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Khaleda rejects PM's offer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition leader Khaleda Zia has rejected outright Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's offer that she (PM) would accept any date for election if demanded by the opposition leader on the floor of the parliament.

"The Prime Minister has no authority to announce or hold election. It is the Election Commission that will do the job," she told journalists at her official residence in the city yesterday evening.

Asking the PM to resign and hand over power to a caretaker government immediately, the Opposition leader said, "We'll decide on the election date in consultation with the caretaker government. For this, we don't need to go back to the parliament."

At her meeting with the foreign diplomats on Friday, Hasina said she would agree to any date for an early election provided the Opposition leader goes back to parliament and asks for it.

The Opposition leader also accused the PM of not keeping any of her promises made to the people. "She (PM) has proved to be a liar. People do not believe her, nor do we."

Three foreign R&H consultants abducted in CHT

Tk 9 crore demanded as ransom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Gunmen abducted three foreigners working as consultants for the Roads and Highways Department in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) from a road, 25 kilometres off Rangamati on Friday evening and demanded a Tk nine crore ransom.

The three -- Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hugaard of Denmark, and Tim Shelby of Great Britain -- were taken hostage at gunpoint while they were on their way to Khagrachhari hill district by a car from Rangamati hill town at around 5pm on Friday, police sources said.

Another British consultant David Weston, who was also in the car, and the driver were allowed to return to Rangamati with a note to get Tk nine crore (1.8 million

US dollars) in local currency to secure release of the hostages.

The authorities today deployed armed forces for the searching operation. The armed kidnapers are suspected to be members of anti-peace accord groups like the United People Democratic Front (UPDF), led by former Pahari Chhatra Parishad leader Proshit Khisha.

Police said a group of six gunmen had intercepted the car carrying the consultants at RMK road linking Rangamati and Khagrachhari and forced them out of the car.

The kidnapers took the three hostages to nearby forests in the hilly terrain after they had let Weston and the car driver go, police sources added.

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Sit-in around Secretariat today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led four-party opposition alliance stages a sit-in around the Bangladesh Secretariat today amidst tight security and widespread apprehension of violence.

The sit-in is part of the opposition programme to press home several demands, including resignation of the "failed and incompetent" Awami League government and repeal of the Public Safety Act. Trial of those involved in the textbook scandal, release of and withdrawal of false cases against arrested opposition leaders and activists, and end to repression, killing, terrorism and blatant interference in judicial matters are also on their list of demands.

While the BNP and its allies have made all-out preparations to ensure

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Police personnel put-up barbed-wire barricades at the Matshya Bhaban crossing yesterday to keep Opposition activists at bay during today's sit-in around the Secretariat.

Abduction, killing, extortion rampant in 3 hill dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Incidents of abduction, highway robbery, killing and extortion have become rampant in the three districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts over the last few years.

Businessmen, passenger buses and other commercial transports are forced to pay tolls on roads either to gangs opposed to the CHT peace accord or to the ones supporting the accord.

More than 50 cases of abduction were reported in the last six months. Highway robbery has become so common in the hill districts these days that many transport companies are moving elsewhere in the country with their

business. They have also stopped services in several routes classified as 'notorious'.

Local people said most of the organised crimes are controlled by the two groups, one supporting the CHT peace accord and the other opposing it.

The peace accord ended years of insurgency and guerrilla warfare in the CHT by Chakmas. Since signing of the accord, the government has not gone on the offensive to recover the huge number of illegal arms left after the guerilla warfare, they said.

Although, in the past, there were reports of 'foreigners' being targeted for extortion, but abduc

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'Kidnappers used old-fashioned arms, looked like tribals'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Who kidnapped the three European consultants in Naniarchar on Friday is still not known.

Police and security sources suspect that they were kidnapped by activists of United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) led by Prasiit Khisa, which oppose the CHT peace accord signed by the Jana Sanghati Samity (JSS) with the government in 1997.

But CHT Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma would not immediately blame anyone. "I do not know who is controlling the

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Cop shot dead at Uttara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Miscereants gunned down a police constable and injured two others at Jasim Uddin Road under Uttara thana in the city last night.

The dead was identified as Abbas Salam.

The two injured policemen, identified as Farook and Halim, were admitted to the Combined Military Hospital (CMH).

Police said a gang of miscreants opened fire on the on-duty policemen from inside a taxicab when they were standing on the Jasim Uddin road at about 9:47 last night.

Police later chased the taxicab and arrested two of the gang, Ripon and Selim from in front of Monolova Kabab.

Police also recovered one pistol and 50 bullets from their possession.

Malaysia bans recruitment of Bangladeshis?

AP, Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia has banned the recruitment of Bangladesh workers, blaming them for the country's increasing social problems, a news report said yesterday.

Aseh Che Mat, a senior Home Ministry official gave no figures but accused "thousands" of Bangladeshis of forging documents and marrying local Malay Muslim women to remain in the country illegally. The Star daily said.

He said many Bangladesh workers often switched jobs illegally for better wages and ran their own businesses without valid permits.

Aseh said the ban took effect last month but employers could still hire workers from Myanmar, Nepal, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia, The Star said.

Government officials were on a public holiday yesterday and could not be

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9 killed as bus falls into ditch in Rajbari

UNB, Rajbari

Nine people were killed and 15 others injured in a road accident on Daulatdia-Rajbari road in Sadar upazila early yesterday.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at Darpana-ayanpur crossing, about 8 kilometres from the district town, at about 7 am when a passenger bus from Daulatdia skidded off the road and fell into a roadside ditch.

Nine passengers died on the spot and 15 others received injuries.

Of the dead, two were identified as bus driver Shah Jahan, 35, and a

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Both teachers, students have role to ensure peace on campus: President

UNB, Dhaka

President Shahabuddin Ahmed has asked students to stop campus violence and perform responsibilities to their families, neighbours, society and the state sincerely.

"Lead your life as honest, brave and patriotic citizens rising above all sorts of smugness it's my sincere

advice to you," the President told the students of Jahangirnagar University while addressing the second convocation of the university yesterday.

He regretted that lack of patience, tolerance and good thinking is often noticed in the educational institutions, particularly in the universities. "News of negative

incidents in the educational institutions diminish their positive aspects."

Referring to the incident of repression on girl students in the JU few years back, the President said it blackened the history of the university. He asked both the teachers and students to take united efforts to

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India join the party

SPORTS REPORTER

The GrameenPhone Under-17 Asia Cup took real shape yesterday with the belated arrival of India.

And after the team reached the city two days after the juvenile tournament kicked off Thursday, the Indians recorded a massive 257-run win over United Arab Emirates (UAE) in their opening Group B

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Baghdad blitzed again

Pentagon calls it a "routine mission"

AFP, Washington

Ten years after the Gulf War launched by his father against Saddam Hussein, George W Bush got tough with the Iraqi leader, authorising air strikes against air defence installations near Baghdad for the first time in more than two

years. The air raids killed an 18-year-old woman and a man and left more than 20 Iraqis wounded, some in critical condition, including children, claimed the Iraqi health ministry on Saturday.

Ghaidah Abdallah and Khalil Hamid Alwash succumbed to their

injuries in hospital, a ministry spokesman told the Iraqi News Agency.

Friday's raid by 24 US and British aircraft marked the first time since Desert Fox, a four-day bombing campaign in December 1998, that US warplanes have struck targets

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INSIDE TODAY

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Party politics and the nation's future
Column: Connecting the Dots

Dr AR Choudhury

LAW AND OUR RIGHTS

Judicial independence with accountability

BUSINESS 6, 7 & 8

Speakers stress home-grown policy for development

New 25-nation Asia forum due for February launch

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Feb 18		5.55 pm
Feb 19	6-31 am	

Prayer Timings

February 18

	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-30	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-20
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-00	6-05
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation