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RANGS GROUP

Opposition calls 8-hr hartal today

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP-led opposition alliance goes for an eight-hour hartal across the country today to protest electricity, water and gas crises, deterioration of law and order, terrorism and government's failures in different sectors.

The general strike will begin at 6 in the morning and continue till 2 in the afternoon.

BNP and its major alliance partners Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote had simultaneously called the hartal at separate public rallies in the city on May 3.

To mobilise support for today's shutdown, leaders and workers of the opposition parties staged demonstration at and brought out torch processions from different parts of the city yesterday evening.

Activists of BNP and its front organisations, as part of See Page 12 Col 8

Top WDB officials flee Rajshahi for fear of life?

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, May 10: Some officials of Rajshahi Divisional Office of Water Development Board including the Superintendent Engineer and the Executive Engineer have left the city along with their families following alleged threat on their lives by some persons for contracts.

Normal work at the office and fields have almost been stopped following this, WDB sources said today.

The sources claimed that the persons belonging to the ruling party were pressing the officials See Page 12 Col 3

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Source: Islamic Foundation

Larma agrees to take over as RC chief

By Special Correspondent

The Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) yesterday announced that its Chairman Jyotindriya Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma would take charge of the interim Regional Council (RC) for Chittagong Hill Tracts.

In a press statement, the PCJSS said that it took the decision in view of assurance by the Prime Minister to speed up implementation of the CHT peace agreement and amend the relevant clauses in the three hill district council acts and other clauses detrimental to the agreement.

The Prime Minister gave assurance to amend relevant clauses in the three hill district council (amendment) acts on development planning at national level and other

clauses which run contrary to the CHT agreement, it said.

PCJSS said the CHT Regional Council Act, 1998, was duly passed by the parliament in May last year. But there had been some inconsistencies in the three hill district council (amendment) acts—Rangamati hill district council amendment act, 1998; Khagrachhari hill district council amendment act, 1998 and Bandarban hill district council amendment act, 1998, when those were passed by the parliament.

The government gave an assurance to amend the inconsistencies in the budget session of parliament last year and later in September. But there had been no steps and the government announced the 22-member RC in violation of the

agreement on September 6 last year, the statement said.

PCJSS raised demands for removal of the inconsistencies and held discussions with the government a number of times, including a meeting with the Prime Minister by JB Larma on February 8 and advisor to the PM, Dr SA Malek on March 23.

Following the meetings, the PM gave an assurance to amend the inconsistencies and speed up implementation of the CHT agreement, said the statement which was faxed to The Daily Star office at 10 last night.

Earlier in the afternoon, Shantu Larma arrived in the city from Khagrachhari by road with his close aide Gautam Chakma.

Before leaving Khagrachhari, See Page 12 Col 4

Another 7 lose their bank directorship

By M Shamsur Rahman

Seven more directors of three commercial banks yesterday lost their positions by a court order.

The directors including President of FBCCI Abdul Awal Minto, who was a director of National Bank Limited (NBL), lost their cases after a High Court division bench discharged their petitions challenging notices for their removal from the boards of the respective banks.

The others who lost their directorships are Moazzem Hossain, AKM Abu Taher and Abu Taher, Mia of National Bank Limited, Bajal Ahmed of United Commercial Bank Ltd (UCBL) and Mohammad Yakub and Habibur Rahman of Pubali Bank.

All the directors had been served with the notices under Section 17 of the Bank Companies Act asking them to repay their loans within two months or else they would lose their directorships.

In another judgement by the same court, writ petitions of four UCBL directors were declared infructuous as the bank had already withdrawn its issued notices.

Earlier, in 1995, the central bank had served notices on the defaulting directors of different banks saying that they must repay their overdue loans, failing which they would lose their seats on their respective boards. Twelve of them including Minto went to the High Court See Page 12 Col 5

Health Policy 'Mere approval requires no extra money'

By Nurul Kabir

The Cabinet okayed the National Health Policy yesterday only after the Health Minister succeeded in convincing his Cabinet colleagues that mere approval of the policy would not require extra money.

Health Minister Salahuddin Yusuf told The Daily Star that the policy had been formulated in the light of people's right to healthcare facilities, guaranteed by the Constitution.

The Cabinet meeting, held yesterday afternoon with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair, also agreed in principle to get a law passed to create a Rural Poverty Alleviation Foundation very soon.

Once passed by parliament, See Page 12 Col 6

Hearing on suo moto ends, verdict Thursday 'State can take away hartal right for greater interest'

By SC Correspondent

Hartal is not a fundamental right, but a civic right which can be taken away by the state for greater public interest, the High Court was told yesterday during hearing on the suo moto rule regarding pro-hartal and anti-hartal activities.

Appearing as intervenor at the leave of the court, Dr Aktar Hamid further said, "Hartal can never be peaceful because it never was and never will be." A call for hartal is always conceived by people as a threat of violence, he said.

A Division Bench of the High Court concluded the hearing yesterday and fixed Thursday for pronouncement of judgement.

Apart from Dr Aktar Hamid, Attorney General Mahmudul Islam on behalf of the Home Secretary, Zillur Rahman, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and secretaries of the ministries of home and law, justice and parliamentary affairs on February 15 under Section 56/A of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

In the rule the HC had directed them to show cause as to why pro-hartal activities and anti-hartal activities should not be declared cognizable offence and criminal courts and police should not be directed to take actions accordingly.

The court appointed Barrister

Shawkat Ali Khan and Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar amicus curiae.

Upon receiving the rule, both Zillur Rahman and Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan appeared in the case and submitted their respective affidavits in opposition through Advocate Mahbulley Alam and Barrister Moudud Ahmed respectively.

The Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, also submitted affidavit in opposition, Barrister Abdur Razzak, on behalf of a group of nationalists.

Dr Hamid said, Article 39 (2) (a) of the Constitution clearly speaks about freedom of speech and expression, but these are subject to reasonable restrictions which are: (a) the security of the state, (b) friendly relations with foreign states, (c) public order, (d) decency or morality, (e) contempt of court, See Page 12 Col 4

They all knew about it but 'hapta' kept them silent

By Morshed Ali Khan back from Narsingdi

As the death toll in Narsingdi liquor tragedy rose to 118 yesterday, neither police nor Department of Narcotics Control (DNC) could find clues to how the "usual supply" of rectified spirit had been poisoned 'this time'.

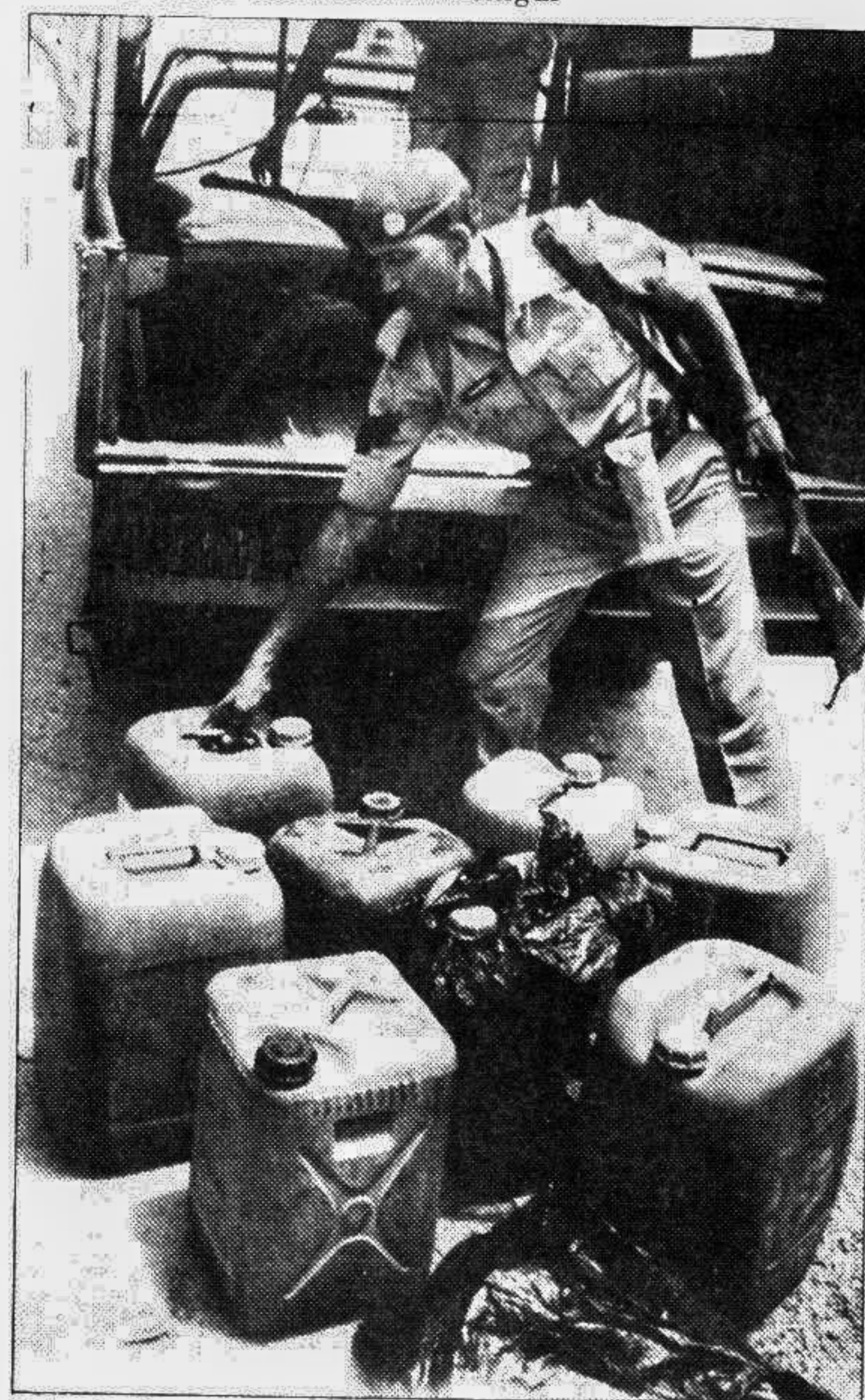
The police have so far picked up six persons, including a 12-year-old boy. All the arrested persons were mere "employees" of the "bars" that sold out the lethal doses. According to police, none of the shop owners or suppliers could be arrested as they fled Narsingdi after their customers started to die.

DNC sources said the consumption of rectified spirit has been going on for years in the town without any incident. They suspected the latest supply for the town contained some lethal dose of "methanol" which is used for industrial use. The other name for rectified spirit is ethanol which is not "harmful" to humans, they said.

This correspondent yesterday found Narsingdi police unloading eight 50-litre jerry cans from their van at around noon. At least three of the large plastic containers contained "rectified spirit or something else" and the stock had been recovered from a rented house in Gabtoli Purnapara of the town.

Police said one Tutul, who had rented the house from one landlord named Solaiman Mridha, was absconding. They suspected that Tutul ran one of several "wholesale" spirit shops in the town from the rented house. The seized liquids would be sent for tests at the Mahakhal laboratory in Dhaka, police said.

Narsingdi police were still looking for "several other" suspects. They were found preparing files for handing over the case to a CID team that has been assigned to investigate. See Page 12 Col 1



Seized plastic containers with 'rectified spirit' being unloaded from a police van in Narsingdi yesterday. —Star photo

Dockers postpone strike after 'assurances' Body to assess possible damages due to proposed terminal

From Staff Correspondent

container port by American company SSA, the sources said. The seven-member financial committee was formed as per demand of the leaders of dock workers, the sources informed.

Besides, the minister also assured of placing the demands for installation of Newmooring terminal by the government and procurement of 142 equipment for Chittagong port to raise its handling capacity, at the ECNEC meeting due on May 12, they said.

The minister also said that necessary actions would be taken in accordance with other demands of the port workers. The leaders of dock workers this morning held a rally to announce the decision of postponement of today's strike.

After the announcement, the dock workers went back to work, port sources said.

Chittagong Dock Bandar Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad, a forum of 22 trade unions of dock workers earlier announced the 24-hour strike demanding cancellation of private terminal at Patenga by SSA and modernisation of Chittagong port from government fund.

See Page 12 Col 7

Rape: Life term for police ASI in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, May 10: An ASI of police has been sentenced to life imprisonment today for raping a teenage girl.

The Special Court of Md. See Page 12 Col 7

Liquor tragedy Death toll now 118

The death toll in the Narsingdi liquor poisoning rose to 118 yesterday with six more deaths reported from Narsingdi and in the capital Dhaka, reports BSS.

Tansen, 40, of Bajitpara in Narsingdi was one of the latest victims who died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital in the early hours of yesterday. The other five deaths occurred in different areas of Narsingdi.

At least 30 persons are fighting for their lives in Dhaka Medical College Hospital and in different areas of Narsingdi. Our Narsingdi Correspondent adds: Those who died in the district yesterday are Kanai Das, 55, of Raj Saver Colony, Milon Miah, 38, of Char Sujanpur under Shibpur thana, Ali Akbar Tota, 40, and two others aged about 40 and 55.

Local police recovered 40 litres of spirit from a hidden store at Purnapara under Narsingdi Sadar. The owner Sulaiman Mridha is absconding.

Police opened the two homeopathic shops, Azad and Kashem Homes, which were earlier sealed off, and collected samples. The samples were sent to Dhaka for laboratory test.

Chhatak blast Sylhet Jubo League leader arrested

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, May 10: CID today arrested Jagadish Chandra Das, a Ward Commissioner of Sylhet Pourashava and Joint-Convener of the district unit of Awami Jubo League, in connection with the bomb explosion at the house of AL MP Muhibur Rahman Manik at Chhatak, official sources said.

A special team led by ASP of CID Aminul Islam raided the house of Jagadish at Ponitola here at about 2 AM today. The team took him to Sunamganj and produced him before a magistrate's court there.

The magistrate sent him to Sunamganj district jail. CID prayed for a 5-day remand, but the court allowed a 2-day remand. CID will take him on remand shortly, the source said.

They further said Jagadish is an accused in at least 26 criminal cases including six under Explosives Act. CID has gathered evidence regarding his involvement in the bomb blast incident in the house of the MP.

Rubel murder Charges against 14 framed

By Court Correspondent

The Third Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge yesterday framed charges against the 14 accused in Shamim Reza Rubel murder case.

Of the 14 accused, 10 were present at the court yesterday during the charge framing of the case.

The court fixed June 7 for cross-examination of the witnesses.

Shamim Reza Rubel was killed at the Detective Branch office at the city's Minto Road by DB police on July 23 last year.

Dweep Kanya salvaged, 10 bodies found

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, May 10: Ten decomposed bodies were recovered today from the ill-fated launch that sank with some 300 passengers in the river Meghna on Saturday.

With this the bodies recovered so far rose to 21. Eleven bodies were found floating near Ramgati and Luxmipur yesterday.

Earlier, BIWTA rescue vessel Hamza salvaged the launch Dweep Kanya from under 60-feet water near Gazirchar amid stormy weather.

The sunken launch was dragged by Hamza with cranes to a open charland near Bhola, DC and SP of Bhola were on board Hamza during the operation.

The bodies were taken to Ilshaghat of Bhola in a trawler. Most of the bodies decomposed as they remained trapped there for more than 48 hours, the divers said. The bodies were recovered from the broken hull, they added.

All the bodies will be buried near the Biswa Road at Ilshaghat if none of their relatives claim them.

BSS quoting BIWTA officials said Hamza started its operation this morning following detection of the launch by fishermen under some 60-feet water near the coast of Bhola yesterday evening.

Local officials said there was no confirmed figure as to how many passengers were travelling by the launch. But they feared that some 100 passengers were still missing.

Dozens of small fishing boats continued the search for the missing passengers as waiting relatives arranged megaphone publicity offering rewards for the trace of their relatives—dead or alive—on both sides of the vast river.

About 60 of the passengers, mostly fish traders, were rescued by fishing boats several hours after the launch capsized being caught by a storm in the midstream at about 11 am on Saturday.

Survivors told the agency that most passengers were trapped inside the cabin of the launch, while some others who jumped into the river drowned as there was no boats around to rescue them due to the storm.

"The Sareng (master) of the launch refused repeated requests from passengers to anchor the vessel at a nearby island when the storm started," said Ahmedullah Majhi of Motirhat in Laxmipur, who See Page 12 Col 5

Bangladesh beat Middlesex

By Sports Reporter

Bangladesh continued their impressive run in their World Cup warm-up matches when they beat English county club Middlesex by 12 runs in a rain-interrupted match at Southgate in London yesterday.

A brilliant undefeated 80 by Akram Khan and a superb 52 by opener Shahriar Hossain as well as Aminul Islam's unbeaten 36 helped the Bangladesh cause.

Middlesex, given a revised target of 236 to win in 43 overs in reply to Bangladesh's 203 for

two in 43.4 overs, were restricted to 223 for six. Minhazul Abedin took 2 for 40 while Hasibul Hossain, Enamul Hoque and Mohamed Rafique took one wicket each.

Opener Weekes with 63, Ramprakash with an unbeaten 53 and Langer with 48 gave Bangladesh a scare, but the lower-order failed to negotiate the Bangladesh attack.

Earlier, Bangladesh were heading for a commanding total before rain interrupted play. See Page 12 Col 4

THIS WEEK IN Rising Stars

George Clooney

in Superstars



Meet The Three Young

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