

## AL lawmakers to quit

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central office on Bangabandhu Avenue.

"She will make the next move once we submit our resignation letters to her (Hasina)," Zillur said as he was asked when the AL lawmakers would tender their resignation.

The AL meeting also fixed a series of protest programmes including a mass hunger strike in the city's Paltan Maidan on March 24, demonstrations, rallies and processions across the country on March 16 and similar demonstrations by its different front organisations from March 18 through 23.

"Moreover, many leaders in today's meeting proposed a hartal call. However, considering the ongoing secondary school certificate examinations, she (Hasina) decided to call hartal after the exams," Zillur said.

The meeting also agreed to exchange views with all pro-liberation forces, boost the party's organisational capacity and start cross-country tour programmes to make people aware of the BNP-Jamaat's misrule.

"We strongly condemn the government move to remove Bangabandhu's portraits from government offices and foreign

missions. We consider this move as a ploy to destroy the spirit of War of Independence and re-establish the spirit of 1947," Zillur told reporters.

Chief Whip of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Abudus Shahid and Political Secretary to the AL president Saber Hossain Chowdhury were also present at press briefing.

Shahid said the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) would meet soon to discuss in detail the resignation issue.

Explaining the party position on the decision, Saber said, "We took the decision after taking into account the deteriorating political and economic situation and the worsening law and order. And of course, the move to remove Bangabandhu's portrait was discussed."

The AL meeting noted with concern that lawmakers of the ruling alliance are more often than not skipping the parliament proceedings, making it ineffective. It also observed that opposition lawmakers were left out of development works at the grassroots level while sanctions for works under Test Relief and Food-for-Work programmes were being made against the ruling alliance MPs.

Earlier, at the meeting of the Standing Committee on the Private Member's Bills and Resolution Monday, when BNP lawmaker Shamsul Alam Pramanik piloted the bill styled "The Preservation and Display of Portrait of Father of the Nation (Repeal) Bill 2002" in the Jatiya Sangsad, the AL MPs walked out.

However, the meeting with Committee Member Abu Yusuf Md Khalilur Rahman in the chair recommended placing of the bill with minor changes before the parliament for its passage. Awami League members Shaukat Ali and AKM Jahangir gave a note of dissent on the placing of the bill.

Talking to newsmen in the parliament yesterday, Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Khan was optimistic about the passage of the bill sometime next week.

The AL MPs-elect had initially declined to take oath as lawmakers as it alleged the October 1, 2001 parliamentary polls were grossly rigged. Although they took oath later on, they never did join parliament proceedings.

However, they have been attending the parliamentary standing committee meetings.



Awami League President and Leader of the Opposition in Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina speaks at the Awami League central working committee (ALWCWC) meeting at party central office in the city yesterday.

## Canadian troops scour caves for al-Qaeda, Taliban diehards

AFF, GARDEZ, Afghanistan

Hundreds of Canadian troops have begun searching potentially booby-trapped caves used by diehard Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters in eastern Afghanistan, coalition forces said yesterday.

Some 500 mainly Canadian infantry troops are taking part in Operation Harpoon, "designed to destroy the remaining pockets of Taliban and al-Qaeda elements," in the Shahi Kot Valley and Arma mountains, Lieutenant Luc Charron, a spokesman for the Canadian light infantry battalion, told a briefing at the Bagram Air Base north of Kabul.

Harpoon, under Canadian operational command, is being conducted under Operation Anaconda, the 13-day US-led offensive against the last known stronghold of Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters.

A US Army rifle company is attached to the Canadian battalion, carrying out what Charron called "a very risky mission."

US forces spokesman Major Bryan Hilferly said Canadians had taken over from Americans on the ground, describing the troop ratio at around 50 percent Afghan and 50 percent coalition.

"Operation Anaconda continues. We still have more than 1,000 soldiers on the ground actively searching for the terrorists but we've seen little movement in the last 24 hours."

He said the focus Thursday was on "sensitive site exploitations" of caves used by the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

"We now have light infantry on 'the whale' (ridge) and the Shahi Kot Valley area doing... sensitive site exploitations, looking for information, looking in the caves," he said.

"We have discovered caves and mortar positions, we have destroyed the mortar positions."

Asked if the caves could be booby-trapped, Hilferly said: "We certainly think that they probably are."

Afghan soldiers allied to the US-led coalition still occupied the Shahi Kot valley, some 30 kilometers (19 miles) south of the Pakia provincial capital Gardez, Hilferly said.

But some 1,000 anti-Taliban Northern Alliance troops sent by the Afghan defence ministry last week have begun returning to their barracks in Kabul.

"Everyone has left Gardez, everyone is going to Kabul. We have received the order to leave Gardez," commander Zahir Shah told AFP near the Tirra pass on the

road to Kabul, 10 kilometers (six miles) north of Gardez.

Shah said Gul Haider, the commander of the defense ministry forces, had left Gardez with a number of troops at around 3:00 pm (10:30 GMT).

Ten Russian-made tanks carrying groups of soldiers could be seen moving slowly towards the pass, along with some pick-up trucks.

Shah said more troop-laden trucks were already further ahead on the road to the capital.

Haider earlier told AFP here that his troops had completed their work. "There are no more enemies. Our work is finished," he said.

Coalition forces believe they have killed "hundreds" of Taliban and al-Qaeda during Operation Anaconda, but "there have not been many bodies found," Hilferly said.

"That's probably because we dropped very big bombs on them so it's not like they were just in a car crash."

"Also there were many in caves and we believe that we have shut the caves with them in there."

## SI jailed

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Aftab Ali, 36, son of late Shabed Ali Munshi, succumbed to his injuries at the upazila health complex. Aftab was arrested in connection with a false case.

The victim's brother Azharul Islam lodged a case in this regard with Shingra police accusing 13 persons including SI Abdul Awal and constable Shamsun Nur.

The Additional District and Sessions Judge of Natore A S A Mahfuz, after examining the witnesses and evidences, delivered the judgement.

The judge also acquitted Shamun Nur, constable of Shingra thana of the charge.

Hazrat Ali and Abdul Kalam Azad, two other accused in the case, died during the trial of the case.

## AL-BNP clash leaves 20 hurt in Magura

UNB, Magura

At least 20 people were injured in a clash between the supporters of Awami League and BNP at Jagla village in Sadar upazila on Wednesday.

Some 25 houses were ransacked during the clash, which erupted over establishing supremacy in the area. Both the groups used lethal weapons during the clash.

Of the injured, Babu, 10, was admitted to Sadar Hospital in a critical condition.

The houses of Razzak, Mokter, Mustafa and Saiful were ransacked and looted during the clash.

Police brought the situation under control. None was arrested in connection with the incident.

## Four alleged terrorists held with arms in Magura

UNB, Magura

Police in separate raids arrested four alleged terrorists along with illegal firearms from Sadar and Mohammadpur upazila on Wednesday.

Police arrested Sushanta Kumar Mondal, 34, along with two bullets and a pipe gun from Banogram in Mohammadpur upazila. He was wanted in 15 cases.

In another drive at Ghorama village in Sadar upazila at noon, police nabbed three alleged miscreants - Kala Meer, Yasin and Tarik. Kala Meer was wanted in five cases. Separate cases were filed with police.

## Torture on Nasim

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with illegally possessing US dollars and attacking the motorcade of the then leader of the opposition in parliament Khaleida Zia in Madaripur in June last year. Later on March 11, a sedition case was filed accusing him of involvement in anti-state activities.

Dr Sultana, who was allowed to meet Nasim 14 days after his arrest, burst into tears while narrating the 'inhuman torture' on her husband allegedly by the CID men while he was on remand.

"CID tortured Nasim in an inhuman way after blinding him during his six-day remand. Despite court order, he was not produced before the court during the hearing as he was severely tortured and was directly sent to Dhaka Central Jail," she alleged.

She claimed that the court had also ordered formation of a medical board for proper treatment of Nasim.

"I went to the central jail on March 11 along with two lawyers following the court order but the jail authorities, on the plea of government ban on meeting Nasim, did not allow us to meet him. This was a violation of court order," Sultana said.

She however added that she along with her brother-in-law Yamin, Barister Amirul Islam and Advocate Rahmat Ali met Nasim on Wednesday.

"He (Nasim) was given electric shock in his head, nose, eye and other parts of his body. There were also black marks on his left eye, which proves severe torture on him," she alleged.

Following court order, a medical board was formed to examine her husband's condition, but the board members belong to the pro-BNP doctors association, DAB, she claimed.

She called for formation of another medical board comprising renowned doctors and urged the authorities to ensure that her hus-

band is not tortured any more.

## Terrorist attacks 5 hurt, houses looted, torched in Munshiganj

UNB, Munshiganj

At least five people were injured and a number of houses looted and torched in terrorist attacks in Edrakpur area in the town and neighbouring Nayagaon village yesterday.

Police and local people said about 40 terrorists equipped with firearms first attacked the Edrakpur residence of Communal Harmony Council Secretary Advocate Giasuddin Pintu.

They ransacked the house and looted gold ornaments, computer, TV and cash worth over Tk 3 lakh.

Then the terrorists attacked comedian Teli Samad's Nayagaon Purbapara house and looted valuables.

They also ransacked the houses of Jubo League leader Kazal and Ali Hossain at the same village. They torched the house of Hossain, locals said.

The attackers also went to Awami League leader Tajul Islam's house at Edrakpur. Failing to capture him, they beat up his elder brother Deen Islam. His mother Mumunnesa, 70, was also injured in the attack. The criminals later stabbed a grocer, Giasuddin.

Locals complained that all these terrorist incidents took place within 50 yards of the district police lines.

## Hena questions

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The election to Upazila Parishad has been shelved since the revival of the upazila system in 1997 through the passage of an Act.

But this time, the EC announced schedule for elections to three city corporations on March 11 without consultation with any political parties, which led people to question credibility of the city polls. The main opposition Awami League has rejected the schedule.

Although Chief Election Commissioner MA Syed underscored -- on the day of his appointment as CEC in May 2002 -- transparency and a level playing field among political parties to make elections meaningful and credible, he is now opposing dialogues with them ahead of the city corporation polls.

A week ahead of schedule, Syed told newsmen that he would not initiate any dialogue with the political parties since the local government elections are held on a non-party basis.

Traditionally, the candidates seek 'party blessings' for participation in such elections and the parties unofficially nominate them as their candidates.

In the changing atmosphere, the Awami League after its defeat in the last general election announced that the party would not participate in any election under Syed and demanded his immediate resignation, blaming him for his 'partisan role' in the elections.

The then opposition BNP had also demanded resignation of Abu Hena for the same reason.

## Hasina

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large number of students of Dhaka University brought out a procession from Aparajeya Bangla on the Arts Faculty building premises. As the procession reached Doel Chatter, the then SP Hafizur Rahman Laskar fired shots on it, killing two students - Joyanal and Zafar-- the complaint said

The complainant also claimed that he had collected evidences from Rentu's book as regards involvement of the accused in the incident.

After hearing, Magistrate Mohammad Emdadul Haq took the complaint into cognizance and directed the officer-in-charge of Ramna thana to investigate the case and take proper action.

## Criminal

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Meanwhile, it was learnt that the contractor of the construction firm, Surma International, is a ruling party MP from Langalkot in Comilla.

He was awarded the contract to build seven overhead footbridges at a cost of Tk 8.34 crore by the Dhaka Urban Transport Project.

Engineers said the slabs may not withstand jolts during the coming norwester.

Top engineers of Rajuk and the DCC told The Daily Star that the constructions were very amateurish and built with the help of a very new technology called pre-stretch tension.

The construction firm did not consult with the Pre-Stretch Tension Society which gives counselling on the new technology in the country, they said.

## Technocrat quota

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ruling party policymakers are not happy with the performance of a number of ministers.

In recent times, the BNP policymakers have been clamouring for immediate removal of some ministers from the cabinet for poor performance in running administrative affairs and some others for "corruption and nepotism".

The government, according to sources, has plans to immediately axe some ministers on the ground of poor performance as well as "corruption and nepotism".

A policymaker of the ruling BNP told The Daily Star that the party has arrived at no final decision on repeal of the technocrat quota as yet, but an amendment bill in this regard was under serious consideration.

He said that Khaleida had also agreed to abolish the quota system and the government might table an amendment bill soon.

## Footbridge collapse kills 2

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"Fortunately, the traffic from New Market direction was stopped at the moment and the traffic from Elephant Road was taking a right turn, otherwise the casualty could have been much higher," he said.

"All the sergeants and constables rushed to the vehicle to help. The driver was totally crushed and I took a big hammer from someone and broke open the rear door and took out the only passenger of the vehicle. At the moment he did not show any sign of life," said a shaken Jahangir.

It took them about half an hour to cut open the vehicles and pull out the bodies, he said.

This is the second such incident in the city within the last three and a half months. One person was crushed to death and 15 others injured when a slab of an under-construction footbridge over Progti Sarani at Badda fell on a passenger bus on November 26 last year.

Chief Executive Officer of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) Nurul Huda was assigned then to probe into the incident.

DCC authorities had said that the construction company would be black listed, if found guilty.

However, the investigation report was never made public and the contractor was asked to complete construction of eight similar footbridges 'under mysterious circumstances'.

The work, meanwhile, continued at a snail's pace, with the precariously placed heavy concrete slabs left unattended for months.

The Daily Star also alerted the public of the danger of these slabs by pictures but the authorities never paid any attention.

"The two men did not stand a chance, we had to cut the vehicle open to take out the body of the chauffeur," said a traffic sergeant.

The traffic sergeant and other police officials, who were deployed there to manage thousands of curious onlookers at the busy intersection yesterday, said that all the 11 remaining slabs were in danger of falling down any moment.

They said that the entire construction scheme should be re-examined because the quality of construction looked so amateurish.

"We were always afraid of doing our duty under these bridges because we thought any moment even if a rickshaw hits one of the pillars these huge slabs would just come crashing down," said a traffic policeman.

Another vehicle, a red Toyota, which was just behind the Pajero, sustained slight damage as a big chunk of the concrete fell on the rear window of the car. The car immediately drove to safer distance while onlookers watched.

"I was the first one to arrive and help pull out Mujibur Rahman," claimed Md Shahidul, a salesman of Ibne Ayaz, a nearby cloth shop at the Elephant Road. "I called a few people across the busy street to lend me hands but most people were scared fearing the second concrete slab may fall down any moment."

"I heard someone crying out, 'Save me.' I thought someone was alive and we must pull him out but he was stuck as the roof of the vehicle completely squished the body. I then took an iron rod and rope and soon found people joining me."

According to witnesses, it took about half an hour for the first wrecker to arrive at the spot, subsequently four more arrived one by one to pull out the ill-fated Mitsubishi Pajero (Dhaka Metro-JA-5519). The front left door of the jeep is still lying under the concrete along with the spare tyre underneath.

In the meantime, electric supply

was cut off in the entire area about 40 minutes after the incident.

Police said that the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) and the Public Works Department (PWD) were immediately informed of the incident but they did not arrive at the spot even three hours after the incident, a police officer at the Dhanmandi thana claimed.

Yousuf Ali, an Ansar, who also helped in the rescue bid, said, "I was standing about 200 yards from the place of occurrence. It happened in a blink of an eye."

Abdul Gafur, the contractor of the project, was not yet arrested.

According to family sources, Mujibur left his office after a meeting at the BCIC central office for the kitchen market in New Market.

He then headed for his Kalabagan residence.

Earlier he had talked to his wife Parvin over phone from office. Parvin told her husband that she was expecting guests at home and he should fetch some vegetables.

Mujibur's son Takib is studying in Australia and his only daughter Shimu is a computer science student at Jahangirnagar University.

Till writing of this report the concrete slab was still lying at the spot with overhead electric wire on the street.

A total of seven such overhead footbridges are under construction while two have been completed and commissioned for public use.

The under-construction bridges are at the Moghbazar intersection, Uttara near Laljami, Bashabo, Baridhara near the American Embassy, Paribagh and Mirpur.

Two completed bridges are in Shaymoli and Jatrabari.

## Port city in severe water crisis

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as against the requirement of 100 million gallons per day. It gets about 20 million gallons from Mohara Water Treatment Plant near the Haldra river and the rest from its 44 deep tube-wells.

The demand for water is rising fast with the increase of city population by about 45 thousand per year, they mentioned.

When contacted, officials concerned attributed the acute water crisis in the city to a sharp fall in ground water level due to excessive use of ground water, misuse of water, heat spill and above all frequent power failure.

"As a dry season now exists, we are facing a high demand for water right now. The demand would increase in the forthcoming summer

days," Chief Engineer of Chittagong WASA Abul Kashem told this correspondent.

He hoped that conscious people would understand the prevailing situation and 'our limitations.' He went on, "Since it is impossible for us to supply water round the clock, we urge and request the city dwellers to make the best and prudent use of water they are getting now."

Referring to WASA's efforts for increasing supply of water, the chief engineer said the project file of the Tk 88 crore Madunaghat Water Treatment Plant would be sent to the ministry concerned soon. When the project is implemented, additional 10 million gallons of water would be supplied.

Meanwhile, bureaucratic tangles have allegedly been delaying

expansion work of the second unit of Mohara Plant, sources said.

The Tk 505 crore project, to be financed by Japan, was expected to be implemented by 2005 and WASA might get 20 million gallons of water from it.

Many conscious citizens however feel that unless a massive project is taken up, the water crisis would persist.

Leaders of Nagorik Uddyog (Citizens' Initiative), a forum working on water issue, recently held a dialogue on 'Water Crisis in Chittagong: Alternative Way Out'. Discussants there emphasised mass awareness and alternatives such as preserving rain water to fight the crisis.

## City Corporation polls

# Criteria for eligibility of candidates announced

UNB, Dhaka

The Election Commission yesterday announced criteria for eligibility of candidates for the April 25 elections to Dhaka, Khulna and Rajshahi city corporations.

A person intending to contest the mayoral post or that of general and woman commissioner must at least be a 25-year old citizen of the country and voter of any ward of the corporation concerned.

One cannot vie for both mayoral and commissioner posts. If he or she does so, all of his/her nomination papers submitted to the returning officer concerned will be cancelled.

The candidate or persons who propose or second his or her name will be able to submit the nomination paper to the returning officer, who is a deputy election commissioner on the day of submission on March 20.

The deposit needs to be paid for the mayoral post is Tk 5,000 while for the commissioner post reserved for women or that of general commissioner it is Tk 2,000. Bank cheque or the copy of treasury chalan will have to be attached to the nomination paper.

A commissioner candidate can contest from two or more wards and

if s/he is elected from more than one ward, s/he will have to inform the EC within seven days about the ward he or she wants to represent. The rest of the seats will be vacated then.

If a person fails to repay bank loan within the stipulated time set by state-owned commercial and specialised banks and financial institutions, he or she will not be eligible to contest the corporation elections.

The banks are Sonali Bank, Agrani Bank, Janata Bank, Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha, Bangladesh Shilpa Bank, House Building Finance Corporation, Bangladesh Krishi Bank, Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank and Rupali Bank.

A person defaulting on any tax, local tax, toll or fee under city corporation ordinance is also not eligible to contest the election.

Another non-eligibility is non-expiry of five years after losing a job of the state or local authority for moral turpitude.

The non-qualification also includes a candidate's involvement in the city corporation concerned as a contractor or supplier or his/her financial interest in it or if s/he is a government appointed dealer of any essential item.

The other criteria for non-eligibility are: holding a full-time profitable post of the state or city corporation concerned or of any other local body, abdication of the citizenship of Bangladesh, conviction for two years' imprisonment for any criminal offence or non-expiry of five years or government-determined period after being convicted in any criminal or graft case.

If a person is not relieved of the liability after being announced bankrupt and if a court declares a person as mentally deranged, then he or she will be ineligible.

Any voter can propose or second a candidate for the post of mayor, but for the commissioner post they must be voters of the ward concerned.

A voter of a ward can propose or second only one nomination for a mayor candidate and similar condition will be applicable for general commissioner or woman commissioner posts.

This time, woman commissioners will be elected in direct balloting to the reserved posts, but women are also allowed to vie for mayoral or general commissioner posts.

## Bad governance

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Bangabandhu Avenue in the city, as was the case with the BNP when the AL was in power.

Moreover, armed police attacked AL processions in front of the Bangabandhu Avenue office at least on two occasions in the first few months of the present government.

Several AL leaders and activists have been arrested while others have gone in hiding to escape arrest.

Experts wonder how the AL leaders and activists, who are not even in a position to hold a public rally, could play a major role in law and order downside, as the prime minister has suggested.

However, promoting a 'conspiracy theory', the Inspector General of Police M Oabbir Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star, "There must be someone behind the scene responsible for deterioration of law and order in the country."

"If we analyse some of the incidents that took place during the last few days that proves that somebody is doing these as part of a plan," he said. He added that attack on police at Khulna was also such an incident. But former Assistant Inspector

General of Police Bazlul Karim maintains contrasting view.

"The party in power should shoulder the responsibility for deteriorating law and order. The government should pay more attention to police and try to improve the situation instead of blaming the opposition."

## Hafiz Pasha

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actively participate in and support the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Leading Bangladeshi NGOs are also eager to take part in the reconstruction process, he said. Pasha had talks with Prof Mohammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank and Fazle Hasan Abed of BRAC in this regard.