

### Asian nations may not oppose Kofi Annan's re-election

REUTERS, United Nations  
Asian nations dropped thoughts of opposing UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's re-election on Monday, positioning themselves instead to field a candidate of their own in five years.

At a meeting of 50 Asian UN members, many wanted to endorse Annan immediately for a second five-year term. Others said their governments needed to give approval first, according to Pakistani Ambassador Shamsad Ahmad, current chairman of the Asian group.

In the absence of a candidate from Asia now, Annan's re-election appears a foregone conclusion.

"There was no doubt in the mind of anyone that he would be re-elected," Ahmad said.

The only mention of a challenge came several months ago when names were floated informally

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### Corruption case Ershad to be produced in court Apr 27

COURT CORRESPONDENT  
The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday fixed April 27, to produce former president H M Ershad before the court in connection with a corruption case.

CMM Shailendra Kumer Adhikari fixed the date following placing of a "custody warrant."

The jail authorities could not produce Ershad before the court yesterday as he was shifted to the prison cell at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) from Dhaka Central Jail on March 24 due to pain in his chest, sources said.

Earlier, the CMM's court issued "custody warrants" against Ershad in the case.

In the case, it was alleged that Ershad, while in office, permitted the Scimitar Company to dig exploration wells at Haripur Oil Field by misusing power.

The case was filed with Tejgaon thana on January 16, 1996 against Ershad and Anwar Hossain, the then Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources. Anwar was later granted bail by the High Court.

# Petrobangla asks Shell for more Sangu gas from next month

SHARIER KHAN  
Petrobangla has asked Shell Oil to supply an additional 50 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) of gas from April from the Sangu field.

Already Petrobangla has more than Tk 200 crore overdue with the oil companies for purchase of gas produced under the Production Sharing Contract (PSC).

However, given the current pipeline infrastructure condition and fast increase of demand, Petrobangla has no choice but to purchase more of the comparatively expensive Sangu gas in dollars, sources said.

Compared to Petrobangla's purchase of gas from Sangu and Jalalabad fields respectively. Of these two, Petrobangla owes Shell Tk 125 crore (40 million US dollars).

Petrobangla has sought the additional supply of 200mmcf of gas for the 110 megawatt Haripur power plant of the Power Development Board (PDB), which is scheduled to start operation from April, sources said.

Shell has, however, been occasionally supplying up to 180mmcf of gas for the last few months. On an average, Shell is currently supplying around 160 to 170mmcf, the sources added.

"Gas demand has shot up to 1,050mmcf now and is expected to rise

further," said a source.

Also, a few vital pipeline projects like the Tk 361 crore Habiganj-Ashuganj and Hatighata-Ashuganj projects remain far behind schedule. As a result, Petrobangla is unable to optimise gas supplies from its own gas fields and is now forced to ask Shell for more of Sangu gas.

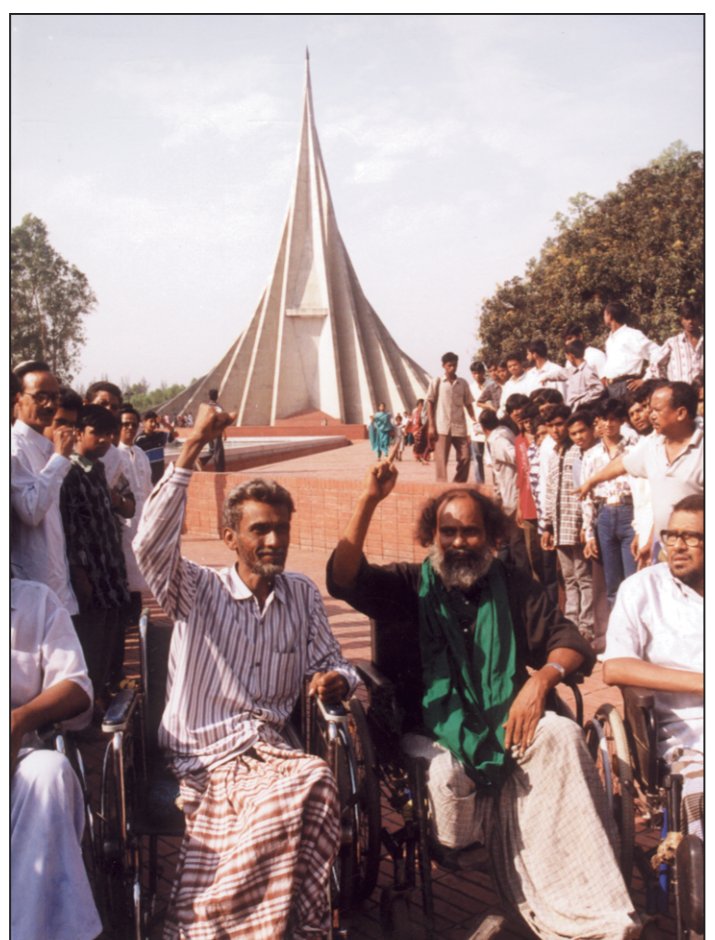
In the Chittagong region, Sangu is now the main source of gas production as the Bakhrabad field, which used to produce a maximum of 185mmcf per day, is currently producing only 35mmcf. This is another reason for Petrobangla to ask for more gas from Sangu, sources added.

The off-shore Sangu gas costs Petrobangla around 2.2 dollars per unit currently while Petrobangla sells gas at 1.2 (Tk 67) dollar per unit.

As one of the five gas wells turned out dry, Sangu started with a gas production of 60mmcf in June 8, 1998 against a committed gas production target of 160mmcf. Gradually, this supply increased up to 120-140mmcf last year and Shell started saying that it could supply 200mmcf from these four wells.

However, Petrobangla experts rejected the suggestion saying that extraction of more than 30mmcf per well or a total of 120mmcf from four wells

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Disabled freedom fighters renew their pledge to serve the country as they, along with thousands of people from all walks of life, pay respects to the millions who embraced martyrdom 30 years back to win the independence, at the National Memorial on March 26.

### Rehana won't contest polls

BSS, Dhaka  
Dispelling all media speculations, Sheikh Rehana, younger sister of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, yesterday said she would not contest the coming general elections from any constituency.

"These are sheer ill-motivated campaigns to create confusion and misunderstanding," Sheikh Rehana told BSS over telephone from London where she lives with her family members.

Rehana's comments came after several newspapers published stories that she would contest the coming elections.

Sheikh Rehana, along with her elder sister, survived the August 15, 1975 carnage in which their father, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated, with all other members of the family.

Sheikh Rehana expressed her determination to work for the party, the cause of democracy and the country's hard-earned independence.

"I have nothing to gain for myself

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### Babul murder Manzur's brother sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT  
Mafizur Rahman Mostafa, younger brother of former JP (Ershad) Secretary General Nazim Rahman Manzur, arrested in connection with the murder of Obaidul Haq Babul, was sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday.

The court also directed the jail authorities to take necessary steps for proper treatment of the accused in the jail.

The Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shahidul Islam passed the order after hearing the petitions, submitted by the defence lawyers.

Mostafa was produced before the CMM's Court Dhaka at about 3:30 pm yesterday on completion of a two-day remand in the third phase.

The defence lawyers submitted two petitions before the court. In the first petition, they stated that the IO of the case submitted a charge sheet against nine people on January 18, 1999. In the charge sheet, Mostafa's

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## Bangabandhu Murder Case Defence argues for acquittal of Majed, Sharful

BSS, Dhaka  
Defence lawyers sought acquittal of fugitive former army officers M A Majed and Ahmed Sharful Hossain claiming that none of the two were present at the killing spot and the charge of conspiracy could not be proved against them.

"The man who does not deserve even one day's jail term was given the capital punishment by the trial judge" and one of the two judges of the previous High Court bench, Advocate Waliul Islam, the state-appointed lawyer for former lieutenant colonel Ahmed Sharful Hossain said.

He said the charge of conspiracy did not stand against his absconding client only for joining the army night parade as part of "routine army duty" on the previous night of the August 15, 1975 carnage since he was not seen in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's residence during the massacre.

The defence lawyer alleged that his client's name, a major at that time, came in different forms in different case-related documents where he was described as SHARFUL Hossain, SHARIFUL Hossain or Shariful ISLAM. But nowhere was his father's name pointed out to clarify his identity.

"There can be more than one man having the same name in a village or an institution. It is difficult to identify them without father's name," Advocate Waliul Islam said.

The lawyer said he "wholeheartedly" supported the order of Justice Mohammad Ruhul Amin, one of the previous High Court bench judges acquitting his client and "humbly criticise" the judgement of Justice A B M Khairul Haque, who found him guilty on charges of conspiracy.

The lawyer said, moreover, several witnesses claimed to have seen

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## BJP-Trinamool honeymoon seems over in West Bengal Congress looking for avenues to sneak in

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi  
The honeymoon between India's ruling BJP and Trinamool Congress led by Mamata Banerjee now seems over. Having pulled out of the country's ruling alliance more than a week ago, Trinamool's alliance and seat sharing with BJP for the assembly elections in West Bengal appear on the brink.

And as Trinamool-BJP relations nose-dived, the main opposition party, Congress, led by Sonia Gandhi, has opened talks with Mamata for electoral alliance in West Bengal, setting the stage for a possible new political configuration in a state ruled by the Left Front.

Officially, however, neither Trinamool nor BJP is willing right now to go on record to call off their alliance and maintain each its welcome to the other as part of a broad anti-Left alliance in West Bengal. Obviously, it is a battle of nerves as to who will blink first, as neither is ready to take the blame for the break-up. But BJP says it is ready to contest in more than 100 seats in West Bengal if the alliance with Trinamool does not materialise.

The BJP-Trinamool ties took a turn for the worse last week when the saffron party declared that the fate of the electoral alliance in the state depended on the public announcement of Mamata's support to the Vajpayee government, in the event



Bangladesh Cricket Board XI opener Javed Omar Belim follows through a pull shot during yesterday's exhibition match against International XI in the city as wicketkeeper Vikram Rathore of India and Hashan Tillekeratne of Sri Lanka look on. Belim scored a magnificent 102, but the local selection lost by five wickets. (Story on page 13)

## Uncertainty dampens election mood among AL workers

REAZ AHMAD  
Growing uncertainty over an early general election has baffled the mid-ranking ruling Awami League leaders and its grassroots workers, and have poured cold water on their plans to go for an early electioneering, party sources said.

There has been no meeting of Awami League at any tiers of policy-makers since the party chief's declaration at the Saudi city of Medina that her party was prepared for an early election by June 12.

Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina led a 10-member party delegation to Bangabhaban on March 20 and apprised President Shahabuddin Ahmad of her plan to relinquish power after April 17. But, an opposition ultimatum to the government to quit power by March 30 has all but nipped the prospects of an early election.

Sources in the AL said that party workers are now waiting to know what the party position on the election is, which they expect to be made known at a meeting of the Awami League Parliamentary Party (ALPP), of which Hasina is also the Leader.

As the 22nd session of the seventh parliament is set to begin on March 29, AL sources said, an ALPP meeting might be convened on the very first day.

Some senior party leaders had earlier said that they were expecting either a meeting of the party presidium or the working committee to discuss the issue of early polls but that was not to happen.

Sources now say if the party chief spells out the election policies at the

ALPP meeting, the grassroots workers can get a clear-cut guideline which is seen crucial for them in their preparation for the election.

However, pointing at the Sheikh Hasina's public meeting at Cox's Bazar on March 24, another AL source said there was no confusion among the rank and file over the issue of election. Party workers have been instructed to get ready for the balloting no matter when the election is held.

Hasina sought votes for Awami League at the Cox's Bazar rally where a number of local Union Parishad chairmen joined the party.

Meanwhile, Hasina is scheduled to address a public rally in the city's Parade Ground on March 30 and

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## 300 arrested during combing operation in 10 districts

QUAZI AMANULLAH, Khulna  
Over 300 alleged criminals have been arrested till Sunday morning in a combing operation by police in country's ten south-western districts.

The decision to launch the operation followed the looting of four rifles from police in Satkhira Wednesday midnight.

Remote villages in Satkhira, Jhenidah, Magura and Jessore districts are now being combed to weed out the suspected hideouts of outlawed organisations, said police sources.

The sources said most of the arrested are wanted in criminal cases and have been politically sheltered for long. But few of them are outlaws.

Sources close to the offices of police superintendents in Satkhira, Jessore, Jhenidah and Magura districts said the extremists belonging to different outlawed organisations escaped from their hideouts soon after the operation began.

They have either taken shelter in border areas or crossed the borders, the sources said. Many of the

outlaws are at large in different guises in Khulna city and Bagerhat district, making it quite impossible for police to detect them, they added.

Meanwhile, special squads have been formed to comb different areas of the metropolitan to apprehend the armed cadres. The special squads headed by the OCs of five thanas, however, are yet to arrest any.

Operations are going on to detect those having created panic among businessmen and other affluent persons by demanding tolls. They threatened them to get ready for death in case of failure to pay, said a KMP source.

Physicians, business tycoons and corrupt government officials have also been targeted for extorting money in the name of PBCP and

BCP. Armed cadres of the ruling party are also among those threatening for tolls by letters and over telephones.

The situation took an alarming turn, when the PBCP armed cadres killed three persons including Awami League leader Haroon Sarder. PBCP claimed responsibility for the killings.

The PBCP also circulated leaflets in the city naming its targets and asking them to pay in full the demanded money within the fixed time.

The leaflets contain quotations from Karl Marx and Mao Tsetung. The motto of physical liquidation of what PBCP terms "class enemies" has also been explained in the leaflets.

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