



Cricket craze
An artist paints a portrait of Sachin Tendulkar on the wall of a house in Calcutta yesterday as battle for the Cup begins today in England. —AFP photo

Ban on using the Bridge prompts BNP protest

Govt 'requests' road marchers to take Aricha route

By Staff Correspondent

The government has banned BNP's May 16 "road march" planned to pass through the Bangabandhu Bridge, invoking "public interest" including the safety and security of the structure and its surrounding areas. In an instant reaction, BNP has termed the ban "illegal, undemocratic, conspiratorial and aimed to foil its programme" and asked the government to withdraw the prohibition immediately. Otherwise, the government will have to bear all the responsibilities for the consequences, warned a BNP statement issued after an emergency meeting of the party stalwarts with its chief Khaleda Zia. The government however suggested an alternative and offered extra facilities. A government statement issued last night requested the BNP to use other alternative routes including the Aricha-Nagarbari ferry ghat for a "smooth and peaceful" passage

of the marchers. "Adequate number of ferries will be arranged at the Aricha-Nagarbari Ghat (to carry the vehicles) to be used in the march," the handout said and hoped the opposition party would go for the alternative route, taking into consideration the bridge's security and public interest. The ban came only two days ahead of the three-day opposition campaign. The government argued that such a large convoy of vehicles might safety of the bridge and trigger subversive activities at the key-point installation (KPI) and its surrounding areas. "The government is respectful to democratic rights and hence it has kept open all alternative routes including Aricha-Nagarbari one for the May 16 programme," it said. The government handout termed illegal the passing of a convoy of "many motor vehi-

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Hartal gets High Court stick

Supreme Court judge stays HC rule

By SC Correspondent

A High Court bench has ruled that pro-hartal and anti-hartal activities, which compel others obviously by show of criminal force to do what they are not legally bound to do, are cognizable offence and directed the criminal courts and the police to take action accordingly. However, the HC judgement, delivered yesterday, was stayed for two weeks by the Appellate Division of the SC following a petition from BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan. A Division Bench of the HC comprising Justice Mohammad Gholam Rabbani and Justice Md Latifur Rahman passed the judgement on the suo moto rule regarding pro-hartal and anti-hartal activities. The same Bench of the HC on February 15 this year issued the rule on AL general secretary Zillur Rahman, BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and secretaries of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Parliamentary Affairs. By that rule, the court directed them to show cause as to why pro-hartal and anti-hartal activities should not be declared cognizable offence and the criminal courts and the po-

lice should not be directed to take action accordingly. The court also appointed Barrister Shawkat Ali Khan and Barrister Jamiruddin Shir-car as *amicus curiae*. Zillur Rahman and Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, and the Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs contested the rule by filing affidavits in opposition, while Barrister Abdur Razzak and Dr Kazi Aktar Hamid gave their opinion as interveners. With regard to issuance of the rule the court said in its judgement, "From the Daily Ittefaq dated 10th to 12th February we read that a rickshaw-puller while plying on hartal day was burnt by pouring petrol over his body ultimately to death and that a young man was shot to death when two processions, one supporting hartal and the other opposing hartal, met face to face on a road. These and the other activities which we read from the said newspaper did not per se suggest that the decision of calling hartal originated in moral force and therefore a suo moto rule had to be issued in exercise of our inherent power". The court observed, "True, hartal, gherao and abaradh are the expressions of dissent

against any action of the government or any authority, but at the same time these have an inbuilt potentiality for threatening or disturbing public tranquility. These forms of dissent are expected to originate in moral force, but the line between the cessation of moral force and emergence of criminal force is very thin, the court said. "Classical example is the non-violence and non-cooperation movement of Gandhi against the imposition of tax during the British rule upon the salt producers at the sea shore. Later on, the movement was called off by Gandhi when a mob set a police station on fire" the HC said. "Gandhi declared that for the violence the purpose of the movement had gone astray". The court said that an unlawful assembly in an assembly of five or more persons if their common objective is (i) to over-awe by criminal force (a) the government or (b) the legislature, or (c) any public servant in exercise of lawful power (ii) to resist the execution of law or legal process (iii) to commit mischief (iv) to obtain possession

of any property or (b) to deprive any person of any in corporeal right, or (c) to enforce any right or supposed right (v) by criminal force to compel any person (a) to do what he is not legally bound to do or (b) to omit to do what he is legally entitled to do (Section 141 of the Penal Code)". Referring to Section 149 of the Penal Code, the judgement said, "If an offence is committed by any member of an unlawful assembly in prosecution of the

Stains on sanity

By Staff Correspondent
The chair meant for the President and another chair for guests at the Darbar Hall of the Bangabhaban were allegedly found damaged by a number of employees at the presidential palace Monday morning, according to police. Azizul Alam, an officer at Bangabhaban, filed a general diary with Motijheel thana on Wednesday in this regard. The complainant mentioned names of six Bangabhaban employees, police said.

Getting closer to tipperary

By Shakil Kasem

Circa 1976-77, Bangladesh cricketers hit their first ball in anger against an international team. Those were early days, when cricket was brushing the nether lips of death in this country and cricketers were an endangered species. I remember in 1972 when cricket was sought to be banned because it smacked of frivolity, something the war ravaged country at the time could ill afford. I remember, too, our homegrown version of Ashes. We marched around the Dhaka Stadium protesting the impending demise of the game and burned all our cricket gears in gut wrenching yet symbolic protest.

To the eternal credit of all involved in the decision making process of the time, saner sense prevailed. Cricket was thrown a life line in Bangladesh. It was the British High Commissioner Arthur Golds, who presented a complete set of cricket gears to the Dhaka University and a hugely exciting match was organised at the University ground. The public response and the resultant impact of that match was resounding. We have not looked back since.

League cricket followed soon thereafter. Equipment was in short supply, but enthusiasm was boundless. Cricket was still the poorer cousin of football but the first tentative steps towards the world beyond was obvious for all to see. M.C.C. was coaxed and cajoled through the persuasive efforts of Robin Marlar and Syed Ashraf Haq, to send a team to Bangladesh in 1976-77. Since then Bangladesh (and Ash too!) have come a long way. It was assumed at the time that Bangladesh's standard was probably at par with a Minor County side. The M.C.C. team was thus made up accordingly, some have been, several could have been and a few could be's. The team was led by Ted Clark. Incidentally I met Ted's son who was here on professional assignment, at the Dhaka Club this week. Small world this, with time flying at breakneck speed. But I digress. The match against the M.C.C. was a soul stirring event. When we lined up, all of us clad in the first Bangladesh Blazers ever awarded by our Board, it was a moment so moving, that it lasted, for me at least, a lifetime.

The Board office was a single decrepit room with a plywood partition. I am not sure if it even had a telephone in those days. Anwar, the first peon the Board had, used to sleep and cook behind that partition. These were the roots (that anchored the aspirations of this



TODAY'S MATCH
England vs Sri Lanka
Venue: Lord's
Live Coverage: BTv and Star Sports (3 pm)

TOMORROW'S MATCHES
India vs South Africa
Venue: Hove
Live Coverage: BTv and ESPN (3 pm)

Zimbabwe vs Kenya
Venue: Taunton
Live Coverage: Star Sports (3 pm)

Brewing a huge black economy

Illegal liquor trade spins thousands of crores of taka

By Morshed Ali Khan

Thousands of crores of taka are on the roll in an illegal trade on home based "breweries" and liquors smuggled into the country. The business, estimated to roll "thousands of crores of taka", serves a population which is legally barred from consuming alcohol without a license issued by the Department of Narcotics Control (DNC). In almost every township and in some villages, growth of breweries and "bars" is phenomenal, according to sources at the DNC, the guardian of the Narcotics Control Act 1995. One of

ficial who has working in the Department for more than 30 years said the amount that rolls in the trade could be as high as Tk 12,000 crore. A Daily Star investigation found that in Dhaka city alone, there are more than 300 illegal "bars" selling anything from rectified spirit to chotali, a popular brew made from molasses. Most of these city bars are situated in slum areas along railway tracks in Kawranbazar and Khilgaon, Nilkhet, Rajabazar, Moghbazar, Shantinagar, Badda, Tejgaon, Nawabpur Road, Lalbagh, Hazaribagh, Rayerbazar, the flood protec-

tion embankment and numerous other places. The supply of chotali in the city comes mainly from a village near Gazipur town. Women who have the know-how run these breweries. About 50 houses openly produce the liquor where police or the DNC do not dare to intervene. About two years ago, a police raid was resisted by several hundred stick-wielding women, according to local administration. Now the administration "bears" with the "trade" provided the producers maintain regular links with them, sources in the local administra-

tion said. On way to Narsingdi where more than 120 people were killed in liquor poisoning, this correspondent recently found several houses serving chotali at Golakanda village under Rujganj thana. At Madhabdi and Nagori under Kaliganj thana, several kilometres towards Narsingdi from Golakanda, a good number of "breweries" brew chotali for a lucrative market in the area. An owner of a brewery at Pailapara of Madhabdi said, after the Narsingdi tragedy they were asked by the law-enforcing authorities to "keep a low pro-

file" for the time being. He said six litres of chotali cost about Tk 700 in the retail market and he produced up to 100 litres a day. "The brewing technology is simple and the raw materials are readily available. The demand is high and an increasing number of unemployed people see it as an instant escape from poverty. Given the present scenario, you need to regulate it rather than trying to stamp it out," said a narcotics control official. He also pointed out that with 500 personnel in the country there is nothing much the DNC can do. The Narcotics Control Act 1990 says that a non-Muslim can consume almost any type of alcohol available in the registered shops provided he has a license. But a Muslim can only be licensed when he has certificate from a physician of civil surgeon status. A "certified" Muslim consumer is mainly restricted to two types of liquor. One is known as "bilati liquor" manufactured by the "lone" brewery of the country called Carew & Company. And the other is liquor imported from foreign countries. In Dhaka metropolis, DNC sources said there were 1,276

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On a terrifying trip

Unregulated river vessels are mostly death traps

By Shehab Ahmed

Hundreds of motor vessels are plying the rivers, ignoring safety rules and the need for life-saving equipment aboard. Some like "Dweep Kannya", which sunk with over 200 people on board in the Meghna river last week, did not have a fitness certificate or permission to operate in that particular route, river transport sources said. The sources said the little boat went down in a portion of the Meghna that is 14 mile in width. It did not have any per-

mit to face the fury of the massive flow of water from the world's greatest river systems when it sailed from the southern port of Barisal to Laxmipur on May 8. The boat was not built to negotiate the rough waters in the South as it was a small craft that plied on the Kalapakop-Bandura route in Munshiganj as ML Malla earlier. Before that, it had ferried fuel as a small oil carrier, whose centre of gravity was different than a passenger boat. The imbalance made all the difference when it was wobbling in rough waters, laden with extra passenger, the sources said. The unfortunate passengers, most of whom had been missing six days after the tragedy, were allegedly forced to stay inside the hold. Its only door was locked when it was caught in a storm to keep it stable despite the design faults which had already made the vessel vulnerable to the turbulence in Meghna, the sources said.

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Courting with disaster
Over-crowded shallow-engine boat is a regular feature on the Buriganga. Death becomes the destination quite often. Yet, the rat race goes on along the riverine routes across Bangladesh. Star photo: A K M Mohsin

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