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Donors 'ready to meet' President

Bangladesh's development partners are ready to meet President Shahabuddin Ahmed in their bid to defuse political tensions for smooth economic growth of the country, said a diplomat.

"We're ready to meet the President..." French Ambassador in Dhaka Ms Renee Veyret told UNB while speaking about the diplomats' recent meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia.

Asked about the outcome of their parley with Sheikh Hasina on Sunday, she said: "We had a very good meeting with the Prime Minister."

She said both the Prime Minister and the opposition leader had discussed their problems and explained their positions in the current situation.

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CPB chiefs meet Khaleda, talk politics

By Staff Correspondent
Two top leaders of Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) yesterday had a long meeting with BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia at her official residence and discussed various issues related to the country's latest political situation.

Sources in both the parties said CPB president Manjurul Ahsan Khan and general secretary Mujahedul Islam Selim met came to see Khaleda Zia at 5 pm and continued discussion until magrib azan. Details of the discussion could not be known.

BNP sources refused to discuss.

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9 bills to appoint more than one Pro VC passed

Parliament yesterday passed nine bills providing for more than one post of Pro Vice Chancellor in the seven universities of the country, reports UNB.

Education Minister ASHK Sadeq piloted the Bills, which were passed by voice vote.

The bills are related to: Dhaka University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Jahangirnagar University, Khulna University, Shahjalal Science and Technology University, Sylhet and Agricultural University, Mymensingh.

Earlier, Opposition lawmakers came down heavily on the government for 'spoiling'.

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Quake jolts Rangpur

RANGPUR, Apr 6: A moderate earthquake jolted the district headquarters and adjacent areas early today, reports UNB.

Officials said the quake continued for six seconds beginning 3.40 am, but magnitude of the quake could not be ascertained in the absence of measuring scale.

However, there were no reports of damage or casualties.

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Today's issue of The Daily Star contains two special supplements on 1st National Day of Disabled Persons '99 on Page-9 and World Health Day on Page-10

Prayer Timings April 7

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5:30	5:35
Zohr	12:45	1:20
Asr	4:30	4:35
Maghrib	6:20	6:23
Esha	7:30	7:35

Source: Islamic Foundation

Decomposed body at DB office

CID arrests inspector, questions 8 others

By Staff Correspondent

CID last night arrested a detective branch (DB) inspector for his alleged involvement in the murder of Jajal Ahmed Shah.

Inspector Ziaul Ahsan was arrested 12 days after the decomposed body of Shafi had been found in the rooftop water tank of Detective Branch office at city's Minto Road under Ramna police station on March 25. The identity of the body was revealed on March 31.

CID investigators were questioning eight more DB men including two inspectors last

night. All the nine were members of the same DB team led by assistant commissioner Humayun Kabir, recently transferred to Chittagong. The new AC, Borhanuddin, took over last week.

CID investigators suspect that Shafi's killing followed row over distribution of money gained illegally from recovery of a huge quantity of smuggled heroine. One investigation source claimed that the DB men recovered 3.5 kilograms of heroin, worth about Tk 2.5-3.0 crore, based on a tip off from

Shafi in February.

Shafi was believed to have been killed because of what investigators thought the victim's demand for his share of the money.

Without leaving any official document, the suspected DB officials allegedly distributed about Tk 2.5 crore among themselves, the source said.

The DB men allegedly gave Shafi Tk three lakh to keep mum. But Shafi had allegedly demanded Tk 20 lakh more as his share.

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Rally gives deadline to govt

Arrest Manik within seven days

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Apr 6: An 'all-party rally' at Chhatrak today gave the government seven days for arresting ruling party MP Manikur Rahman Manik in connection with bomb explosions at his house and demanded exemplary punishment to him.

Otherwise, an 8-hour hartal will be observed in Chhatrak on April 17, it was announced at the rally, held at the Shaheed Minar at the thana headquarters.

A day-long agitation programme for April 15 was announced at the rally. If needed, further agitation programme would be launched, it was declared.

Senior leaders of Awami League, BNP, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami from Manik's constituency addressed the

rally held under the banner of 'Nagorik Forum' and presided over by Haji Nurul Islam.

The speakers included a former MP, Manik's constituency, Sunamganj-5, comprise areas in Chhatrak and Doara Bazar thana.

The speakers said, the MP was elected for framing laws in the Parliament and to ensure security to the people. But, instead of that, he turned his own house into a store of illegal weapons and a bomb-making factory, they said.

They also called upon the government to conduct a thorough investigation about the source of lakhs of Taka, allegedly recovered from the house of the MP.

The legislator along with his aides should be booked immediately.

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Money can buy full marks?

By Gobinda Bar

Ahead of the viva voce for appointment of primary school teachers, organised gangs in different areas of the country are allegedly collecting huge amounts of money from candidates who have qualified in written tests.

The 'gangs' are realising Tk 40,000 to Tk 60,000 from candidates alluring them 'full marks' in oral tests that began in the last week of March.

Local political leaders and government officials are also allegedly involved in the deals.

Like many others, a candidate in Rajoir under Madaripur thana told this correspondent that she gave Tk 40,000 to a local political leader who promised her 'full marks' in the oral test.

The candidate hopes that she would get a job if she gets 'full marks'.

Some 27,000 candidates who qualified in written tests held

in November last year, are scheduled to appear at the 20-marks oral tests. Tests are yet to begin in many districts though the Directorate of Primary Education earlier gave directives to district administrations to begin the tests by March 31.

More than 9000 primary school teachers including 6,000 women will be appointed by June in 63 districts excluding the three districts in Chittagong Hill Tracts, sources said.

A four-member committee headed by Deputy Commissioner is scheduled to take the oral test. Other members of the committee are the District Primary Education Officer and two other members nominated by Directorate of Primary Education and the Ministry of Primary Education.

When contacted, SM Haider, said

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PM's directive to ensure water supply in city

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked concerned officials to take all possible measures for ensuring adequate water supply in the city, reports UNB.

"You must solve the water problem in the city and ensure civic amenities," she said while addressing a high level meeting of LGRD and Cooperatives Ministry at her Tejgaon office in the morning.

The meeting reviewed the progress of Sayedabad Water Treatment Plant Project and functioning of the water supply system of the capital.

The current demand of water for the capital, having the population of 9 million, is 140 crore liter per day, whereas the capacity of water supply of WASA per day is 96 crore liter.

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Home Minister Nasim says

Culprits of Jessore blast identified

From Our Correspondent

JESSORE, Apr 6: Home Minister Mohammad Nasim said today that the persons involved in the killing of people at the Udichi's function have already been identified and the names of the killers would be made public soon.

Nasim disclosed this while talking to elites and journalists at the Deputy Commissioner's Collectorate auditorium here.

The Home Minister said the government was determined to curb terrorism at any cost and ensure law and order in the 10 districts of South-Western Zone.

Referring to the steps taken in this direction, the minister

told that already 150 police camps have been set up in different areas of those districts to deal with crimes and criminals.

Citing instance of strong measures taken against terrorists and terrorism, he said that even an MP's brother in Sylhet has not been spared. He is now in custody, he said.

He, however, assured that no 'innocent' persons will be 'unnecessarily' harassed.

Nasim asked police and other law-enforcing agencies to make combined efforts with the help of local people to improve law and order in the southwest districts.

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US rejects Belgrade's offer for truce

BELGRADE, Apr 6: The Yugoslav leader today declared a unilateral ceasefire in Kosovo starting at 8 pm (1800 GMT) to mark the Orthodox Easter, reports agencies.

It was unclear if the ceasefire would continue past the holiday, which begins Friday and lasts through Sunday.

"To honour the biggest Christian holiday, Easter, all actions of the army and police will stop in Kosovo against the terrorist organization KLA starting April 6 at 8 pm," said a government statement.

The statement also offered to reach a "temporary agreement" with moderate ethnic Albanian leader Ibrahim Rugova, which would be the basis for a "final agreement" on Kosovo "within Serbia and Yugoslavia."

The statement also pledged that the government would

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BNP calls hartal in Rajshahi today

From Our Correspondent
RAJSHAH, Apr 6: The BNP will observe a dawn-to-dusk hartal tomorrow.

The city and district units of the BNP had called the hartal to press home its seven-point demand. The demands include immediate arrest of the culprits who attacked BNP at Durgapur, improvement of law and order in the district and repair of Rajshahi Town Protection Embankment.

The BNP and its front organisations brought out processions in the city to draw up its support for tomorrow's hartal.

Meanwhile, confusions have arisen among the members of public whether hartal will be observed from dawn-to-dusk or till mid-day. The confusion has arisen as a faction of BNP led by Rajshahi city mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu is in favour of half-day hartal and another faction led by Kabir Hossain MP supports dawn-to-dusk hartal.

Earlier on Friday, the BNP announced a half-day hartal, but later they opted for the day-long hartal.

3 killed, 100 hurt in Gopalganj clashes

From Our Correspondent
GOPALGANJ, Apr 6: At least three people were killed and around 100 others injured in clashes between supporters of the present and former UP chairmen at Palashi village under Kashiani thana.

The clash took place in the early hours of April 5 between supporters of Haji Nausher Ali, the current chairman of Nizamkandi Union Parishad and former chairman Master Mukhlesur Rahman. The two are known to have a long time rivalry.

Witnesses said, when supporters of the current chairman were planning to attack their rivals, a clash ensued that continued throughout the night of April 5.

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16 teenage girls rescued from Tanbazar

From Our Correspondent
NARAYANGANJ, Apr 6: Sixteen teenage girls were rescued from the Tanbazar brothel here today by a team of Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Forum (BNWL).

Acting on a tip-off, the BNWL team led by advocate Salma Ali along with police went to the red light area to rescue a girl named Parul, 17. However, during the rescue operation, some under-aged girls who were forced into sex business requested Salma Ali to rescue them.

The team managed to rescue Parul. Others rescued were identified as Swapna, 16, Ashma, 15, Lovely, 16, Hosne Ara, 16, Ayesha, 15, Farida, 14, Pe-

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Asma's mother files case against 7

By Staff Correspondent
Zohra Begum, mother of Asma Begum whose kidney was removed 'mistakenly' by doctors at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, lodged a case with the CMM's Court Monday accusing seven persons including five doctors at the hospital.

Asma underwent a kidney transplantation at the Bangabandhu Medical University Hospital in February. Her mother gave the kidney.

The accused are Prof Mahmuda Khatun of Gynaecology Department, four other doctors and two officials at the DMCH.

Bus service to Calcutta after 52 yrs

From Shehab Ahmed

CALCUTTA, Apr 6: It is 360 km away from Dhaka. The trial run of a regular bus service between the two cities began today after 52 years.

Thousands of people lined up along the road from the Indian border check post at Petrapole to Barasat, on way to Calcutta to cheer the arrival of a BRTC bus carrying officials and mediamen from Bangladesh.

Starting at 7:30 am from Kamalapur BRTC terminal, the Hino air-conditioned coach crossed the mighty Jamuna and the Padma to enter the Salt Lake terminal in Suburban Calcutta at 8:45 pm (BST).

A grand reception was given at Petrapole border post where Indian officials, border guards and hundreds of people gathered.

At a ceremony after presenting bouquets to the 40 passengers, Santung Goswami, MD, and Ashoke Kumar Bose, chairman West Bengal Surface Transport Corporation and Bangladesh Deputy High Commissioner Sheikh Ahmed Jalal received the Bangladesh team saying it augured a new dawn in the relationship between the two countries.

Earlier, at Kamalapur Bus Terminal, Joint Secretary Karar Mahmudul Hasan of the Communications Ministry saw the team off.

An Indian bus will leave for Dhaka tomorrow.

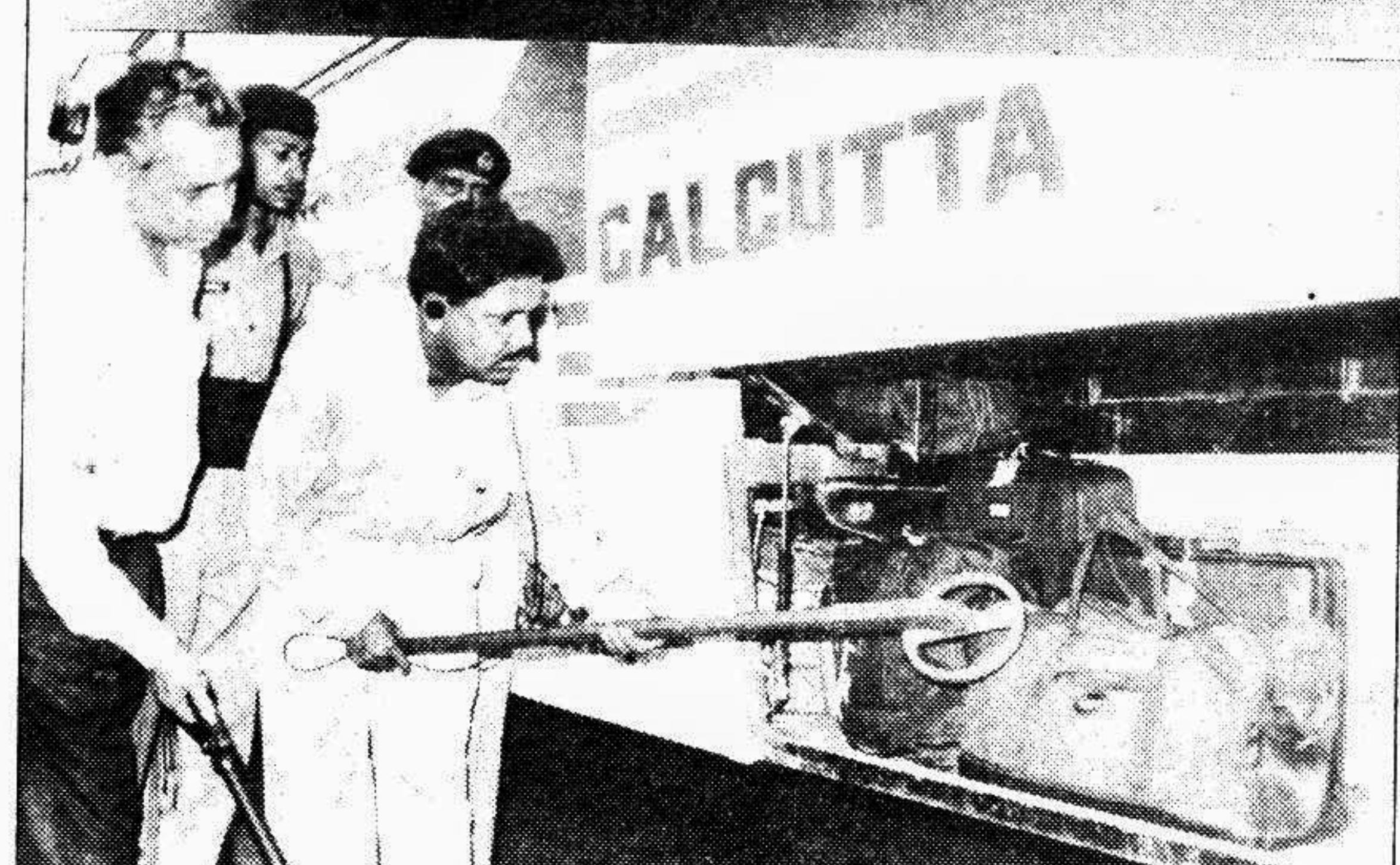
Security was provided to the Bangladesh bus all the way upto the Benapole point while Indian security took over after the bus entered their territory.

UNB adds: People in Jhenidah, Magura and Jessore districts were seen eagerly waiting to welcome the trial run of the bus, that moved amidst tight security on both sides of the frontier.

Hundreds of people also lined up on both sides of the road at Benapole when the 40-seater bus rolled into the Indian territory with BSF band party playing the song: 'Dhano Dhanyo Phappe Bhura Amaderi Bandhura'.

They clapped and shouted

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Ready for the ride to history
A BRTC air-conditioned coach waits at Kamalapur to start for Calcutta on a trial run yesterday (top) and the security check before departure (above). The Dhaka-Calcutta commercial bus service is expected to begin sometime next month.

— Star photo by Anisur Rahman

Shazneen murder

Proceedings of case adjourned for 3 weeks

By Staff Correspondent

The First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court yesterday adjourned the proceedings of Shazneen murder case for three weeks.

Shazneen Tasnim Rahman, 15, youngest daughter of leading industrialist Latifur Rahman, was raped and murdered at their Gulshan residence on April 23 last year. A murder case and another case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act, 1995, were filed with Gulshan thana in this regard.

In charge sheets of both the cases, police accused seven persons -- domestic help Shahid, contractor Hasan, supervisor Badal, carpenter Shani Ram, guard Humayun Kabir, maids --

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Reported smuggling to India Tanners refute claim by raw leather traders

By Rafiq Hasan

Bangladesh Finished Leather and Leather Goods Exporters Association (BFLGEA) has refuted the claim by raw leather traders that large quantities of hides and skins are being smuggled to India after their prices are lower this year than last year's.

"It is very much unlikely that a major portion of raw leather is being smuggled out this year," Abdus Sattar Bhuiyan, President of BFLGEA told this correspondent yesterday. "The leather market in Bangladesh is not in such a position," he said.

"The prices of cow hide and goat skin are, on an average, Tk 100 higher than those of last year," he said.

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Factional feud plagues RCCI

By Nurul Kabir, back from Rajshahi

The Rajshahi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (RCCI) has been plagued with factionalism for several years, severely affecting professional interests of the local investors and business community.

Local leaders of the mainstream political parties, traders and factory owners say that disputes among the opposing factions have made the RCCI, whose tenure expired in June 1995, almost non-functional.

Of the 18-man chamber body, only four people including its president, Mohammad Ali Sarker, were elected to office in June 1993. The remaining members have been co-opted by

Sarker illegally over the last few years.

The group opposed to Mohammad Ali Sarker believes that there should be a rule under which a committee will automatically cease to exist, in case of the body's failure to hold fresh elections in a stipulated time. "If that is done, the district level chamber bodies will never have to witness people like Mohammad Ali Sarker who love to continue as chamber leader without any elections year after year," says a former RCCI president A K M Mostafizur Rahman.

Asserting the need for such a rule for district level chambers,

Rahman refers to the provision regulating the elections of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI).

The FBCCI rule concerned says that in case of failure to hold elections on time, its executive committee will automatically cease to exist. A small ad-hoc body -- headed by the immediate past available president -- will be constituted which will hold both annual general meeting and fresh polls within 90 days of the expiry of term.

Dispute in the RCCI began almost immediately after the elections of the Sarker led

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Quest for new alliance as BJP govt tottering

From Pallab Bhattacharya



AIADMK leader Jayalalitha Jayaram sitting as Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee walks behind after finishing his speech during a function in New Delhi on March 26.

— AFP photo

NEW DELHI, Apr 6: The government of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee faces a major crisis as its key constituent All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) headed by Jayalalitha is poised to pull out of the one-year-old BJP-led coalition and seek new political alliances.

As a prelude to parting ways with the ruling alliance, Jayalalitha last night announced her party would withdraw its two ministers from Vajpayee government and let it be known that she would visit Delhi from April 12 to scout for new allies to explore the formation of a government "that delivers rather than promises and does not discriminate on grounds of religion, caste or creed."

Jayalalitha's decisions to pull out of the government came hours after the Vajpayee cabinet outrightly rejected the three demands put forward by her and linked them to continuance of support by AIADMK, which has 18 MPs in Lok Sabha, to the BJP-led government.

The demands are dismissal of Defence Minister George Fernandes against whom sacked Navy chief Vishnu Bhagwat levelled corruption charges, reinstatement of Bhagwat and a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into charges against Fernandes.

Although Jayalalitha did not specify the date for withdrawal of support to Vajpayee government, she signalled the parting of ways would take place only after an alternative arrangement had been sewn up on her terms.

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