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Police club former home minister Mohammad Nasim (right -- on the ground) and former agriculture minister Motia Chowdhury (middle) during the hartal hours in the city yesterday.

Police besiege AL office, baton Motia, Nasim

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former Awami League ministers Mohammad Nasim and Motia Chowdhury, Chief Whip of the Opposition in the present parliament Abdus Shahid and some other central leaders of the party were injured when police charged batons

and lobbed tear gas shells on a peaceful sit-in near AL's central office in the city during the half-day countrywide hartal yesterday.

A heavy contingent of armed police besieged the AL central office at the Bangabandhu Avenue since the morning. Police allowed only a few central leaders of the party to enter

their office after much haggling.

Contingents of police were deployed at other strategic points in the city to maintain law and order during the hartal, called by AL protesting price hike of oil, gas and electricity.

As party leaders and activists gathered in front of the party central office, Nasim, Motia, Abdus Shahid and Ahsanullah Master MP and some other leaders came out and tried to bring out a procession.

As the procession moved a few hundred yards towards the Zero Point, police stopped it. The

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IMF's new, tough stance

Every details of govt expenditure demanded to ensure transparency

INAM AHMED

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission, now in Dhaka to discuss a standby loan facility, wants the government to bring transparency in its expenditure.

According to finance ministry sources, the Bretton-Woods institution has wanted to know how and for what purposes the government spends and if the procurement procedures are transparent.

This essentially means a monthly reporting system by the government of its expenditures as part of a stringent monitoring system to detect corruption.

The IMF's new conditions differ substantially from its traditional demands for reforms of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), privatisation, financial sector reforms or flexible exchange rate management.

In fact, the Fund's new stance came following the realisation that corruption is a big drag on the country's growth. According to Transparency International,

Bangladesh is the most corrupt country in the world, and the World Bank has said the country loses two per cent of its GDP due to corruption.

The IMF has also realised that the government's expenditures are virtually unaccountable and no one knows what amounts are being spent every year for what purposes. Estimates of government spending are never done even in revised or original budgets.

Questions like why new cars are being purchased for managing directors of closed-down public sector units, why purchases are the most secret procedures of the government, what the government did with a huge Tk 4500 crore borrowing in the first six months of this fiscal are coming to the fore. The government could not come up with any satisfactory answer during a meeting with the IMF about how the money was spent.

The IMF is also interested to see a coordinated study on what the government plans on the economic front in the next three to four years.

It has also hinted that if the government agrees to such conditions, it can

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6 alleged highway robbers beaten to death

ABUL KALAM AZAD, back from Keraniganj

Outraged villagers beat to death six alleged highway robbers in Sakta village in Keraniganj on Tuesday night.

The villagers caught the unidentified robbers after chasing them down in a village beel. They were committing robbery on the Zinjira-Nawabganj Highway near Sakta Bazaar, six kilometres off the Keraniganj Police Station.

Police and villagers said the gang consisting of ten to 12 robbers, equipped with firearms and lethal weapons, started looting vehicles on the route at about 8:30pm.

They first stopped a tempo and robbed its passengers of Tk 500 in total.

"We came to know about the robbers when they were looting a Nawabganj-bound passenger bus from Zinjira," said Nur Islam, a tea stall owner at Sakta Bazaar.

Immediately afterwards, someone rushed to the nearby Sakta Bazaar mosque and announced over the mosque's loudspeaker that a robbery was taking place near Sakta Bazaar and urged everybody to come out to confront the robbers with whatever weapons they had. The same appeal was made from the mosques of other villages -- Boalsata, Nurundi and Ramekanda.

Responding to the call, thousands of villagers raced to the bazaar, armed with sticks and lethal weapons.

Then the robbers started running away through a beel, firing gunshots. But the villagers with torches chased them.

"They had no way to flee and the villagers had nearly overpowered them," said Mojnu Mia, a resident of Boalsata village.

"Cornered and threatened, the robbers fired several gunshots and tried to slash at anyone approaching them with sharp weapons," continued Mia.

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Waqar wrecks hosts

AL-AMIN

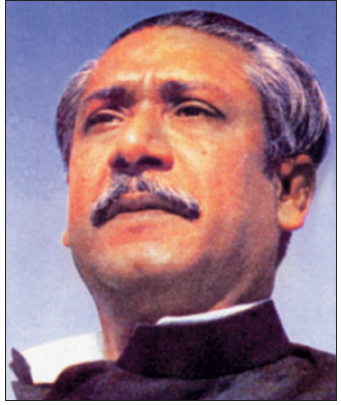
Waqar Younis bowled Pakistan to a commanding position on the opening day of the first Test of Coca-Cola Series against Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Wednesday.

The visiting captain took six wickets, his first five-wicket haul in four years, for 55 runs as Bangladesh crashed to 160 in 53.2 overs.

Pakistan replied with 126 for three at close with Yousuf Youhana and nightwatchman Saqlain Mushtaq batting on 14 and 1 respectively. Both openers Shahdab Kabir and Taufeeq Umar scored half-centuries.

The home team did little to entertain the modest crowd at the big bowl in their tenth Test appearance on a perfect batting strip. They went into

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Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Homecoming Day of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman will be observed in the country today.

This day in 1972, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned home from Pakistan after nine months of confinement in Pakistani jail during the country's War of Liberation.

Bangabandhu was arrested from his Dhanmondi residence in the city

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Procession, rally protesting damage of deity

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Residents of Shankhari Bazaar area yesterday held a rally and brought out a procession protesting the attack and damage of a deity of goddess Kali on Tuesday evening.

The speakers at the rally demanded exemplary punishment to the persons responsible for the attack. Later, they paraded through different streets of the old city.

Meanwhile, Kalam Mohammad

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