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Secy-level trade talks with India open tomorrow

## Duty-free access of 25 items to figure high

Duty-free access of 25 categories of Bangladeshi items to Indian market will figure high in the secretary-level trade talks between Bangladesh and India in Delhi May 10-11, reports UNB.

Bangladesh's commerce secretary Golam Rahman will leave Dhaka today to meet his Indian counterpart, P P Prabhu, to find out ways and means of increasing volume of bilateral two-way trade between the two neighbours.

The balance of trade tilted towards India in the recent past. Bangladesh exports totalling about 60 million dollars in 1998-99 fiscal year while imports stood at 1.236 billion, leaving a trade deficit of 1.176 billion dollars.

Removal of hurdles in way of specific exports from Bangladesh, improvement of infrastructure, including customs points, roads, railway and waterway, joint venture prospects and exchange of trade missions, are among the agenda of Bangladesh.

The meeting follows bilateral talks between Bangladesh's Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil and his Indian counterpart, Murali Manohar, on the sidelines of BIMSTEC trade ministers' talks in Delhi late last month.

Following formal commit-

ment made by Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee during his Dhaka visit last year, Bangladesh made a list of 191 items under 25 broad categories for duty-free entry into Indian market. The list, sent to Indian authority few months back, still awaits their final decision.

Transshipment, a strong demand of India for carrying its goods through Bangladesh's territory, is very likely to come up in the talks between the two secretaries.

But Dhaka is yet to finalise its position on the politically contentious issue, unofficially tagged by the Indian side to duty-free access of Bangladeshi products.

"We're not in a hurry about transshipment. We're awaiting reports of expert committee and the Task Force," said a Commerce Ministry official.

The expert committee, comprising both local and foreign experts, has submitted its draft report to the Commerce Ministry, but the Task Force could not yet produce any report, the official said.

Returning from Delhi last month, Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil also said the government would also go through it before going to implement it as the issue entailed various implications.

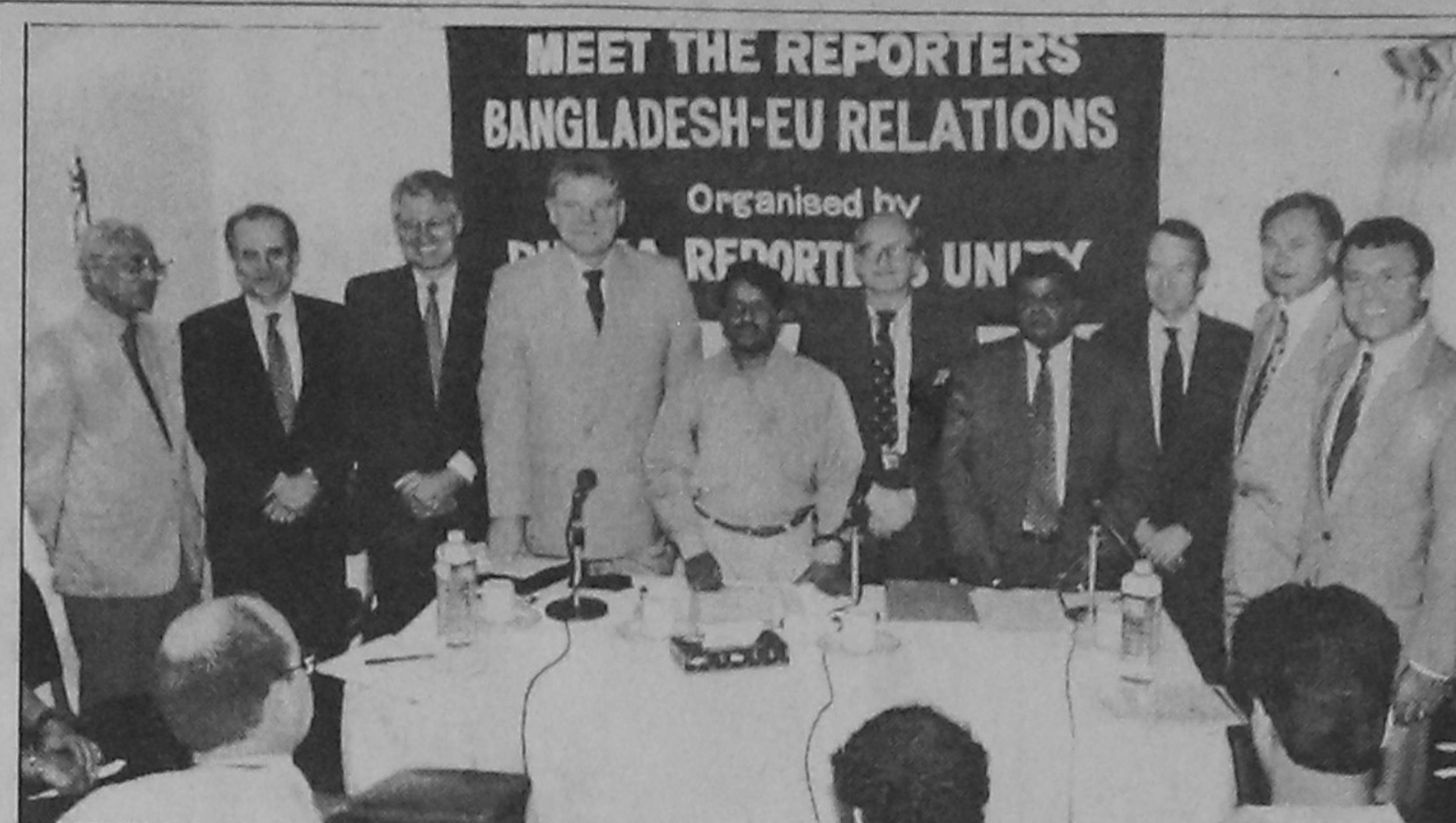
Bangladesh will also strongly lobby extending 50 per cent duty concession to 216 items, as agreed by the Central regime. Some 171 items are enjoying the facilities at present and the Indian Commerce Minister assured Jalil of implementing the decision for the remaining 39 items.

Besides, Bangladesh will raise such issues as the harassment by Indian authorities on some Bangladeshi exportable, including Rabi-mafroz battery, raw jute and jute goods, T-shirts, beauty soap, melamine and snacks.

Indian customs claim 35 per cent duty or Tk 450, whichever is the highest, for exports from Bangladesh, which is a "clear violation of WTO rules of customs duty," a Commerce Ministry official said.

Bangladesh follows Indian trucks to enter three km inside, but Bangladesh trucks are forced to unload on no man's land. Besides, Indian authority does not allow more than 50 trucks from Bangladesh a day, the official said. "All these should be on reciprocal basis," he said.

The official however said the problems might remain at the implementation levels, and not at the highest policy level.



Envoys of all the seven European Union countries in Bangladesh and the EC Head of Delegation exchanged views on "Bangladesh-EU Relations" at the "Meet the Reporters" programme at the Dhaka Reporters' Unity office in the city yesterday. Seen from left are Head of EC Delegation Antonio de Souza Menezes, Ambassador of Italy M.F. Pini, Ambassador of Denmark Finn Thilsted, Ambassador of Germany Uwe Schramm, DRU general secretary Monwarul Islam, Charge d' Affaires of France J.G. de Wargny, DRU president M. Anwarul Haq, High Commissioner of Britain Dr. David Carter, Ambassador of Sweden A. Johnson and Charge d' Affaires of the Netherlands Jan A. Mass.

—Star photo

## 'Love Bug' virus: Main suspect detained for questioning

MANILA, May 8: A young Philippine couple, both bank workers, were named today as the main suspects in the creation of the devastating "Love Bug" computer virus and the man was arrested after a search of their dilapidated Manila flat, reports Reuters.

Irene de Guzman, the man's 23-year-old girlfriend, will present herself to authorities later today or tomorrow, Philippine National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) chief Federico Opinon told reporters.

He also confirmed that Romeo Ramones, 27, was the clean-shaven man arrested and led away in handcuffs by NBI officers after the flat search. The couple lived on the ground-level of a 40-year-old government-built housing project in the lower middle-class Bagong Barangay suburb.

"He opted to remain silent," chief investigator Nelson Bartolome told reporters when asked if Ramones had made any statement.

Opinion said no charges had yet been brought but that the NBI had 36 hours to do so. The search was made after

the NBI obtained warrants from a Manila judge.

The agency had kept the flat under surveillance since Saturday, shortly after they were informed by local Internet service providers and authorities overseas that the virus, which penetrated millions of computers including those of the Pentagon, CIA and British Parliament, was believed to have originated there.

But the NBI was unable to immediately act because computer hacking is not a crime in the Philippines.

The warrants, which named both de Guzman and Ramones, said there was reason to believe that equipment in the house possibly including computers and peripheral equipment, telephones and other hardware, had been used in violation of the Access Devices Regulation Act.

**No computer in flat**  
The Access Devices Act governs the use of codes, account numbers and passwords giving access to different types of devices. The law provides for a maximum punishment of 20

years in jail for violators.

Opinion said investigators had taken away some computer diskettes and other material, but would not comment further. Gil Alinas, chairman of the local residents council, said the NBI took away 17 items including telephones, telephone wiring and computer magazines — but no computer.

"There was no computer in the house," Alinas told reporters.

Both Ramones and de Guzman are bank employees and a quiet, unassuming couple, neighbours told reporters as NBI officers conducted a three and a half hour search of the flat.

"She was nice, she would smile at me when passing, but I hardly ever talked to her," said one woman. "I didn't know the man either. But I don't think they were married."

The NBI said it was also likely that further investigation could lead to more arrests, but would not give details. "Expect more fireworks. We might still apply for more warrants," Opinion said.

## Domestic air service

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"Technical problems are there but the old airport is an asset for us and we want to use it. We will soon start re-carpeting 8,000 feet of the runway, and the airport will be ready for operation before the NAM summit in 2001," Hossain said.

But Managing Director of GMG Airlines, Shahab Sattar said it will be a total chaos for hundreds of transit passengers coming from Dubai, London and other places. "How will they come to Tejgaon from Zia to avail a connecting flight?"

With all necessary infrastructures, Zia remains under-utilised with around 20 domestic and international flights a day. Zia can handle as many as 150 flights a day with the existing present infrastructures. There is no justification to spend so much of money to separate the domestic wing, he said.

Sources said the move was orchestrated in the light of a government plan to hand over Zia to a consortium of local and foreign investors. The local partner is Nasrin Karim, daughter of Jatiya Sangsad Speaker Humayun Rashid Chowdhury. Under the plan, Zia would undergo a "massive facelift" and be converted into a "full-fledged international air-

port' to be operated on commercial basis.

When contacted, Nasrin told The Daily Star that an investment proposal involving about Tk 300 crore was lying with the authorities for two years. Under the proposal Zia and Sylhet airports would be converted into 'top international airports'. The proposal has three options for the government — Build Operate Transfer (BOT), Build Operate Own and Build and Operate Jointly, she said.

"But I do not think the move to shift the domestic services from Zia has anything to do with our proposal," Nasrin said.

The action chairman of CAAB however said plans are underway to hand over cargo, luggage and passenger handling at Zia to the private sector. "I am not aware of any move to privatise the airport," he said.

Another official source claimed that in the face of a growing demand from environmentalists for shifting the cantonment and the old airport from the city, the military has initiated the project to keep a vast city area under its control.

## 5 killed, 26 hurt as truck tumbles down bridge

PABNA, May 8: Five people travelling by a truck were killed and 26 others injured as the lorry tumbled down a bridge on the Nagarbari-Bogra highway at Patgari in Santhia upazila this morning, reports UNB.

Police said the truck carrying small businessmen from Bera plunged 5-7 feet deep into water at 6:30 am after the driver lost control on the steering when one of the front wheels derailed.

Two passengers identified as Sher Mohammad, 45, and Abul Hossain, 48, died on the spot. Three others — Shamsher Ali, 45, Khokon, 30, and Razzak Mollah, 25 — died on the way to hospital.

The victims, hailed from different villages in Bera and Santhia upazilas, were going to Sherpur in Bogra to purchase paddy. The bodies were taken away by their relatives without post mortem.

Twenty-one of the injured were admitted to Bera health complex while five others — Islam, 35, Abul Hossain, 40, Sanwar, 35, Afanuddin, 28, and Abul Salam — were sent to Dhaka, Bogra and Pabna "in critical condition."

The truck driver managed to escape. A case was filed with Santhia thana.

## CEC Hena resigns

From Page 1

gland problems and blood pressure.

After sending the resignation letter to the President, Hena went to office to say good bye to his colleagues on the Commission and staff at the EC Secretariat. He went to the office by a car with the flag down. He spent about an hour with acting Chief Election Commissioner Moshataque Ahmed Chowdhury and Election Commissioner Abdur Rahman Chowdhury. He regretted to them that he could not consult them before resigning. He then visited every room at the Secretariat.

Abu Hena told The Daily Star, "I have resigned purely on the health ground, political situation has nothing to do with it." He still believes that the allegations made against him and his colleagues on the Commission were baseless and demands for resignation illogical.

The resignation came when the Opposition has virtually stopped demanding it and the ruling party got unhappy with the Commission over the latter's reluctance to hold Upazila polls without the Opposition's participation.

Moshataque Ahmed Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "I feel bad that Mr Hena has resigned. I wish him quick recovery from illness." He also said a replacement should be made as soon as possible.

Abu Hena had taken office following consensus among the major political parties in April 1996. He conducted the June 1996 general elections in which

Sheikh Hasina's Awami League went to power and Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh Nationalist Party emerged as the main opposition in parliament.

The opposition, specially BNP, started accusing Hena of bias towards the ruling party since the first parliamentary by-election in a Feni constituency and demanded his resignation. The party staged a demonstration on December 17, 1998 to press the demand. Later, BNP, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Oikya Jote formed an opposition alliance on January 6, 1999 and put forward a four-point demand including Abu Hena's resignation.

The alliance staged demonstration around the EC Secretariat on September 30, 1999. The ruling party started pressing in January this year for Upazila polls even without the Opposition's participation, a high level EC source said. "As a result, Hena was about to resign. He changed his mind only after the Prime Minister's assurance that there would be no more any such pressure."

But the ruling AL grew critical of the EC as it did not go for holding Upazila elections without the participation of opposition parties. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina publicly expressed annoyance at this on February 14 this year while Local Government Minister and AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman went one step further on March 11. Dissatisfied over its reluctance to hold the polls as desired by the ruling party, Zillur Rahman publicly termed the Commission "Kum-bhakarna, a character in Indian mythology known for deep sleep."

The conflicting political camps have made various allegations against Abu Hena but none of those substantiated the allegations.

Hena is the third CEC, out of seven so far, who has quit office before the expiry of five-year term. Justice Abdur Rauf who joined office on December 12, 1990 resigned on April 18, 1995. He was replaced by Justice A K M Sadek on April 27, 1995 who quit on April 6, 1996.

Abu Hena, a retired bureaucrat to become the CEC for the first time, had taken oath on April 9, 1996.

## Killer of two brothers yet to be arrested

By Staff Correspondent

Police have failed to arrest the killer of the two brothers gunned down at Mohammadpur in the city on Friday.

The investigation officer of DB told The Daily Star yesterday that his team visited the spot and talked to the people who witnessed the killing.

The officer said they are trying to find out the reason behind the killing.

Earlier, ABM Sultan Ahmed, former officer-in-charge of Tejgaon police station declined to do the job. The detective chief then assigned inspector AKM Mohsinuzzaman to investigate the case.

Ashfaq Hossain Jewel, 28, and Mohammad Ali Rebel, 24, were shot dead allegedly by Kamal Pasha, who according to police is a professional killer.

They were sons of Sayed Amad Hossain, former editor of monthly Detective, a police publication and a resident of Kazi Nazrul Islam Road at Mohammadpur.

## Shikdar's armed cadre arrested

From Staff Correspondent

KHULNA, May 8: Police arrested Kabir Mridha today from railway colony area. He is one of the armed cadres of Ershad Shikdar and wanted in connection with many criminal cases.

Police said Kabir Mridha helped Shikdar establish 'Nalchity Project' by illegal occupation of railway land. Mridha was in-charge of a group of Shikdar's accomplices involved in pilferage of fuel from rail wagons.

Meanwhile, Ershad Shikdar flew into rage in the Special Court today when he was refused cooked food brought by his elder daughter from Swarnakamol. He abused police officials on duty in obnoxious words. A senior police official sent Ershad Shikdar to a separate room in the court imposing more stringent restrictions on him.

The cooked food brought from Swarnakamol was not allowed for security reason.

## Nasim Osman's assistant murdered

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, May 8: Mohammad Nurunnabi, 40, an office assistant of former Jatiya Party MP A K M Nasim Osman, was beaten to death by unidentified miscreants in Pathantuli area under Siddhirganj thana last night.

Police and eyewitnesses said the victim was attacked at 10:30 pm when he was returning to his Enayet Nagar residence by a rickshaw.

The miscreants beat him up mercilessly and left him unconscious near an under-construction building declared him dead.

Passers-by took him to the nearby hospital where doctors declared him dead. The body was sent to the morgue for autopsy.

A case has been registered with Siddhirganj police station but none was arrested so far.

## Colombo rejects LTTE ceasefire offer

COLOMBO, May 8: The government will not accept a ceasefire offer made Monday by the Tamil Tiger rebels because it is conditional, government officials said, reports AP.

Accepting the offer would send a wrong signal that the government was willing to pull out its troops out of the northern city of Jaffna, said officials.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga favours peace talks, but will not accept any conditions or compromise the sovereignty of Sri Lanka, said a senior government official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Earlier, Tamil Tiger rebels offered a temporary ceasefire today to allow the evacuation of 40,000 Sri Lankan government troops from the northern city of Jaffna.

The safe passage offer amounted to a call for the surrender of the city of 500,000 "to prevent the further escalation of violence and a bloodbath." It was faxed to news agencies in Colombo and New Delhi from the London office of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The government has indicated it is prepared to fight to hold on to the city and the nearby Palali air base, the crucial supply link for troops defending Jaffna.

The offer of a truce came as the Sri Lankan air force bombed rebel artillery positions at Elephant Pass, the land bridge that the rebels captured

last month between the Jaffna Peninsula and the mainland.

Military officials said the army was inducting weaponry newly acquired on the international arms market to strengthen the new military defense line, 25 kilometers southeast of Jaffna, in the hope of stopping a relentless advance by the rebels toward the city.

Jaffna, considered the center of Tamil culture and history, was under the rebels' control from 1990-95. It was then the capital of a virtual Tamil state, which had its own police, judiciary and border controls. During that time, however, the government never lost control of the Palali airport.

Reports of the truce offer were delayed in Sri Lanka by military censorship that has been imposed on the local and foreign media.

The Tigers' press release said the LTTE is prepared to declare a temporary ceasefire suspending all armed hostilities against the Sri Lankan armed forces to facilitate the beleaguered government troops to be evacuated safely from the Jaffna Peninsula.

The ceasefire would come into effect as soon as the Sri Lankan government responds that it is willing to observe a halt in fighting.

The rebels called upon the International Committee of the Red Cross to supervise and assist the orderly evacuation of troops.

## Repression on wife HC grants bail to Prof Ferdous

The High Court granted bail to Mohammad Ferdous Hossain, an associate professor of the Department of Political Science, Dhaka University, yesterday till disposal of the case against him for repression on his wife, reports BSS.

A High Court Division Bench comprising Justice M A Aziz and Justice Mohammad Abdus Salam granted the bail after hearing the counsels of Prof Ferdous and the state.

Earlier, the High Court refused to grant an interim bail to Prof Ferdous, who is also General Secretary, DU Teachers Association, following rejection of his bail prayer by the Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Bishesh Adalat, Dhaka.

After a chargesheet was submitted against him by the investigation officer, Prof Ferdous again tried to get bail from Nari-O-Shishu Nirjatan Daman Bishesh Adalat but failed. He then preferred appeal before the High Court against the rejection of his bail prayer from the lower court and obtained the bail yesterday.

The case, in brief, is that Khalid Mahmud, brother-in-law of Prof Ferdous, lodged a case with Ramna police on January 27, alleging that at 9 am on January 26, he was informed by one Dr Mizanur Rahman by telephone that Prof Ferdous was demanding Tk 5 lakh as dowry from his sister Ayesha Siddiqua Shelley. Prof Ferdous beat her sister and at one stage he tried to strangle her.

Senior advocate Khandker Mahbubuddin Ahmed moved the bail prayer of Ferdous. He was assisted by Barrister Abdullah Al Mamun, advocate Ruhul Qudus Kaja and advocate Humayun Kabir Bulbul.

## Top leaders of 4-party alliance won't join May 16 mass procession

Secretaries general of the four opposition parties allied against the government will lead the May 16 mass procession in the capital to protest the threat of ruling party leaders' to the High Court judges.

The central liaison committee of the alliance at a meeting at 29 Minto Road yesterday decided that the chiefs of the allied parties would not join the procession.

"The top leaders will not be in the mass procession as they are busy otherwise. Besides, it is not necessary that they will have to be present everywhere," a liaison committee member told UNB.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia announced the programme of mass procession in the city at a combined rally at Paltan Maidan on April 30.

Meeting sources said the four chiefs would address a grand rally of primary school teachers on May 21 in the capital.

About next course of action, he said they had not yet taken

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## Guyana Test Day 4 lost to weather

GEORGETOWN, May 8: Bad weather claimed the fourth day of the First Test between the West Indies and Pakistan at Bourda Oval here Monday without a ball being struck, reports AFP.

After the rain-hit third day the West Indies were on 222 for seven in reply to Pakistan's first innings total of 288.



Anti-globalisation protesters burn an Asian Development Bank (ADB) banner and explode firecrackers yesterday in front of the Westin hotel hosting the 33rd ADB annual meeting in Chinag Mai. Several thousand protesters chanted slogans around the building as the final day of the conference got under way inside.

— AFP photo

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e-mail : itsdhk@bangla.net  
Website : http://www.itsfts.com

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ITS Intertek Testing Services (Bd) Ltd.  
Hasney Tower (7th Floor), 3/A, Kawran Bazar C/A., Dhaka-1215, Bangladesh.

Editor: Mahfuz Anam

Published by the Editor from Transcraft Ltd, 229, Tejgaon Industrial Area, Dhaka-1208 on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd., 52 Motijheel C.A., Dhaka-1000. Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: 19 Karwan Bazar, Dhaka-1215. Telephone Numbers: 8124944, 8124955, 8124966, Fax: 8125155, GPO Box No. 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Internet edition address: http://www.dailystarnews.com and Email address: dstar@bangla.net