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## 2 lawyers quit as judge 'imposes ban' on Sharif's evidence

LAHORE, Feb 27: Two lawyers representing deposed Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif at his trial withdrew from the case today, criticising a court order which may impose a reporting ban on their client's evidence, reports AFP.

Ajaz Buttani and Khwaja Sultan said they could no longer represent their client.

"We are withdrawing from the case," they said in a joint statement at a news conference here.

"This is ridiculous. We cannot contest the case when such measures are taken by the court hearing a historic case," they said.

Sharif's brother Shabbaz and five other officials have been charged with hijacking, abduction, attempted murder and terrorism in a case based on the night of the country's military coup on October 12.

All the accused have pleaded not guilty but face the death penalty if convicted.

The two lawyers were the most senior of the nine-member defence team and represented both Sharif and his brother.

Prosecutors last week asked the anti-terrorist court hearing the case to hold sessions in private when Sharif and his co-accused gave evidence, fearing the premier's testimony could breach national security.

On Friday, Judge Rehmat Hussain Jafri ruled Sharif could give evidence in public, but that he would decide what could be reported.

"We also protest that a former prime minister of the country was tried in such a manner and in a court which was created to deal speedily with terrorism cases," the two lawyers said.

Battalvi said it was the first time he had pulled out of a case.

A senior lawyer, he represented the prosecution in the trial of another former Pakistani premier, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who was sentenced to death and hanged in April 1979.

"Can I defend my client when he has been denied the freedom of speech which law gave him," Battalvi said.

"For me as a counsel of Mian Nawaz Sharif the last two days have been a period of acute anxiety and tension."

He said the judge had stepped beyond the law in his decision.

"I say it with great respect that law has not given him any such authority nor has law fixed any parameters by which the statement of the accused can be scissored by the judge," he said.

"To say the least, this is not justice."

One of Sharif's remaining lawyers, Nihal Hashmi, said the withdrawals showed their client was not getting a fair trial.

"It is a serious blow. The resignations show that the trial is not fair," he said.

"Now when his turn has come they are depriving his right and the right of the masses to know about the real picture on the day of October 12."



BNP brought out a procession in the city yesterday evening in support of the Opposition called dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal today.

## Human chain demanding reopening of Shahjalal varsity

From JU Correspondent

SAVAR, Feb 27: Hundreds of students and teachers of Jahangirnagar University (JU), led by Gonatantrik Chhatra Oikya (GCO), formed a human chain on Dhaka-Aricha highway today demanding immediate re-opening of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology.

The human chain was formed on the road in front of the university at about 11.15 am and it lasted until 11.45 am.

The GCO also held a rally at the Dairy Farm gate of the university later.

Addressing the rally, GCO leaders condemned the role of the President saying he could have broken the stalemate much earlier by taking punitive action against the fundamentalists who are responsible for the whole situation.

They demanded immediate reopening of the university, implementation of SUST syndicate decision of naming of the halls and buildings and exemplary punishment to the fundamentalists.

GCO activists along with a number of university students and teachers, before forming the human chain, brought out separate processions from different academic buildings.

## Food security: Accord with EC soon

By Staff Correspondent

The government and the European Commission (EC) is likely to sign an agreement shortly on the EC's future food security programme in Bangladesh.

"We are preparing a draft of a formal proposal in this regard, which would be submitted before Bangladesh government after approval from the EC head office," said Paul Webber, director general (development) of the EC headquarters, yesterday.

Without giving any specific date for sending the proposal to the government, he said, "We are going to submit the proposal within two to four weeks."

Webber is on a visit here as part of a five-member delegation led by EC commissioner Paul Nielson to assess the EC role in the development of Bangladesh. Nielson left Bangladesh last week.

The EC officials said around 80 million euro would be provided to Bangladesh in the next three years under EC food security programme that will start this year after signing of the agreement.

Under the proposed agreement, the EC is supposed to increase cash aid instead of providing food from this year as part of its changed food security programme.

The EC officials said that the government agreed in principle on getting cash instead of food.

Webber and some EC officials attended a seminar in the evening on the new food security programme of the Bangladesh government.

He also chaired a working session of the two-day seminar on "Integration of the cash payment system in food security programme of Bangladesh," at the IDB Bhawan and answered questions concerning the issue.

"The new EU food aid strategy which shifts the emphasis on the cash from food would provide greater flexibility in the choice for Bangladesh and eventually will be more beneficial for poverty alleviation of the country," said Ambassador Antonio de Souza Menezes, the head of EC delegation in Bangladesh while inaugurating the seminar in the morning.

The EC ambassador appreciated the government's willingness to consider the new strategy with an open mind. He stated that the EC would act in close cooperation with the government on its implementation.

Explaining the policy, the Menezes mentioned that the new policy includes support to programmes aiming not only at an improved and sustainable food production, but also at projects that would ensure increasing levels of income for the poorest and the most vulnerable.

Some officials of the ministry of food contradicted with the views that providing cash instead of food would be more beneficial to the vulnerable poor. They argued that the weather in Bangladesh was very unpredictable and none can assume what might happen in the next year.

Only food can tackle any emergency caused by natural calamities, said an official. He advocated for providing food instead of cash that may create a lot of problems for the government.

"Cash can ensure security of income of the people, not security of food," he added.

However, a keynote paper presented by Firdos Khatun noted a number of advantages of increased use of cash instead of food.

Arguing in favour of cash aid, he said it would have comparative advantages in asset creating investments at beneficiary level. It is highly cost effective and would concentrate on development-oriented activities.

The seminar will end tomorrow where Mahbub Kabir, secretary, ministry of food would chair a technical session.



Police examining the broken locks of shops at Hasina Yasin Electrical Goods Market in old Dhaka where a robbery took place on Saturday night.

## US itself plagued with HR problems: Beijing

BEIJING, Feb 27: Turning the tables on its accuser, China scoffed today at the United States' human rights record, saying America is plagued with racism and other problems and should not pass judgement on other nations, reports AP.

The accusations contained in a government report, "US Human Rights Record in 1999," was China's response to the US State Department's annual human rights report, which criticised Beijing.

"The United States does not have a good human rights record of its own but likes to play the role of the 'world's human rights judge,'" the Information Office of China's State Council, or Cabinet, said in its sharply critical 10,000-word paper.

"The American government needs to keep an eye on its own human rights problems, mind its own business and stop interfering in the internal affairs of other countries by utilizing the human rights question," it said.

The US State Department report, issued Friday, said Beijing's rights situation deteriorated markedly last year. It listed such examples as intensified suppression of dissent and control over unregistered churches, restriction of fundamental freedoms of minority groups including Tibetan Buddhists, and increased manipulation of the press and the Internet.

Among its many accusations, the Chinese report retorted that the safety of US citizens is threatened by widespread violent crime and a huge number of privately owned firearms. Police brutality is rampant and "the state of children in the US is grim," the report charged.

"In overcrowded American prisons, inmates are mistreated and violence prevails," it said. "The human rights of female prisoners are seriously violated."

It said the shooting of African immigrant Amadou Diallo by four New York City police officers came "to symbolize the violent behavior of the American police." The officers were acquitted Friday of murder and other state criminal charges.

"US police all too often suspect colored people are guilty of crime, even when little or no evidence is available," the Chinese report said.

It also was sharply critical of the war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo, saying air strikes by US-led NATO forces caused "the biggest humanitarian catastrophe in Europe since the end of World War II."

While the paper pulled much of its statistics and information from US media reports, it also criticized the American media as a "propaganda machine used by the authorities to manipulate public opinion."

The report was carried by Xinhua, China's government-controlled news agency.

## Teachers indeed!

BANGKOK, Feb 27: Six Thai girls drowned after being told by their teachers to walk blindfolded into a pond, police said today, reports Reuters.

The girls, aged between 10 and 12, were on a school outing in Songkhla province, about 1,200-km south of Bangkok, when the accident happened.

Two others were saved.

Witnesses told police that as the girls walked into the water, a game organised by the teachers, they began to panic.

"The victims apparently struggled while getting deeper into the pond and instead of returning to land they lost their sense of direction," an officer said.

Police are investigating.

## Call to increase reserved seats for women in JS

By Staff Correspondent

"Some women's rights activists in a letter yesterday urged the government and the Opposition to increase to 64 the number of seats reserved for women in the Jatiya Sangsad."

The activists who include intellectuals and teachers also urged the prime minister and the Opposition leader to open the seats to direct elections rather than the nomination system.

They said the government was distancing itself from the 1997 National Women Policy.

However, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told the nation Friday night that the government could not amend the Constitution to increase the number of reserved seats for women while the Opposition abstained from attending the parliament session.

## Rahman Group

From Page 1

Rahman Group and its directors for realising Tk. 106 crore defaulted loans.

According to sources, SB will file five more cases this week against Rahman Group for realising defaulted loans. The total amount of defaulted loans of 11 CTEC companies of the Group with SB is Tk. 145 crore.

## No hartal

From Page 1

The meeting also instructed all units, especially the thana committees in the city, to immediately form All Party Action Council. It also decided that the thana committees, if needed, can introduce joint convenor posts in the APAC. There should be maximum three joint convenors and the committee would not include more than 101 members, the liaison body decided.

BNP leaders Tariqul Islam and Anwar Zahid, JP leaders Kazi Firoz Rashid and A B M Golam Mostafa, Jamaat leaders Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Qader Mollah and A T M Azharul Islam and IOJ leader A R M Abdul Matin attended the meeting.

## Loan defaulters A quarter is trying to thwart govt action: Kibria

By Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister SAMS Kibria has said the government has taken a tough stand against loan defaulters, who are united against efforts to bring discipline in the financial sector.

"Some vested quarters even told the Bangladesh Bank not to trouble these people (loan defaulters)," Kibria said while speaking at a routine monthly meeting of Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) at Sheraton Hotel here yesterday.

The government is implementing the Financial Sector Reform Programme to restore discipline in the financial sector. But there is a persistent effort by a quarter to thwart the move, he said.

He blamed the immediate past government for not taking any step for implementing the reform programme, particularly against loan defaulters. "Rather, they forced banks to give loans on political considerations," he added.

In this connection the finance minister mentioned the immediate past government's directive to write off agri-loans up to Tk. 5000 along with interest. This not burdened the government but also encouraged people not to repay bank loans.

Replying to a question at the meeting, the finance minister admitted that the lending rate of banks was "too high."

"The rate of interest was not adjusting with the falling rate of inflation. When the inflation rate is going down, the lending rate should be reduced. I will talk with the central bank governor on the issue," Kibria said.

About government's borrowing from banks, the finance minister said, "It has no negative impact on the economy."

"Government's borrowing had neither any inflationary pressure nor it affected lending to the private sector as excess liquidity to the tune of Tk. 4500 crore is lying with the banking system," he said.

He said, after the devastating flood of 1998, the country's economy was in a state of recession. But the government's timely action in investing Tk. 3000 crore in the agriculture sector stopped it, he added.

Earlier, FICCI President Wali Bhuiyan said, high corporate income tax, deteriorating law and order, frequent hartals, congestion at ports and no implementation of financial sector reforms remained the major hindrances to investment.

He also drew the attention of the minister that tax-holiday to investors would end on June 30 and suggested that the tax net be widened.

In reply, the finance minister said government is in a dilemma as donors do not want continuation of the facility, but investors want it. A decision on this issue will be taken at an appropriate time, he said.

The minister declared that duty-free import of generators would be allowed till December this year.

FICCI members representing different foreign companies attended the meeting. Managing Director of Shell Marketing BD Ltd. James Ashworth also spoke.

## Ctg Port

From Page 1

along the jetty. However, port sources said the authority has already formed a committee to buy two boats so the coast guard can patrol the outer anchorage.

Port thana police said they launch raids to retrieve the stolen goods and arrest the pirates when they receive written complaints from agents or captains.

However, most captains don't bother to lodge a complaint since they leave port as soon as loading and unloading is complete.

## Biman

From Page 1

It is planning to open more routes and frequencies to increase its revenue to return into the black from the red for the past few years. Biman officials say the recent buying of two Airbus 310 is weighing heavily on the airline.

Thanks to "open sky" policy for the domestic sector, Biman is facing stiff competition from the two private operators, GMG Airlines and Air Parabat, who are also lobbying for a slice of the regional and international routes.

Biman officials hope that with the help of a strategic partner it would be able to gain a firm foothold in the Asian sky, despite increasing competition and similar tie-ups in the region.

## Shikdar

From Page 1

this case filed with Khulna thana.

Akimul was also killed in the ice factory on the night of February 25, 1998 for having illicit relation with Shikdar's first wife Khodeja. Later, his body was dumped into the River Bhairab. Eight people including Shikdar and his wife Khodeja are accused in the case. Khodeja is absconding.

Juba League activist Siraj was killed on October 2 in 1997. He was chopped to death and his body was also dumped into the Bhairab River.

Siraj was killed for opposing Shikdar's drug trafficking, said Noor-e-Alam. Four of the 11 FIR named accused are still absconding.

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## New 100-taka notes issued

Bangladesh Bank has issued new notes of Tk 100 denomination to the market, reports UNB.

The note with signature of governor of the bank Dr Mohammad Faruq is same as the existing one except the signature and embedded security thread, said a Bangladesh Bank press release.

The existing note will remain in circulation along with the newly issued note.

## Jalal murder

The case, in brief, is that the body of Jalal was found in the water tank of D B Office on March 25 last year. The same day a general diary was registered with Ramna police stating that an unidentified body was found in the water tank of their office. On the basis of GD the police lodged FIR on March 26 the same year.

Later, Abbasuddin, son of Jalal, lodged a second FIR with police on April 4 last year. By profession driver of a Rent-a-Car Service, Jalal used to visit DB office to give information about serious crimes. He was called on March 21 last year at DB office and thereafter, he was missing till his body was found. Police submitted chargesheets against four persons, including Ziaul Ahsan.

The trial court framed charges against them.

Senior Advocate Sirajul Haque appeared for Ziaul Ahsan, while Deputy Attorney General M Faruq and Assistant Attorney General A K M Zahid Haque appeared for the state.

## Hartal today

From Page 1

Which was addressed by city BNP convenor Sadek Hossain Khoka MP.

The rally over, leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations brought out a torch procession from party central office at 6.22 pm and paraded Bijnayagar, Paltan, north gate of Baitul Mukarram, Dainik Bangla and Fakirpool areas.

JP also organised rallies and brought out several torch processions from different parts of the city in support of today's hartal.

Jamaat and IOJ organised separate rallies at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram national mosque and in front of Furam Paltan mosque in the afternoon.

## Assam minister killed as rebels blow up car

GUWAHATI, Feb 27: Suspected separatist guerrillas blew up the car of a minister in India's remote northeastern state of Assam today, killing him and four others in a daring daylight attack, police said, report AP, Reuters.

The rebels triggered a remote-controlled land mine as Assam state Public Works Minister Nagen Sharma's car reached a village in Nalbari district, 115 kilometres west of Guwahati, the capital of Assam state, a top police officer said on condition of anonymity.

Sharma's two police guards and two state government officials, who were with him in the car, also were killed instantly, the officer said. The minister was travelling in a convoy of eight cars and jeeps.

Other details were not immediately available.

Earlier, an Indian army officer was killed today in a gun battle with Maoist United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) militants near Raha, 120 km east of Dispur.

Three militants of the ULFA and a lieutenant were killed at Bagariguri village near Raha following an encounter, a defence spokesman said.

In another incident, soldiers killed an ULFA guerrilla at Tangari in Tinsukia some 490 km east of Dispur, the spokesman said.

The ULFA says the federal government is exploiting the state's mineral and forest resources and neglecting the local economy.

The area is a stronghold of the banned ULFA, which has been fighting for a separate homeland since 1979.

The government had banned the group in late 1980s. More than 10,000 people have been killed since the fighting began.

Six months ago, a top state Cabinet minister, Zoi Nath Sharma, had survived an assassination attempt by the suspected guerrillas.

The rebels fired at Sharma from the river banks while he was going in a boat. Three of his security guards were killed.

State Chief Minister Prafulla Kumar Mohanta also had survived an attempt on his life in the state capital nearly three years ago.

Assam is one of several states in India's northeast that are in the grip of separatist violence unleashed by groups fighting India's military. Their common complaint is alienation, neglect by the federal government and threat to indigenous cultures.

## Traders enforce strike at Munshiganj

MUNSHIGANJ, Feb 27: Traders enforced a half-day strike in the town today protesting the decision to curtail the responsibility of power supply to Pali Bidyut Samity instead of DESA, reports UNB.

Shops remained closed in the town during the strike.

An action committee has been formed to protest the authority's decision to bring the first class municipality under Pali Bidyut Samity for its power supply.

The committee later brought out a procession and held a meeting demanding withdrawal of the decision.