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hurt as bombs hurled on AL processions

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least eight people were injured in several bombs hurled on anti-league processions going towards the National Parade Ground to attend yesterday's rally. Five of them were injured at Mir Akhra when a bomb was fired inside a bus in a convoy led from Narsingdi. They are Amin, Mohsin, Amirul, Gulzar, and Firoz.

Two others -- Anwar Hossain and Mir -- were injured in another bomb blast at Tikatuli. Another son -- Monir Hossain -- was red at Farmgate. All the injured persons were sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, it is said.

Four persons were arrested from Mir Akhra in connection with the incident there. They are Billal...

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Pro-Ershad JP front expel rebels' now

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Despite another split in the Jatiya Party (JP), senior leaders of the pro-er faction are not willing to take action against leader of the other faction Nazim Rahman and his associates' right at the moment due to some 'strategic reasons'.

Any action including expulsion of the rebel leaders may benefit Nazim and the rift may formally close. Most of them are keeping in touch with us. If we expel them now, they may shift their stance, a senior leader of pro-Ershad faction told a correspondent yesterday.

Senior Vice-Chairman of the party, Ershad said that the party would not take any action against the rebels. But decisions like expulsion should not be taken right now.

JP Ershad insiders said a move to already been taken to unite the two factions. Shah Mohammad Abu Far, who initiated the move, expressed optimism about its success.

Bringing allegation of siding with the government, Nazim Rahman expelled three top JP leaders including Ershad, GM Kader and A. A. Shahzahan -- on Thursday, during an anti-split in JP.

Ershad's M. A. Mannan was made acting chairman of the Nazim-led faction...

Pro-wester: Over 100 houses damaged Habiganj

B. Habiganj

Pro-wester lashed four upazilas of the district yesterday razing over hundred houses to the ground.

The storm-hit upazilas are Sadar, Moulali, Madhabpur and Chahang.

According to various sources, the storm swept the upazilas at noon blowing huge trees and partially eroding IRR-1 Boro paddy in the area.

A number of people were also injured in the storm, sources said.

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Turnover lets down hardware
dealers at BCS Computer Show

Thailand talks advocate
developing world's WTO role

Japan unveils deregulation plan
without splitting NTT

Postmaster: Poets are in plenty
February and March

Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 31	6:14 pm
Apr 1	5:51 am

Prayer Timings	
March 31	
Azhan	Jamaat
5:10	5:40
1:00	1:30
4:45	5:00
6:20	6:25
7:45	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation

Join JS to discuss caretaker govt, election date

Prime Minister urges Opposition at grand rally in city

Conditions for early polls

- Leader of the Opposition in the Parliament Khaleda Zia has to join the current Jatiya Sangsad session.
- Opposition has to have talks with the government on formation of caretaker government and election date.
- Unless understanding reached between the parties, there will be no early polls.
- Opposition should promise not to call hartal any more.
- Khaleda to give undertaking that she will take part in election once date is fixed.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia to join the parliament session, discuss with the government formation of a caretaker administration and fixation of the date of election and confirm her participation in it "if she still wants early polls".

Addressing a mammoth party rally at the National Parade Ground in the city, the Prime Minister said her government will not resign; rather hand over power to a neutral caretaker government only if the Opposition returns to parliament and asks for an early general election.

Unless there is an understanding on formation of a caretaker government, election date and Opposition's demands, her government will not hand over power to a caretaker government before expiry of its tenure on July 13, she said.

"If you (Khaleda) want early polls, we must reach an understanding on the issues of caretaker government, polls date and your demands," she said.

Some half a million people turned up at the rally, the biggest in recent memory, organized by ruling Awami League to observe 'Autocracy Fall Day', marking fall of BNP government on this day five years back.

The Prime Minister's latest stance on early polls came two days after a meeting between the President and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at the...

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina (inset) waves at crowd before addressing a huge public rally at National Parade Ground in the city yesterday.

Pvt medical practitioners charge fees many times their rates

NAIMUL HAQ

Private medical practitioners in the country are charging consultation fees many times that permitted by law.

According to the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982, a private medical practitioner, also a homoeopath, is allowed to charge a maximum of Tk 10 for first consultation and Tk 20 for second consultation and subsequent consultation for the same illness.

For medical consultation, at home, a practitioner can charge a maximum of Tk 80 for each visit.

There is no mention of medical practitioners' fees in the recently announced National Health Policy. Some members of the sub-

committee formulating the draft policy had proposed fixing new rates of fees, cancelling the 'outdated' rates, but the proposals 'disappeared' from the final draft before it was placed before the cabinet for approval, sources concerned said.

They had proposed fixing consultation fee for general practitioners at Tk 100 and for 'specialists' Tk 200. But some other members of the sub-committee who had opposed this omitted the proposals from the final draft, the sources mentioned.

The health policy contained proposals for special incentives for 'non-practising doctors engaged in teaching profession or working in clinics.'

It said practising doctors in the public sector would be encouraged to go for 'institutional practice' meaning that the government

would allow them to use facilities of hospitals for private practice provided a specified amount is paid to the government.

There is no provision in the 1982 Ordinance for separate fees for medical practitioners specialising in different fields although 'specialists' claim that they should get higher fees than general practitioners.

According to a survey by this correspondent, many doctors in the city charge up to Tk 500 for private consultation. In some areas, doctors allegedly charge even up to Tk 1000 as consultation fee but it could not be confirmed. Homeopaths also violate laws by charging fees much more than they are allowed to.

The 1982 Ordinance states, 'Every registered medical practitioner carrying on private medical...

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A mammoth gathering

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tens of thousands of people thronged the National Parade Ground and chanted slogans vowing to protect the country from "Opposition-sponsored acts of destruction in the name of hartals".

They gathered at the parade ground where the ruling Awami League organised a grand rally, the first ever political programme there, to mark the fall of BNP government on March 30, 1996 in the face of a mass surge.

Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina, her Cabinet colleagues, senior AL leaders and leaders of the AL's front organisations addressed the rally.

"I saw no such gathering other than the one addressed by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 7, 1971," said an octogenarian AL activist at the rally. He estimated that the number of

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20 killed as truck overturns with 45 near Sherpur

UNB, Sherpur

At least 20 people were killed and 25 injured in a deadly accident on the Sherpur-Mymensingh highway yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred as a Bakshiganj-bound cement-laden truck carrying 45 day-labourers as an add-on from Dhaka overturned on the road at Hawrabazar, 8 km away from the town, at 5:30 am as the tyre of its rear left wheel blew out.

The poor people met the tragic end while they were going home to Jamalpur and Kurigram districts via Bakshiganj of Jamalpur. Each paid Tk 40 for the ride on the lorry.

Fourteen died on the spot and 30 were injured.

The injured were rushed to sadar hospital where two of the victims succumbed to their injuries.

As condition of 15 of the injured rapidly deteriorated, they were shifted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital where four of them

died.

Initially identities of only 13 of the dead were known. They are Manman, 38, Bahadur, 50, Matin, 35, Amir Hossain, 35, Somez Uddin, 35, Surman Ali, 35, Abdul Hye, 30, Saber Uddin, 30, Kadam Ali, 30, and Achia Begum of Rowmari upazila in Kurigram district and Abul Hossain, 30, and Mohammad Ali, 42, and Akumia of Dewanganj upazila in Jamalpur district.

Rest of the deceased included two women and a girl, police and hospital sources said.

Condition of Sobed Ali, Sujat, Tajel, Shukur, Momin Chan, Jirai, Soma Mia and Bacchu was stated to be severe.

"Hearing a hue and cry in the dawn, people offering (Fajr) prayers in the nearby Jamia mosque and other local people rushed to the spot," says a spot account of the accident.

The villagers pulled out the injured groaning under the truck and scattered cement bags and

retrieved the dead bodies.

Later firefighters also joined the rescue operation.

On information, local MP Atiqur Rahman Atiq, DC and SP visited the spot and hospitals.

As news of the tragic accident spread, people from different parts of the district and from Bakshiganj, Rowmari and Itailpur rushed to the spot. All in tears, they scrambled in the Sadar Hospital morgue in search of their near and dear ones.

Road communications on the highway were suspended for 4 hours following the accident. A case was filed.

Police said overloading was the main cause of the fatal accident, which became a "general phenomenon on this route as local commuters, coaches and trucks ply with heavy loads beyond their capacities."

In last three years, sources said, around 50 people have been killed here in such accidents.

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'People won't forgive those who joined JS as govt stooge'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Shibpur (Narsingdi)

BNP secretary-general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the unity of the opposition alliance would not be affected if anyone quit from the alliance and joined hands with the Awami League government.

In an oblique reference to the Ershad-led Jatiya Party faction, he said "people will not forgive those who went to the parliament and are acting as the government's stooge."

Addressing a huge rally of freedom fighters and people at Shibpur Upazila ground in the afternoon, Bhuiyan said joining of the parliament by a faction of JP has caused some to question the unity of the 4-party alliance.

"But we can say that the unity of the alliance will not be affected if one or two quit from the combine," he added.

Freedom fighters, who fought in the war of liberation under the leadership of Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, organised the gathering on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the country's independence.

Referring to JP Parliamentary party meeting inside the prison cell of PG Hospital, the BNP secretary-general said the government did not allow even the wife and relatives of Islamic Oikya Jote Chairman Azizul Haq in the jail and continues to deny "division facilities" to the elderly leader in prison.

Whereas the government not only brought Ershad to the hospital from jail, but also allowed a meeting of 20 people inside the prison cell violating all rules.

Bhuiyan said the parliament has nothing to do with election symbol, but a faction of JP joined the parliament ignoring the alliance's decision. "This should however not affect the unity because this is a unity of the country's patriotic people and it has been forged and strengthened by the people," he observed.

He said the party has enough strength to win the election and added that

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Move on for holding SAARC FMs' meet

M ANWARUL HAQ

Initiatives are on for holding the meeting of SAARC foreign ministers at an early date, South Asian diplomatic sources said.

The date for the meeting will be fixed at the conference of SAARC Standing Committee comprising foreign secretaries due to be held in Colombo in the second week of May. The SAARC Secretariat in Kathmandu is learnt to be actively coordinating the efforts for holding the meetings of both the Standing Committee and the Council of Ministers.

The seven-nation organisation, which suffered a setback due to strained relations between India and Pakistan after the military takeover in Pakistan, is now showing signs of moving forward following fresh initiatives by its current Chairman Sri Lanka's President Chandrika Kumaratunga.

Early last month, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister and Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in talks in Delhi agreed to resume normal activities of SAARC.

The SAARC Newsletter issued from Kathmandu stated, "Consultations initiated by Sri Lanka, the current chairman of SAARC, are proceeding towards reaching unanimity of dates acceptable for resumption of political level meetings, i.e. the Standing Committee (Foreign Secretaries), the Council of Ministers (Foreign Ministers) and the Summit."

It said SAARC Secretary General Nihal Rodrigo's consultations recently left no doubt about strong political commitments of member states for

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Opposition's ultimatum expires

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition's ultimatum for resignation of the government ended yesterday.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia issued the ultimatum at a grand rally of the 4-party alliance at Paltan Maidan on March 21.

But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government rejected the demand for resignation complying with the March 30 deadline given in the ultimatum.

On March 28, Khaleda met with President Shahabuddin Ahmad at Bangabhaban. The President advised her to reconsider the withdrawal of ultimatum and hartal and sit with the government to adjust the timing of the elections since both the parties agreed upon an early election.

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Children protesting a DCC move to lease out the road and footpaths between Curzon Hall and the High Court in front of Shishu Academy for open markets yesterday.

DCC bid to lease out road, footpaths protested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Hundreds of children and their guardians yesterday protested the Dhaka City Corporation's move to lease out the road and footpaths between Curzon Hall and the High Court in front of Shishu Academy for open markets.

Children from different children's organisations, along with their guardians, brought out a procession from in front of Shishu Academy in the morning and paraded up to the Jatiya Press Club to protest the move.

Later, they held a rally on the premises of the Shishu Academy.

The DCC in advertisements in different dailies recently invited bids to lease out the busy and historic

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Developer fined for evading VAT

RAFIQ HASAN

The customs authorities have fined Banani Property Development (Pvt) Limited for evasion of Tk 74.35 lakh in Value Added Tax (VAT) against its Banarupa housing project.

The commissioner of Customs Excise and VAT Commissionerate Dhaka (North) has recently issued an order to Banani properties for payment of Tk 1.48 crore, which includes the unpaid VAT to the public exchequer.

The notice came after several formal hearings on the case, the last being on December 7, 2000. During the hearings the company admitted to the evasion of the VAT and agreed to pay the amount immediately.

As the company confessed to their wrongdoing and extended co-operation, the authorities imposed a nominal fine on them. Normally two and a half times the evaded amount is imposed on a company, if found defaulting.

Nurul Islam, manager of Banani Property, however, denied being penalised by the government. "We owed some VAT which we paid immediately after we were notified," he claimed.

Interestingly, Islam could not say how much money was paid and only said, "We completed the payment before Eid."

But customs sources said that the company has so far

returned only Tk 11 lakh although it had given an undertaking for paying all the money within March 2001.

When asked what action the authority can take if a company does not pay the fine, officials concerned told The Daily Star that they could take a number of steps for realising government money.

The first step is to freeze bank account of the company. If that is not effective then the government can attach private property and file certificate and criminal cases against the company or owner of the company for realising the money, said a high official of the customs department.

Earlier, the custom commissionerate had sent a team comprising of intelligence officials to Banani Property to investigate whether it was paying VAT against the income of Banarupa Housing Project, located in Joarshara and Dakkhin Khan in the city.

The probe team visited the company on July 6, 2000 and asked papers and documents regarding payment of VAT.

On evaluation of the documents the investigation team found out that the company received a total of Tk 42.57 crore for land development up to July 25, 2000, according to the booking receipt.

It handed over 368 housing plots under the project. The amount of payable VAT was Tk 2.10 crore. But the

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