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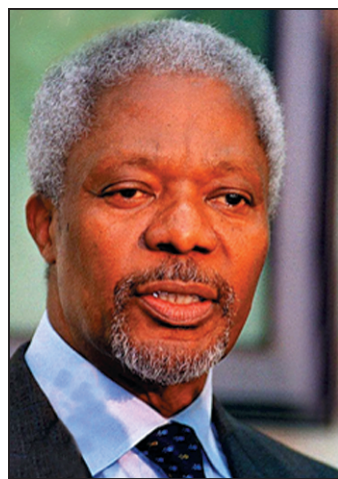
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Annan arrives tomorrow

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan arrives in the capital tomorrow on a three-day visit, the third leg of his four-nation South Asian tour.

He will fly in from Kathmandu and later proceed to New Delhi on March 15. Annan is now in Pakistan on a three-day visit, his first stop of the ten-day tour of the region.

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad will receive Annan, the third UN secretary general to visit the country after Dr Kurt Waldheim and Perez de Cuellar, at the Zia International Airport. Annan will stay at the Sonargaon Hotel.

Courtesy call on President
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Japan's economic meltdown threatens global economy
DSE, CSE price quotations

Announcement

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 12		6.06 pm
Mar 13	6-09 am	

Prayer Timings

March 12

	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-20	5-50
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

BNP to place 7-pt demand before caretaker govt for free, fair polls

REZAUL KARIM

The main opposition BNP plans to put forward a seven-point demand before the caretaker government as soon as it takes over for the sake of a free, fair election. "We will place some highly important issues before the caretaker government immediately after it assumes office and press for implementation of those for a free and fair election," said BNP Secretary-General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Talking to reporters of The Daily Star, Bhorer Kagoj and Daily Jugantar at party central office yesterday, Bhuiyan said BNP has long been demanding for realisation of these demands but the AL government is yet to implement any.

He said the opposition wouldn't

ask for anything from the AL government except its immediate resignation.

The demands to be placed before the caretaker government are, recasting of the Election Commission and removal of all controversial persons from the constitutional body; amendments of certain election rules; revision of the current voters' list through inclusion of genuine voters kept out of the list and exclusion of the fake voters; recovery of illegal arms, closing of licensed arms during polls and cancellation of arms license given to terrorists and branded cadres by the Awami League government; withdrawal of all controversial and party men in different administrative posts and offices; release of all arrested and jailed political leaders

and activists as well as withdrawal of false cases against opposition activists; and ensuring impartiality of state-owned radio and television.

The BNP secretary-general said that it would not be possible to ensure a free, fair and peaceful election unless and until these issues are properly addressed and that his party will extend all-out cooperation to see to it that the election is free and fair.

Replying to a question on BNP's preparation for the upcoming polls, he said BNP raised the demand for an early election only after completing its preparation.

"We believe in democracy and want to come to power through election. Being a democratic party,
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JP for consensus on chief adviser and CEC

STAR REPORT

Jatiya Party (Ershad) yesterday decided that all the components of the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance have to reach a consensus on the Chief Adviser in the next caretaker government and the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

JP sources however said the party has reservation about the present CEC and the immediate past chief justice, who is scheduled to be the Chief Adviser.

Meanwhile, BNP has already expressed its 'no objection' to the immediate past chief justice heading the next caretaker government and said it would 'observe' the performance of the present CEC.

According to a JP press release, the party presidium at a meeting yesterday also decided that a party delegation would meet BNP chief Khaleda Zia shortly to discuss the alliance's election strategy.

The meeting with Khaleda would
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Two tribal young women at Kutukchhari Bazar in Rangamati read the leaflet seeking cooperation in securing release of three European hostages yesterday. The leaflet contains texts in Bangla, English and Chakma.

Cabinet meets today PM likely to discuss polls-related issues

NAZMUL ASHRAF and REAZ AHMAD

With the ruling Awami League and main opposition BNP on the verge of reaching an agreement on an early general election, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is expected to elaborate soon her plans for the polls.

Sources said the prime minister, who returned home last night after performing Hajj in Saudi Arabia, is likely to start talking to party colleagues about such crucial issues as the government's resignation, dissolution of the parliament and a tentative timeframe for the general election.

During the weekly cabinet meeting due at 3 p.m. today, Hasina may take up for discussion the performance of the ministers and the achievements of different ministries. Taking into consideration different factors, one minister said he would get barely one month to work on the development projects under his ministry.

Several influential ministers told The Daily Star last night that the PM may pass on directives to all the ministers to complete different development
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EC preparing for a mid-June election

NAZRUL ISLAM

In view of the recent political development, the Election Commission (EC) has instructed its officials to speed up preparatory work for the next parliamentary elections, keeping mid-June in mind as the tentative timeframe.

"When the caretaker government takes over, the commission would announce the election schedule after consultation with the political parties, taking into account the upcoming HSC examinations and the monsoon," Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed told The Daily Star yesterday.

The HSC exams are scheduled to start from May 10 and end on June 13. Meanwhile, Ashar, the first month of the rainy season, begins on June 15. The commission believes that June 14 (Thursday) would be the best date to hold the polls, EC sources said.

At a meeting yesterday, the EC reviewed its strength and preparations for the first time after Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia had demanded elections by May. On Saturday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said that her party was ready for election before June 12.

However, the CEC himself did not pronounce any polling date.
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Army chief holds closed-door meeting with Shantu Larma

Cordon widened by another 30 sq km in Kalapahar area

ABDULLAH AL MAHMUD, From Rangamati

Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen Harun-Or-Rashid held an hour-long closed-door meeting with CHT Regional Council Chairman Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma for the first time yesterday at the latter's office.

Though the subject of discussion was not disclosed, insiders said they discussed the hostage crisis. The army chief wanted to know Larma's view on the matter, they said.

Earlier, the army chief held another meeting with the authorities

at the Rangamati Brigade Headquarter and discussed the hostage crisis. He arrived here at about 11:30 am.

CHT Affairs Minister Kalparanjan Chakma who remained absent from press briefing in the last two days reportedly due to 'illness', left for Dhaka yesterday to attend a Cabinet meeting today. He was acting as chief coordinator of the efforts for solving the hostage crisis.

Meanwhile, the authorities again said they are hopeful of establishing contact with the abductors "any time" to secure release of the three Europeans held hostage by armed

tribal men since February 16 for ransom.

"We are hopeful of getting a positive reply for negotiation any-time", Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Mobaidul Islam said at a press briefing at Rangamati Circuit House yesterday evening.

The Divisional Commissioner ruled out any army operation. "We will be able to free the hostages through negotiation", he said.

In absence of political leaders, foreign envoys and delegates distributed leaflets at Kutukchhari Bazar and adjoining villages also
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A bush fire broke out on the north-western side of the runway at Zia International Airport yesterday for the second time in two days. The fire, detected at 5:00pm and put out by 6:00pm, is suspected to have originated from a burning cigarette thrown into either dry grass or bush. Fortunately, no damage was done as the aircraft were beyond the fire's reach. Earlier on Saturday morning, fire service put out another fire at the same place.

The abduction story

MORSHED ALI KHAN, Back From Rangamati

Danes Torben Mikkelsen, 48, Nills Hulgaard, 63, and Britons Tim Silby 28, David Weston, 56 -- all working for Danish international consulting firm KAMPSAX-- arrived at Rangamati from Chittagong airport at around one pm on the fateful day of February 16.

The four engineers were to study technical aspects for development of a 63-km vital road linking Rangamati and Khagrachhari under the Tk 500 crore CHT (Chittagong Hill Tracts) Major Roads Project, funded partially by the Danish government.

Within 15 minutes of their arrival at the newly rented KAMPSAX office in Bonorupa area of Rangamati town, the team of four engineers led by the project director, Torben Mikkelsen, set out for the site. The firm's 'local fixer' Zakir Hossain meanwhile arranged accommodation for them at Rangamati Parjatan Hotel.

It was not the first time KAMPSAX experts visited the CHT. Earlier, experts of the firm working for various other projects had visited remote areas of the CHT without any armed escort.

Soren Nysom, the company's Director for International Activities, told The Daily Star that they had been working in Bangladesh for over 10 years without any problem. The guideline of their government is that no Danish company should work where armed guards are required for working, he mentioned.

"We never take up a project at a place where armed escort is necessary to carry out our job," said Nysom.
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Khaleda asks Hasina to step down

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia has asked Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to step down handing over power to a caretaker government to pave the way for general elections by May.

In a statement yesterday, the BNP Chairperson, who is now in China, said the country's independence and sovereignty, culture and religion were not safe as long as Awami League remained in power.

"An early exit of this government will save the country and its people from ruination," she said.

The opposition leader's statement came on the heels of the Prime Minister's announcement in Medina that her party was ready for seeking people's mandate before
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Ershad shown arrested on graft charge

BSS, Dhaka

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) court yesterday issued a "custody warrant" against jailed former president Hussain Muhammad Ershad on a graft charge brought in 1994.

The warrant order was issued following an Anti-Corruption Bureau Petition in this regard.

The former president is now in one month's detention under the Special Powers Act (SPA).

Ershad was sent to jail on November 20 after the High Court convicted him in the Janata Tower

Case sentencing him to a five-year term along with a fine of Taka nearly 5.5 crore.

The CMM issued the custody warrant against Ershad after hearing the argument of the prosecution side and asked the jail authorities to show him as an arrested accused.

The Anti-Corruption Bureau filed the case with Tejgaon thana against the former president on August 31, 1994 on charges of causing a loss of about Tk 17.18 crore to the national exchequer by intervening in Roads and Highways project misusing his power while in office.

Firing on Pajero: Dispute settled forcibly?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The issue of firing of gunshots from the car of Chief Whip's son Sadek Abdullah on the Pajero jeep of industrialist Nurul Haq Shikder on Friday was "settled by use of force and threat of reprisal", sources said.

Shikder's family had thought of filing a complaint with police but refrained from doing so following alleged threats, the sources claimed. Driver Mannan was injured and a window of the jeep was damaged when 8-9 shots were fired from Sadek's car near the Wonderland Children's Park at Gulshan.
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Shikder's wife, two daughters and two grand daughters were going to Baridhara from Dhanmondi in the jeep, family sources had said on Saturday.

Witnesses and the family sources had also said that the shots were

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fired and the jeep was chased up to Jahangir Gate at the cantonment when Sadek and his associates failed to stop it.

The family sources had alleged that Sadek chased the car to kidnap
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