting tension and apprehension of widespread violence across the country.

According to EC sources, 516 candidates are in the electoral race for 136 posts of chairman, 5925 for 1296 ward commissioners (general seats) and 1678 are contesting for 432 reserved seats for women ward commissioners. This is the first time direct election for the reserved seats is being held.

Meanwhile, 42 candidates including five for chairman, have already been elected unopposed. The five municipalities which have their chairmen elected are Gopalpur, Ghatail, Naria, Basurhat and Laximpur.

The number of general commissioners and female commissioners elected unopposed are 26 and 11 respectively.

A large number of law enforcement agency personnel from police, Ansar and para-military BDR have been deployed at the polling stations. Army has been kept standby and will be called to assist the civil administration in case of emergency.

Meanwhile, the EC has already imposed ban on carrying

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Schedule for municipal elections

(By Administrative Division)

February 23

Rajshahi Division: Panchgarh, Thakurgaon, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Ulipur, Govindaganj, Joypurhat, Bogra, Godagari, Tanor, Natore, Serajganj, Bera, Faridpur, and Shantia.

Khulna Division: Kushtia, Alamdanga, Kotchandpur, Mashespur, Jessor, Narail, and Bagerhat.

Barisal Division: Patharghat, Mathbaria, Banaripara, Jhalakathi, Char Fashion.

Dhaka Division: Madhupur, Ghatail, Dhambari, Gouripur, Ishwarganj, Nandail, Mohanganj, Bajitpur, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Munshiganj, Pangsha, Kalkini, Gopalganj, Naria.

Sylhet Division: Sunamganj, Habiganj, Shaistaganj, Moulibazar.

Chittagong Division: Brahmanbaria, Barura, Laximpur, Kabirhat, Bashurhat, Bandarban.

February 24

Rajshahi Division: Birampur, Fulbari, Lalmonirhat, Shantahar, Shahjadpur, Chatmohor, Ishwardi.

Khulna Division: Patuakhali, Gouranandi, Burhanuddin, Doulatkhan.

Dhaka Division: Gopalpur, Bhauapur, Muktagacha, Trishal, Bhaluka, Netrokona, Kishoreganj, Rajbari.

February 25

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Hartal now for 66 hrs Opposition vows to resist vote

By Staff Correspondent

Vowing to resist the municipal vote staggered over three days, the BNP-led alliance of opposition parties goes for a three-day hartal across the country from today.

This is due to their awareness that the opposition workers in the municipal areas are weaker in comparison to the municipal polls without considering their demands including resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner. The polls at 136 of the country's 182 municipalities begin today.

This will be the third phase in a series of Opposition-sponsored hartals on the issue of local elections.

Sources say the opposition parties feel that the hartal should be enforced more effectively at the municipalities where elections will be held.

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Help hold free, fair polls: CEC

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena yesterday sought cooperation from all irrespective of parties to make the municipal elections free and fair, reports UNB.

"The Election Commission has taken all possible effective steps for holding the elections free and impartial," he told the nation over Betar and Television on the eve of the polls to 136 municipalities of the country.

Hena hoped that people would extend all out cooperation to the Election Commission for the greater interest of the country and socio-economic development of their respective areas.

Earlier, an 18-hour hartal had been enforced on the day of filing nominations on January 26 and then a 60-hour one, ending at 6 pm on February 11. On those two occasions, at least nine persons including a police constable were killed and hundreds others injured.

The liaison committee of BNP and three other parties --

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will be held for 66 hrs
Opposition vows to resist vote

By Staff Correspondent

However, they are not sure how far the hartals would be effective in obstructing the polling process.

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India, Pakistan vow to reduce risk of accidental N-war



Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (L) shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Atal Bihari Vajpayee (R) after signing a joint declaration at Governor House in Lahore on Sunday.

—AFP photo

LAHORE, Feb 22: The prime minister of Pakistan and India yesterday vowed to try to reduce the risk of an accidental nuclear war, reports AP.

They also promised to give advance warning of ballistic missile tests, but on the thorny issue of Kashmir they only agreed to keep talking.

Both Pakistan and India have missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads and capable of hitting populated areas in both countries.

"We shall take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorised use of nuclear weapons, according to a joint declaration at the end of a two-day visit to Pakistan of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

"On the thorny issue of Kashmir, the two governments shall intensify their efforts to resolve all issues," the declaration said.

On his return home Sunday, Vajpayee said he told his Pakistani counterpart that it would be very difficult to normalise relations if the slayings by pro-Pakistan militant groups continued in Kashmir.

I drew the attention of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to the killings ... and these must stop. If such killings of innocent civilians continued, it would be very difficult to normalise bilateral relations.

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Police find clues to Aref murder

KUSHTIA, Feb 22: The blueprint for the killing of five JSB leaders, including Kazi Aref Ahmed, had been chalked out in the house of Israfil Hossain in village Kalidaspur on February 15, reports UNB.

Sources investigating in the incident said Israfil who provided shelter to the killers was killed.

Two groups of 20 or 25 people were involved in the killing incident, they added.

The first group of 10 terrorists, equipped with firearms, was in the public meeting in disguise. They were to help another group to execute the plan, sources said.

The confusion over lowest bidder arose when it was found that CWHEC specifically excluded all taxes including duties and levies while Hyundai made no mention of taxes.

Later, Hyundai clarified that except import duties, it had included all taxes, VAT and levies in its bid and asked the authorities to

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Land development for Meghnaghat plant Ministry favours a Chinese firm ignoring 'dispute'

By Shahriar Khan

The Energy Ministry is likely to place its recommendations to the Cabinet's Purchase Committee today to award the contract for land development for Meghnaghat power plant to a Chinese firm, apparently without resolving the issue of lowest bidder, sources concerned.

The project, to be implemented by the Power Development Board (PDB), was delayed for the last two months as the project consultant was indecisive on who had offered the lowest bid. Two companies -- CWHEC of China and Hyundai of South Korea -- were claiming to be the lowest bidder, sources concerned.

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In August last, PDB invited tenders for the design and build turn-key contract for reclamation and embankment protection work at the 100-hectare site on the north bank of the

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Meghna. The bid was participated by four companies -- China National Water Resources and Hydropower Engineering Corporation (CWHEC), Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co of South Korea, China Harbour Engineering Company, China and Kumpulan Meda Liza Berhad of Malaysia.

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WTO chief backs LDCs' bid to get market access

By Staff Correspondent

Director General of World Trade Organisation Renato Ruggiero yesterday agreed with Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed to say that industrialised nations should open up their markets to the Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

"Your minister have referred to a proposal I made in a WTO meeting in Leon, (British prime minister) Tony Blair agreed to my proposal last May. I do not see much resistance to the proposal. I agree that this should be the objective of the next ministerial meeting scheduled to be held in December this year," Ruggiero told a meeting of the business community held in the city yesterday.

Commerce and Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed told the meeting that there were commitments from the WTO chief for giving market access to LDCs.

During yesterday's proceedings defence lawyers prayed for

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This was your dream, we

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hope and believe, made honestly and sincerely. We are anxiously waiting to see the outcome of the next ministerial meeting to be held in the US," Tofail said.

Ruggiero said that the implementation of the proposal for market access would mean "a zero obstacle to export of LDCs".

"Together with the access to developed countries and integrated technical assistance from World Bank, IMF, ITC and UNDP, we would move together in enhancing economies by capacity building."

He praised Bangladesh for successfully fighting the recent devastating flood. He said that Bangladesh was making progress in spite of facing