#### Release of hostages

# Foreign envoys hail PM's initiative

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina exchanged pleasantries with diplomats yesterday after paying homage to Bangabandhu Sheikh Muiibur Rahman on the occasion of his 81st birth anniver-

During the exchange of greetings in the Bangabandhu mausoleum premises the envoys hailed the Prime Minister's personal initiatives for solving the hostage crisis in Chittagong Hill Tracts

They also conveyed the greetings on behalf of their heads of state or government and said Bangabandhu is widely respected in their respective countries. They also likened Bangabandhu to their founding fathers of nations.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received the President in the mausoleum premises about 10:50 am and both the leaders went straight to the mazar to pay homage to the founding father of Bangladesh.

President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed placed the wreath at the newly built mausoleum first followed by the Prime Minister. A smart contingent, drawn from the three services, presented a guard of honour and gave him an armed

The President and the Prime Minister stood in solemn silence for some time as a mark of respect to Bangabandhu as the defence guards played bugle.

Ministers, MPs, sister of the Prime Minister, Sheikh Rehana, chiefs of three services, diplomats from 45 countries, political leaders, high civil and military officials were present at the mazar during the

A munajat was offered there seeking divine blessing for the departed soul of Bangabandhu, his family members, martyrs of the liberation war and martyrs of all democratic movements.

Hospital, said the three foreigners

physical state and it seems they did

not undergo any physical torture.

However, a sense of trauma cannot

be ruled out as they were in captivity

for 28 days. They need complete rest immediately," said a hospital

Diplomats of the two countries

and several senior military officers

occupied the cabins adjacent to

those where the released hostages

were lodged. It was learnt that they

were engaged in talks. Army sup-

British High Commission said over

phone from the CMH, "We are ready

to leave. But we do not know when

we can leave the place (CMH)".

At 8:50 pm, a spokesman of the

Meanwhile, at 9 pm, official news

agency BSS gave a flash that

Foreign Minister Abdus Samad

Azad would address a press confer-

ence at 10 pm at state guest house

Since the afternoon, senior army

Stand-by support troops were

seen arriving at the CMH and even

hurt in Kabul car

Five people, including two children were killed and a dozen others wounded

when a powerful car bomb rocked Kabul yesterday, officials and witnesses said. The Taliban's official Radio Shariat

said five people were killed when oppo-sition forces carried out the explosion at

the "behest of their foreign masters Three Taliban soldiers were among those injured, according to the broad-

Three cars caught fire and several

houses were badly damaged in the blast in the city's western section of Karte

Four people with serious injuries were admitted to the main Wazir Akbar

resident as he fixed his gate, shattered

in the hands of his mother. There were

many people wounded lying around," he told AFP, pointing at pools of blood close

to two destroyed Taliban military jeeps

mander in the area, said the bomb had

been planted in a taxi which was blown

to pieces, damaging nearby houses and

and started searching vehicles.

Taliban soldiers cordoned off the site

15 RDA employees

The accused persons include

RDA Estate Officer Abu Bakar

Siddique, Accounts Officer Shahidul

Islam and Assistant Engineer Ali

alleged that RDA men had forcibly

occupied the Padma residential park

police to take necessary measures in

In his petition, the complainant

Meanwhile, the court asked the

Abdul Nafe, deputy police com-

The two boys died instantly, said one

One died in my arms and the other

Five killed, 12

officials were seen visiting the CMH.

They were learnt to be "debriefing"

the three Europeans

blast

Khan hospital.

by the force of the blast

and a charred taxi cab.

wounding passersby.

FROM PAGE 12

Hossain Masud.

this regard.

area and looted its trees.

Thursday.

Padma (Saturday night) regarding

the release of the three hostages.

plied food to the freed hostages.

"They are in reasonably good

received a clean bill of health.

Prayers over, different organisations and people of different strata placed wreaths at the mazar Among them were leaders of Awami League, its front organisations. central leaders and local adminis-

The President later visited the mazar and mausoleum premises and signed the visitor's book with compliments to the independence

tration officials and people.

"Uncompromising leadership of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is a glorious chapter in the contemporary history of attaining independence, Justice Shahabuddin wrote in the visitor's book.

Meanwhile, different political parties and socio-cultural organisations chalked out separate programmes.

The leaders of the party led by the Chief Whip Abul Hasanat Abdullah placed wreath at the portrait of father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the morning. A milad mahfil was also held. Besides, a discussion was held at the South Bank of the Bibir Pukur area.

Bangabandhu Sangskritic Jote observed a daylong programme on this day at Aswini Kumar Town Hall. The programme included placing of wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu, distribution of sweets, milad mahfil, discussion on the life of Bangabandhu and cultural

Kheyali Group Theatre organised a discussion and cultural function at its office premises. Children's organisation Shuktara, Khelaghar Asar and Divisional Information Office jointly organised similar programmes at AM Government Primary School.

The district unit of Shishu Academy organised a two-day programme on this occasion. The programme included discussion and children's painting competition.

mobile phone chargers and tents

were being brought in view of a brief

rain that swept some parts of the city

snaps of the freed hostages at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs had taken

the responsibility to oversee formal

hand-over of the freed hostages to

diplomats of their countries. At

around 6:30 pm, army officials said

they were waiting for a decision from

foreign ministry Shaheed Akhtar

arrived at the CMH after a meeting

with the foreign minister at his

official residence at New Eskaton.

Foreign Secretary Syed Muazzem

Ali went there at around 9 pm.

European hostages.

force had to be used.'

know, they are well."

ISPR photographers also took

It was learnt that none from the

in the evening.

the foreign ministry.

Freed hostages kept away

# Hostages freed unharmed

troops became sure about presence of the kidnappers at Chakma and Marma villages of Nakshachhari and Daiiivapara in the remote inaccessible hill forest, six km north of Kashkhali

"We surprised the kidnappers at midnight. The gang numbering about seven fired back when we opened some blank shots. As they felt that they were being encircled, they gave up and fled after the exchange of fire for about 12 minutes. A thorough search in the area resulted in rescue of the three hostages," a beaming officer told The Daily Star at Kashthali camp.

Parliament Member from

Rangmati Dipankar Talukder, GOC of 24 Division Major General Abdul Matin, Divisional Commissioner of Chittagong Mobaidul Islam, Brigade Commander of 305th Brigade of Rangamati zone Brigadier General Golam Rabbani and Lt Col Ashraf were present at the camp. Besides, representatives from British High Commission Graham Cough, Chris Suite, John Crawford from Scotland Yard, Danish police specialist Mogul Wilber, Sore J NYSE, head of Danish construction firm Campasax for which the three work, and PCJSS leader Shaktiman Chakma were present to hug and cheer the freed hostages.

It was a joyous and cheerful

a crowd, kept at a distance, to watch the freed Europeans agog with smiles. They had grown beard and looked tanned

Army doctor Lt Col Bahar took care of the three who underwent a thorough check-up at the medical hut of the camp and pronounced them fit to travel to Dhaka.

Their departure for he capital was delayed for some time as helicopter was not immediately available. One had to be requisitioned from Tungipara where Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, ministers and other dignitaries had gone to offer prayers at the mazar of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on his 81st birthday on

Mobaidul Islam, who briefed newsmen every evening at Rangamti Circuit House for the past one month, had his last briefing at the entrance of the army camp.

The official who indicated on Friday that freedom for the hostages was imminent said with a smile there had been no deal and no ransom was paid to the abductors.

The army personnel had been keeping an eye on the kidnappers and during the raid found the hostages together in a hut. The miscreants had fled, leaving some assorted weapons -- a handgun and several country-made guns, he said

"It is a moment of pride for the nation and the army feel happy to carry out the task of freeing the hostages," a beaming Colonel Ashraf said.

"It has been a difficult assignment for his soldiers. For 30 days, they had to be on guard day and night in the forests and hills, closing in the cordon that the kidnappers eventually found difficult to break, said another officer.

He indicated that troops, forbidden to launch a full scale operation, had to use their wits and knowledge of the areas from decades of counter-insurgency operation. "After pinpointing the hideout of the kidnappers, we could surprise them," he said preferring anonymity.

As the hostages flew towards Dhaka 11:10 am in an air force helicopter, Divina Mikkelsen, wife of Torben Mikkelsen, was going to Kutukchhari by road to attend a public rally tomorrow for freedom of the hostages.

"I am overwhelmed with joy" Divina later told newsmen at Rangamati Circuit House where she had a brief rest before returning to Dhaka. She thanked all helping rescue of her husband.

The hostage drama finally ended but it left many questions unan-

"We did not have any prisoner,"

continued in pursuit of the gang that kidnapped the three and to find out the weapons, one source said.

Local people however said they heard some gun shots on Friday night. Some of them preferring anonymity said that the hostages were brought back to the camp after a 'deal was struck' with the kidnappers. Some claimed they heard that Tk 40 lakh was paid as

The kidnappers had earlier demanded a ransom of Tk nine crore, later reportedly reduced it to TK one crore and finally to TK 40 lakh. However, it could not be confirmed. Officials denied any deal with the abductors.

Dipankar Talukder and Brigadier Rabbani's presence in the area on Friday afternoon and in the evening, confirmed by police, produced rumours that freedom of at least one of the hostages was imminent.

somewhere deep inside the forest to negotiate release of the hostages, some sources claimed. Dipankar, however, denied that

They went to Kaokhali and

he went to Kaokhali on Friday and that any ransom was paid. On the identity of the kidnappers,

he said that they were supporters of UPDF. However, he refused to

### Razzak Ali

FROM PAGE 12 said to have been a strong political base of former whip Ashraf Hossain. Ashraf Hossain was elected from this constituency in 1991. Senior Vice President of district BNP and former JP MP Abdul Gaffar Biswas also wants to be nominated from here, said one source.

Apparently there BNP leaders want nomination from Khulna-4 (Rupsha-Dighalia - Terokhada). They are city BNP President M Nurul Islam Dadu Bhai, former MP Ziauddin Paltu and Prof Majedul

But Dr Ghazi Abdul Huq is the lone leader of Khulna BNP who has already started mass contact for mobilising support for his nomination from Khulna-5 (Dumuria-Phultala) constituency.

"I am feeling relaxed as there is no other contender from my party for this seat," said Dr Huq who is a former secretary general of Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA).

#### Grading system

FROM PAGE 12 mark in these subjects in examinations in the next session. This facility will remain valid till their registration for SSC permits.

The system will also reduce the number of "accidents" often taking place after publication of results of public examinations, mainly SSC and HSC, they said.

The grading system will be also introduced in Higher Secondary icate (HSC) examination from 2003.

There will be six grades in the system. These are: A+ (80-100per cent, five points), A (60-79 per cent, four points), B (51-59 per cent, three points) C (41-50 per cent, two points), D (33-40 per cent, one point) and F (0-32 per cent, zero point).

The education boards will issue

certificates containing the GPA grade instead of 'division'. However, students getting 'F' will get official number scripts not certificates. Under the new system, marks

obtained in the 'fourth subject' will not be counted with the GPA but mentioned in the certificate along with marks.

#### Expat voter FROM PAGE 1

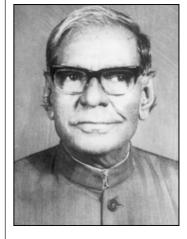
officials stationed abroad are

allowed to exercise their franchise through postal service.

The Sylhet Bibhag Unnayan Sangram Parishad has planned to lav siege to the Prime Minister's Office tomorrow for enrolment of expatriates in the voter list. A good percentage of the expatriates hail from Sylhet division.

The Parishad is also observing a series of programmes home and abroad to realise its demand.

### **Abul Mansur's 22nd** death anniversary today



The 22nd death anniversary of Abul Mansur Ahmad, renowned litterateur, iournalist and statesman of the sub-continent will be observed today with due solemnity, savs a press release.

The mark the occasion. Abul Mansur Ahmad Memorial Committee has organised Doa Mahfil at Dhaka and Mymensingh. Late Abul Mansur Ahmad,

besides being one of the greatest satirist of Bengali literature, was also renowned politician, lawyer and a very powerful journalist. He was the editor of Daily Krishak, Nabajug and Ittehad in undivided Bengal and was a pioneer in progressive journalism. Abul Mansur Ahmad was also a very successful politician. He was provincial Education Minister in the . United Front Cabinet under Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazlul Huq and was the central Commerce and Industries Minister of the Awami League govt of Prime Minister Shaheed Suhrawardy. He was known for his toughness in matters of interest of East Bengal

His five and a half hour long speech in the Pakistan Parliament was termed as the most daring speech of the time made on the floor of the Parliament. In this speech he claimed that Pakistan comprised of two nations, East Bengalees with their distinct culture are different from rest of Pakistanis and they formed a separate nation. This

speech outraged West Pakistan and his execution by a firing squad was demanded by the Karachi Morning News through an editorial 'This is Sedition'. Late Abul Mansur Ahmad's

publications include great satires like Aina, Asmani Purdah, Gulliverer Safar Nama and Food Conference. He has left behind great social and political history of Bengal titled. He has two auto biographical writings on political and other Amar Dekha Rajniti Panchash Bachar (50 years of politics as I have seen it) aspects of his life. He was proficient in writing in both English and Bangla. His political discourse in the context of Pakistan under the name and title of 'End of a Betrayal and Fulfilment of Lahore Resolution' in English was highly praised at home and abroad. Late Abul Mansur Ahmad always

propagated secularism with respect for religion in a manner unparalleled in the forties, fifties and the sixties. His contribution towards opposition movement in the early days of Pakistan, was extremely significant. He wrote about the language issue from early forties, and contributed to the language movement as editor of Ittehad. He was the main architect of 21-point programme Election Manifesto of Jukta Front (a grand coalition of the three giants of our politics Sher-e-Bangla Fazlul Huq, Maulana Bhashani and Shaheed Suhrawardy) in 1954 election through which Muslim League was ousted from power. The 21-point programme (Ekush Dafa) was the first comprehensive articulation of the political, economic and cultural demands of the Bengalis of the then eastern part of Pakistan.

Bangla Academy has recently published two volumes of Abul Mansur's collected works. Three more volumes are under print. Abul Mansur Ahmad was one of the greatest political personalities of Bangladesh who combined rare talents in three distinct fields politics, journalism and literary

## **EU** to monitor polls

FROM PAGE 1 political parties.

In reply to a question, he said EUEOM would consist of MPs, representatives of human-rights organizations, NGOs and Foreign Ministry officials who have got expertise in monitoring elections in different countries of the world. The team will comprise election law experts, media and logistic experts.

Menezes said EU observers would be deployed at selective areas, which would appear "problematic and sensitive." They would liaison with all organisations to be involved in the process of monitoring the polls. The EU would also

provide technical assistance, in effective monitoring of the elec-

The ambassador said the 66member mission would split up in three categories 24 Long Term Observers, which may be supplemented by another 20 observers, and 18 Short Term Observers. Besides, a core group of 4 to 5 observers would coordinate the entire monitoring of the hustings.

As part of their work plan, the European poll observers would travel to different places, talk to people and election and administrative officials and get acclimatised with the situation in a bid to have deeper understanding of the whole

In last general election in June

Menezes said, adding that the EU has now been able to develop an effective election-monitoring mechanism acquiring expertise after working in different national elec-

tions across the world. He referred to the signing of Cooperation Agreement between Bangladesh and the European Union incorporating political cooperation and functioning of demo-cratic institutions as one of the key

#### Road accidents

FROM PAGE 1 Chittagong bound truck collided head on with a microbus coming from Laxmipur, leaving seven passengers of the microbus dead on

the spot and four others injured.

The injured including the microbus driver, were taken to Chandina Upazila Health Complex when one of them, succumbed to

Of the dead, seven were identified as Bakul Begum, 38, Ibrahim, 15, Sirajul Islam, 70, Shaon, 4, Mohammad Ali, 40, Moina, 45, and Mahin 2

The identity of another victim could not be known.

Police seized both the vehicles but the driver and helper of the truck fled the scene soon after the accident. A case was filed with Chandina

Divisional Commissioner Mobaidul Islam talking with the three foreign hostages who were rescued earlier in the day

# Cong likely to shift strategy towards coalition politics

At 7 pm, Chief of Protocol Jahangir Sadat and Director General of European Desk at the

> India's main opposition Congress party signalled yesterday a major strategy shift towards coalition politics, during a national meeting dominated by the bribery scandal

rocking the government. Meanwhile, the foreign diplo-The mood at the two-day All India matic community in Dhaka wel-Congress Committee (AIĆC) meet comed release of the three in Bangalore was jubilant, with the party sensing its first real opportu-French Ambassador Michel nity to seize the initiative from the

Lummaux told The Daily Star, "We government since it came to power are all very happy that they have 17 months ago. been released. It is good that no Congress president Sonia Gandhi devoted most of her inaugu-Ambassador of European Union ral address to a vitriolic attack on Antonio de Souza Menzes said, Prime Minister Atal Behari "We are happy that they have been Vajpayee's coalition, saying it had

lost the moral authority to govern released unharmed. I understand and should resign. none of them have been unwell." The government has been About an hour after the three plunged into its worst crisis to date were flown to Dhaka, British High over allegations of corruption con-Commission spokesman Lockstone tained in a video expose by underahad said,"We are very delighted at cover journalists posing as arms their release. They are in remark-

The video footage showed senior politicians, bureaucrats and army officials apparently taking bribes to facilitate a fictional deal to

sell equipment to the Indian military. "The prime minister is busy defending his allies and the guilty.

With cracks appearing in Vajpayee's unwieldy ruling alliance,

betrayal of the nation and treach

ery," Gandhi told thousands of party

resolution to be adopted at the AICC contained a key clause signalling the willingness of Congress which has always shunned coalition government to seek a powersharing arrangement with other

#### Violence claims FROM PAGE 12

superintendent of police.

A curfew was imposed on several neighbourhoods in Kanpur and authorities summoned additional

security from neighbouring districts to control the rioters, Sharma said. In Bihar's Siwan area yesterday hundreds of soldiers and riot police were on guard a day after the deadly

police said. Police arrested seven people and recovered an AK-47 rifle, some grenades and a pistol.

The rioters were supporters of lawmaker Shahabuddin, who is accused in 29 cases of murder,

clash in the village of Pratap Pur,

They have cheated the nation. What parties. he is doing now is nothing but a

"Taking into account the present political scenario. (Congress) would be prepared to enter into appropriate electoral or coalition arrangements with secular parties on the basis of mutual understanding," the resolution said.

Senior party leader Arjun Singh, moving the resolution, said the time was ripe for Congress to give the clarion call to its workers to "confront and agitate" against the ruling coalition's attempt to cling to power.

"It is projected as if Congress is against all coalitions. We are prepared to enter into appropriate coalition arrangements with secular parties," Singh said.

When the last Vajpayee government collapsed in 1999, Gandhi scorned the prospect of a coalition and instead sought to set up an alternative Congress administration with the outside support of other

The move failed, with not enough regional parties willing to forsake cabinet representation, and in the ensuing general election Vaipayee's alliance was re-elected with an increased majority.

# Chronology of kidnap crisis

#### PM: politics FROM PAGE 12

Motijheel Model High School, Arifuzzaman Khan Sajib, read out the historic 7th March speech of the great leader and a cultural troupe from Tangail performed a Jari song.

ably good condition. As far as we

the freed hostages would move out

of the country to join their families at

It was not known last night when

round the rally, patted children and posed for photographs with them. She advised the children to learn

how to love the downtrodden and build the country following the ideals of Bangabandhu. Later, she distributed awards

among the successful children who

#### took part in the Bangabandhu One held at ZIA

FROM PAGE 1

nal or antisocial activity

"We also visited his Shenpara residence under Kafrul thana, but could not find out any allegation against him," the duty officer of cantonment police said. He also said they would go for legal action after investigation.

When contacted, DC North Benozir Ahmed said they are investigating why Mamun entered the airport with a toy pistol.

authorities freeze army movement Hasina with her usual smile went in the 'red zone' area at Kalapahar but refuses to withdraw the cordon. February 19: Minister for CHT

Affairs Kalparanian Chakma, upon directed by the Prime Minister to take up the matter, sends Archimedes Chakma. UP chairman of Mohal Chhari, to communicate with the abductors as a mediator. Archimedes brings back a letter from February 21: Kalparanjan

Chakma and Chairman of CHT Refugee Task Force Dipanker Talukder MP hold talks with representatives of the abductors at Dosharpara, near the Satero Miler Matha, in the evening February 22: Kalparanjan and

Dipanker again meet the representatives at the same place in the evening and arrange a direct talk

with the abductors the next day. Army raids four villages in the red zone area and nabs some 28 relatives of the abductors.

February 25: Kalparanjan and

the negotiation as co-ordinator and deputy co-ordinator. February 26: Army Chief Lt

General Harunor Rashid visits Guniapara army camp (locally known as Betchhari army camp) and expresses rigid stand against withdrawal of the cordon. He also meets Minister Kalparanjan. At a press briefing before leaving

for Saudi Arabia to perform Hajj, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina issues threat of army intervention, if the abductors refuse to sit for nego-February 27: Authorities receive

hostages. February 28: Three negotiation experts including two from Scotland Yard join the authorities to help bring about a negotiated end to the crisis.

a letter dated February 22 from the

March 1: Kalparanjan issues a two-day ultimatum to the abductors to release the hostages from a public rally at Guniapara and orders release of the arrested relatives of the abductors.

March 2: Ultimatum extended till

by the abductors. March 3: Kalparanjan hopes to

secure release of the hostages

within the next two days. Abductors

demand safe passage. March 4: Ransom issue triggers speculation and debate jeopardising negotiations. March 5: Chittagong GOC Major General Abdul Matin meets Kalparanjan at Rangamati. Public

meeting at Kutukchhari decided. An

eight-kilometre-by-two-kilometre

safe passage is demarcated by yellow and red flags to facilitate release of the hostages. March 6: Kalparanjan urges from a public meeting at Kutukchhari the tribals to help free

the hostages within three days or

face army operation.

March 9: After the Eid-ul-Azha vacation, Director General of Prime Minister's Office in Rangamati Momin Ullah Patowary and PSO Major General Syeed visit Guniapara. Head of Political Department of the British High Commission in Bangladesh Gra-

Officer John Geddess

March 10: Major General Matin meets Mominullah and Sveed. Authorities distribute leaflets, renewing appeal requesting tribal people to help release the hostages. March 11: Chief of Army Staff Lt

Regional Council Chairman Jyotirindra Bodhipriya Larma alias Shantu Larma March 12: Kalparanjan departs the scene and Dipanker renews attempt to re-establish communica-

tion and initiate indirect negotiations

General Harun-Or Rashid holds

meeting with JSS Chief and CHT

with the abductors. March 14, 15: Chakma Raja Debashish Roy makes appeal for the first time to release the hostages from motivation rally at Kaukhali.

March 16: Dipanker and Brigade Commander of Rangamati Brigadier Golam Robbani go to Guniapara in the morning expecting release of the hostages.

March 17: Hostages are freed.

#### FROM PAGE 1 March 5 in response to appeal made ham Clough takes over from Press Dipanker are designated to conduct precondition for negotiations. The