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Historic March 7 today

By Staff Correspondent
The nation observes the historic March 7 today.

On this day in 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman gave a call for independence in a historic speech before a mammoth public rally at the then Ramna Race Course Maidan (now Suhrawardy Uddyan) in the city.

"Ebarer sangram, amader mukti sangram, ebarer sangram swadhinatar sangram (This struggle is for our freedom, this struggle is for our independence)," thundered Sheikh Mujib, calling upon the people to be ready for independence struggle.

The March 7 speech is considered as a classic oratory which galvanised and inspired the entire nation of then 75 million people.

The nation started non-cooperation with the then Pakistan regime following the speech by Sheikh Mujib, who had emerged as the unchallenged leader of 75 million Bengalis following the general elections of 1970.

Then military-civil-bureaucratic clique of Pakistan refused to accept the people's verdict and pushed then East Pakistan.

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Khaleda concerned over 'entry of illegal arms'

BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed grave concern over the reported entry of illegal arms from across the border, reports UNB.

"Terrorism, extortion and abduction are going on unabated engulfing the entire nation," she noted with regret while exchanging views with the newly elected office-bearers of Dhaka Bar Association. President Advocate Abdur Reza Khan led the team to the official residence of the Opposition leader.

Begum Zia said huge arms were coming from across the border.

She called upon all nationalist forces to unite and launch an out government movement for the sake of country's independence and sovereignty.

Meanwhile, newly elected president of the Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (JUTA) Prof. Abu Syed along with 18 teachers of the University called on Begum Zia at her residence.

Convener of the University Teachers' Association (UTA) was also present.

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Prayer Timings

March 7		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-35
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-35
Maghrib	6-10	6-13
Esha	7-25	7-30

Source: Islamic Foundation

The Daily Star

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RANGS GROUP

More women MPs in JS demanded

The Daily Star Roundtable

By Staff Correspondent

Speakers at a roundtable conference yesterday said that woman representation in Parliament should be increased to 64 seats from the 30 seats that are currently reserved for them.

Some speakers felt that all women should be directly elected, while some others argued that reserved seats should continue for a few more years.

They also observed that the ministry of women and children's affairs should act as watchdog to monitor activities rather than involve itself in implementing projects.

They were speaking at The Daily Star organised roundtable on "Gender Equality: Where we are today", held at Hotel Sheraton. Editor Mahfuz Anam moderated the conference.

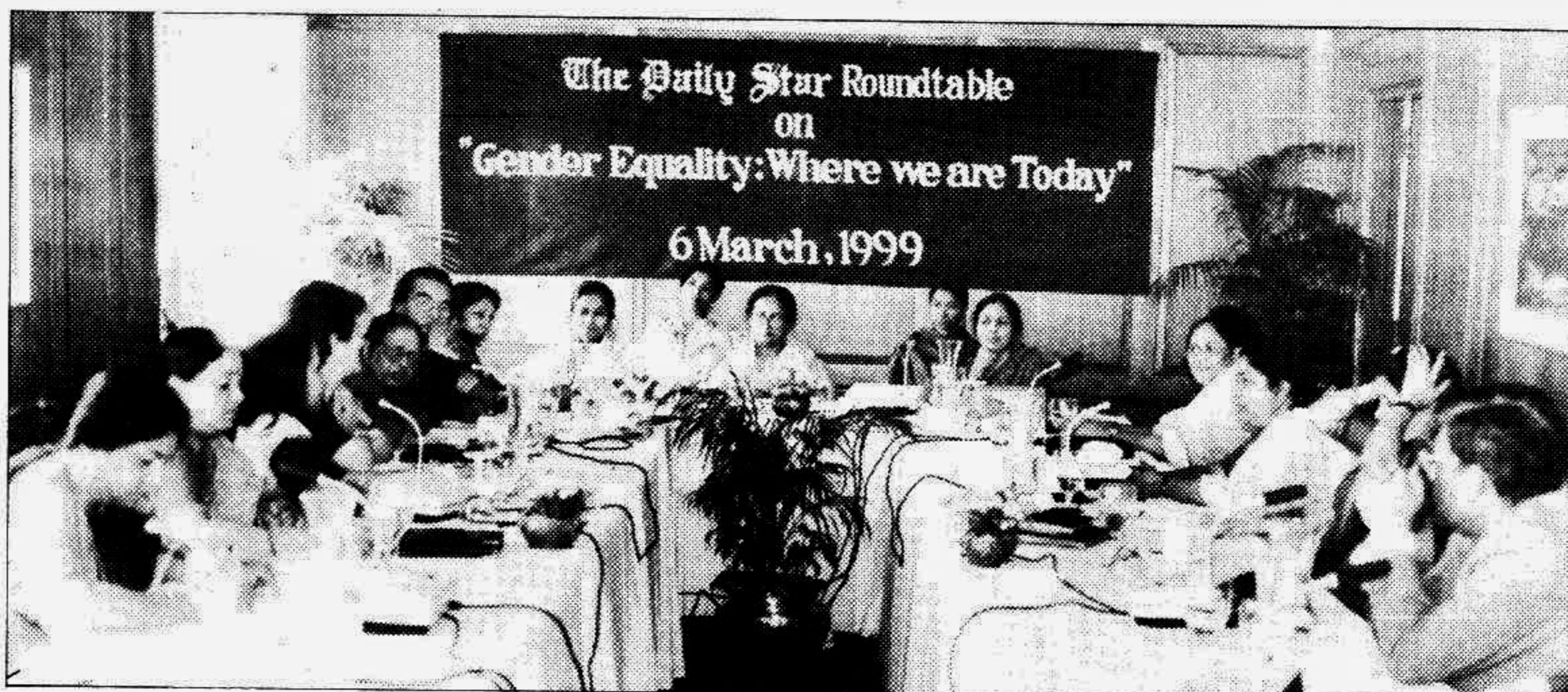
The participants called for a

change of mindset at all levels, especially among policy makers and bureaucrats, in a society fundamentally guided by male-dominated ideas and views.

Speakers expressed their disappointment at the role of the parliament that, since 1991, has not seriously debated any gender issues. The 37 MPs, including the 30 indirectly elected ones, have not been given any chance to raise women issues during the parliament sessions.

They expressed their frustration that political parties have not addressed the issue of everyday violence against women and the frequent rape of women and minor girls that have taken place in the last few years. The meeting called for an all-out protest against these occurrences.

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The Roundtable in progress yesterday.

— Star photo

Petrobangla okays, ministry intervenes

Okland's bid to transfer 80pc concerns to Tullow

By Sharier Khan

Okland, a low profile American oil company working in blocks 17 and 18, has finally revealed its true colour by applying for transfer of 80 per cent of its concerns in Bangladesh to a small Irish company, Tullow Oil, sources said.

Of this 80 per cent, five per cent has been proposed to be given to the local director of Tullow, Kazi Shahid Ahmed.

At a surprisingly fast pace, Petrobangla okayed the proposed transfer of Okland's concerns to Tullow within two days of seeking the permission last week, the sources said.

However, a high official of the Energy Ministry intervened

in the process and asked Petrobangla to seek legal opinion from the Law Ministry in the light of provisions of the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) before giving permission to Okland.

A Director of Petrobangla, who is apparently "pursuing" the matter, tried to argue that clearance was given "quickly" because otherwise, Okland's activities would slow down. The argument was however brushed aside, the sources said.

"In case of Shell-Cairn's share transfer, Petrobangla held talks, sent documents to the Energy Ministry and sought Law Ministry's opinion. One such case still remains unre-

solved with the Law Ministry as the PSC does not have provisions for such transfer of share," said a source expressing his surprise at the development. "But share transfer of Okland at a such remarkable pace is absolutely suspicious."

It has been rumoured for more than a year now that Okland secretly transferred operational rights in most of the two blocks to Tullow, which stirred many controversies by getting maximum favour from the government in the Second Round Block Bidding.

Okland has finally applied for government permission for transfer of more than three

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AL offers dialogue with BNP

The general secretary of ruling Awami League, Zillur Rahman, has made a fresh offer for "open dialogue" with the opposition BNP to resolve the current political problem.

"I convey through you our good intention to sit with BNP with open mind at any place, at any time," he told the UNB yesterday.

He categorically said the just-concluded municipal election, which was free, fair and peaceful, cannot be a subject of negotiation.

Results of municipal election where voters cast their ballots spontaneously and elected their representatives can never be cancelled, as being insisted by the opposition," the LGD Minister said.

He, however, said: "We are ready to discuss the forthcoming Upazila Parishad, City Corporation, Zilla Parishad and Gram Parishad elections as

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Dry spell threatens next rice crops

By Shehab Ahmed

After a virtually bone dry December-February, meteorologists and agriculturists are now watching the weather wearily, looking for the elusive rain-bearing clouds to break the long dry spell, preceded by the worst flood in decades.

"Unless the north-westerly dry winds in the upper atmosphere is overwhelmed by southerly/south-easterly wind, it is a bad news," a senior meteorologist watching the situation told The Daily Star yesterday.

Like the weatherman, administrators and farmers alike are watching the weather. If it does not rain soon, rice crops will be affected, agriculture experts said.

There was only two millimetres rainfall in the last three months. The last rainfall was recorded in late November in

the wake of a cyclonic storm. Since then, there was one millimetre rainfall each in Mongla and Rangpur and traces in some places during the last three months, raising fear of a long dry spell as temperature started soaring from this week, the meteorologist said.

The normal average of rainfall is 7.1 mm in December, 9.5 mm in January and 15.3 mm in February.

Asked what has gone wrong, another senior meteorologist said, until last week the north-westerly dry wind in the upper atmosphere up to 10,000 feet was holding the clouds back.

"But we noticed a slight change since yesterday. The southerly/south-easterly winds are being felt a little. If it continues in the next few days and the influence of the winds

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Crucial meeting on Kafco today

By Toufique Imrose Khalidi

Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed sits with the Kafco's shareholders and lenders today amid renewed pressure from foreign shareholders' lobby, which is insisting that the government accept the commercial settlement proposed by the defaulting general contractor.

Two Japanese companies, Chiyoda and Marubeni, were awarded the job of general contractor without any bidding, allegedly at an inflated price. Originally valued at roughly US\$ 300 million, the contract eventually went up to about US\$ 425 million, excluding taxes and other substantial items.

The two companies, along with the Japanese aid giving arm, are also shareholders of

the US\$ 600 million joint venture and have lent money to the project. One of them, Marubeni, has an exclusive sales agreement with Kafco for ammonia, one of its two products. The other offtake deal, for urea, went to American-owned Transammonia at the behest of Marubeni.

The minister said he had called the meeting to try and find a solution to the project's multifaceted problems "once and for all" but stopped short of saying that he was expecting it by today.

Tofail Ahmed has already said the government, being the largest shareholder of Kafco and guarantor of Kafco's loans, does not find the settlement ac-

ceptable. "If we accept the plant, and if it does not operate properly, then who's going to compensate," the minister said, speaking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Just ahead of the crucial meeting, Japan's Export Import Bank (Eximbank), a governmental agency which leads a syndicate of Japanese banks with US\$ 150 million in outstanding loans to Kafco, sent a strongly-worded note to the company and all its shareholders, calling the commercial settlement the "most probable and appropriate solution".

"We strongly hope that in order to cure the situation overdue, all shareholders should consider every possible solu-

tion, which include the commercial settlement that may be the most probable and appropriate solution we suppose."

The settlement, as proposed by the general contractor, calls for plant acceptance with all its faults which have forced the Chittagong-based factory to shut down as many as 37 times since it went into production in December 1994. The settlement will also give immunity to the contractors from Kafco's compensation demands in return for only US\$ 16 million, a figure well below the US\$ 25 million performance bond.

The minister says the company has lost as much as US\$ 120 million in lost production

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Bahrain's Emir dead, son assumes power

MANAMA, Mar 6: The Emir of Bahrain, a key Western ally who struggled to subdue unrest from the Persian Gulf island's Shiite Muslim majority, died today after suffering a heart attack on his palace, reports AP.

Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, 65, collapsed shortly after a morning meeting with visiting US Defense Secretary William Cohen, said an Information Ministry official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Emir did not show any signs of ill health earlier today, said the official, who added, "He was perfectly normal."

Agency quoted a palace statement as saying that the Emir, who ascended the throne in 1961, died of a heart attack. Sheikh Isa's son, Sheikh Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, quickly assumed the throne.

"I am assuming the rule of Bahrain, relying on God, exerting all the efforts possible to serve our country and our people," Sheikh Hamad, 49, said in a statement released by the news agency. He noted he would continue his father's policies.

Thousands of people gathered along streets, waiting to see the ambulance carrying Sheikh Isa's body pass en route to the royal cemetery in Riffa, 20 kilometers south of Manama, the capital.

Cars carrying dignitaries streamed into Riffa, where sobbing men and women scattered flowers on the streets in a traditional Islamic funeral custom. About 10,000 people attended the burial, which lasted



File photo of Sheikh Isa bin Salman Al Khalifa, the late Emir of Bahrain.

less than half an hour.

Members of the royal family and ordinary Bahrainis helped shoulder the wooden stretcher from the ambulance to the grave, with mourners pushing their way toward the body, wrapped in a gray-blue cloth. Sheikh Hamad and Prime Minister Sheikh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa attended the funeral.

Flags at government buildings were flying at half-staff as an official mourning period — three months for the government sector, five days for the private sector — began.

The transition of power was expected to be smooth because

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SNS to take to streets if its demands ignored

By Staff Correspondent

Sammitilo Nari Samaj(SNS) yesterday threatened that all women's organisations in the country will take to streets if the proposed women and child repression prevention law is enacted ignoring suggestions of women's rights bodies.

The SNS in a statement said the Cabinet has made a mockery of democracy by approving the proposed law incorporating in it all the clauses of the Women and Child Repression Prevention Act (WCRA), excluding only the one dealing

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4 policemen hurt in gunfight with 'terrorists' in Ctg: 3 held

CHITTAGONG, Mar 6: Four policemen were injured in a gunfight with 'terrorists' in a city early this morning, reports UNB.

ASP of Panchlaish Zone Obidur Rahman, SI Golapur Rahman, constables Noor Hossain and Mustafa Kamal were admitted to the police hospital with bullet wounds.

Police said the gunfight ensued when 'terrorists' suspected to be members of a BCL faction, opened fire at the police who came to round up an accused in the Kader killing case. Kader was shot dead in factional feud recently in CHT Polytechnic Institute.

Police, however, arrested Sayem, Rana and Khokon Uddin from the spot. They are identified 'terrorists' and are accused in several killing cases, police said.

Meanwhile, owners of some 600 petrol pumps in the city went on 24-hour strike protesting Thursday's looting of a petrol pump and killing of Abul Khair Bhulu at Love Lane in the city.

Petroleum Distributors' Samity demanded immediate arrest of the killers and recovery of the rifle and money

First day of strike at IU

From Our Correspondent KUSHTIA, Mar 6: The first day of 72-hour strike in Islamic University, called by JCD, passed off peacefully today.

No class or examination was held and no IU vehicles pined. JCD, the student wing of op-

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JP rebels hold grand meeting today

By Special Correspondent

Jatiya Party rebels are testing their strength in a "final show-down" with their former supreme HM Ershad by holding a grand meeting at a community centre in Dhanmondi today.

A number of top notchers and MPs are expected to attend the meeting, sources close to the rebels said.

"We are going to take stock of the situation and chalk out future course of action of the party after Ershad's somersault by joining heads with someone who had said he would never be allowed to come out of prison," a top JP leader, Anwar Hossain Manju, told The Daily Star last night.

He said the meeting, expected to be represented by the JP rank and file from all over the country, is the first such gathering.

It would not only discuss the party's future but also take stock of the current political situation and the party's role as a constructive opposition in parliament, he added.

Manju who fired the first salvo against Ershad's leadership on the issue of his resignation from Sheikh Hasina's Cabinet, has so far been able to gather support from a wide spectrum of the party, including Senior Vice-president Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury and president members Sardar Amjad

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Businessman assaulted by SB official's bodyguard

By Staff Correspondent

A bodyguard and driver of a senior official of the Special Branch allegedly assaulted a businessman near the Vagranus Nook School and College yesterday noon.

The incident took place when Manzurul Karim, the businessman, along with his wife, who is a teacher of the school, and child were going to the school driving a car, said Ramna police and the victim.

According to Karim, a resident of city's Mohammadpur area, he was slowly driving through a traffic jam in front of Ramna thana. Suddenly the bodyguard punched the bonnet of Karim's car and asked him to stop so that the SB official's car could cross the road. The SB official was not in the car during the incident.

As soon as Karim's wife told the bodyguard, who was in plain clothes then, to wait, he forcibly opened the driver's door and started punching Karim indiscriminately. Later, the driver from the official's car joined the guard.

Locals and onlookers then rushed to the spot and managed to catch the driver while the bodyguard ran and escaped. They proceeded to beat up the chauffeur, Karim added.

The names of the driver and the bodyguard could not be known immediately.

The SB official, when contacted last night told this correspondent that he heard about the incident and an inspector of city SB was investigating it.

Flat owners attacked by hired goons

By Staff Correspondent

A group of armed men attacked apartment owners of Prominent Housing and assaulted the flat owners, including women, who were then attending a meeting inside the housing compound at city's Mohammadpur area Friday night.

An official of Mohammadpur police told The Daily Star last night that the incident was the sequel to a long drawn enmity among Monzur Kader and the flat owners.

Police arrested six persons from the spot and produced them before the CMM's court yesterday. Police were deployed at the area soon after the incident, the official added.

A press release signed by the president of Prominent Welfare Society said last night that the group of about 50, equipped with sticks, iron rods, fire arms and crackers, broke open one of

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Sardar Amjad, Sheikh Shahid expelled from JP

Sardar Amjad Hossain and Sheikh Shahidul Islam, Jatiya Party president members, have been expelled from the party, reports UNB.

A JP press release said party Chairman HM Ershad yesterday removed Sardar Amjad and Sheikh Shahid from the presidium members and relieved them of all responsibilities of the party.