



An Israeli tank aims its cannon at Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah. Israeli forces broke into the compound punching a hole in the outer wall and seized two buildings. (More pictures on page 5)

Rallies allowed without loud speaker!

AL city programmes uncertain

REAZ AHMAD

After "foiling" three scheduled programmes of Awami League in the city in last one week, police authorities were now "refusing" to give it permission to use even loud speaker, party leaders alleged yesterday.

As a result, the party's planned rallies in the city in the first week of April have become uncertain.

"The Opposition Leader (Sheikh Hasina) is scheduled to undertake some mass contact programmes and address rallies in the city but police authorities are refusing to allow use of loud speakers," Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Political Secretary to the AL President Sheikh Hasina told The Daily Star yesterday.

Though AL got permission for holding rallies, police authorities are

refusing permission to use loud speaker. "They say are acting on instructions from higher authorities", he said.

"We are at the mercy of the government to hold any political programme in the city", he said.

Sheikh Hasina has plans for mass contact and rallies in Khilgaon-Sabujbagh, Laibagh and Mirpur areas. These programmes ahead of the AL-called April 6 dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal country are important he said.

When contacted Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Abdul Quyum said the home ministry recently gave instruction to strictly follow relevant rules and to limit use of loud speaker to seven designated meeting venues in the city.

When his attention was drawn to

use of loud speakers everyday by different socio-cultural and religious organisations at different city spots, he said, "We will go by rules."

He however said, "Unless AL's programmes coincide with those of any other organisation, I don't think the DCs (Deputy Commissioners of DMP zones) concerned will have any reason to refuse them (AL) permission. May be, they (DCs) are preoccupied with other work and do not get time to see the applications for permission."

He was asked about alleged police protection to a front organisation of the ruling party which occupied the Muktangan on March 28 though AL was given permission to use the venue on that day.

He said, "AL was given permission to hold a rally at the venue but

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Israel calls Arafat enemy, takes over Ramallah

Arafat vows not to cow down as Israeli tanks smash into his hq

AP, Ramallah

Israel yesterday declared Yasser Arafat an enemy, sieged this West Bank town and stormed the Palestinian leader's headquarters, as part of a large-scale military operation launched in response to Palestinian terror attacks that killed 29 Israeli civilians in three days. Five Palestinians and an Israeli soldier were killed in yesterday's fighting in Ramallah.

Arafat's three-story office building came under heavy Israeli tank shelling during the assault. Earlier yesterday, an Israeli bulldozer demolished a wall at the main entrance of Arafat's headquarters.

Arafat was in a windowless ground-floor room, but his aides said the situation was very volatile and that the Palestinian leader's life was in danger. Israel insisted it had no plans to harm Arafat.

In the compound, Israeli soldiers exchanged fire with Arafat's guards, killing one and wounding 25. Israeli snipers took over two buildings and set up positions on rooftops, giving them a clear view of Arafat's third-floor office, while tank shells punched holes into the walls of the compound.

A defiant Arafat said he did not fear death and would not be cowed. "They want me under arrest or in exile or dead, but I am telling them, I prefer to be martyred," Arafat said in a telephone interview with Al Jazeera, the Arab satellite television channel. "May God make us martyrs."

The raid was the closest Israeli forces have come to the Palestinian leader in 18 months of fighting. Israel has confined Arafat to the headquarters for four months, barring him from traveling.

In Jerusalem, meanwhile, a 16-year-old Palestinian girl blew herself up at

the entrance of a Jerusalem supermarket yesterday, killing herself and two Israeli civilians, and wounding at least 19 shoppers. A militia linked to Arafat's Fatah movement claimed responsibility.

The violence appeared to doom the latest US truce mission, though US envoy Anthony Zinni was to remain in the region. Zinni spoke to Arafat by phone yesterday and met with Palestinian Cabinet Minister Saeb Erekat in the West Bank town of Jericho, Palestinian officials said.

The fighting came a day after an Arab summit in Beirut, Lebanon, approved a plan that calls on Arab nations to develop normal relations with Israel in exchange for its withdrawal from territory captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

The plan marked the first time in more than a half-century of Mideast conflict that Arab states have made such an offer. Israel said it would study the plan, but that its top priority was responding to Palestinian attacks.

The latest escalation began with a suicide bombing by the Islamic militant group Hamas on Wednesday in a hotel in the Israeli resort of Netanya. The bomber blew himself up in the hotel's banquet hall, among 250 Israelis gathered for the Passover Seder, the ritual meal ushering in the Jewish holiday. Twenty-two diners were killed -- one died of wounds yesterday -- and more than 130 were hurt, putting the attack on par with a suicide bombing outside a Tel Aviv disco last June that also killed 22 Israelis.

Israel's Cabinet met for an all-night session. Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announced yesterday that Israel now considered Arafat an enemy and would completely isolate him. The Cabinet also approved a large-scale

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'Butcher of Bangladesh' dead

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's former army chief general Tikka Khan, once labelled the "Butcher of Bengal" for his ruthlessness against Bangladeshi freedom fighters, died on Thursday after a long illness, the official media reported.

State-run Radio Pakistan said Khan, who died at the age of 87, was buried with "full military

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Barapukuria power project PDB set to release funds defying finance ministry

SHARIER KHAN

When the finance ministry is refusing to allow any power project under supplier's credit, the Power Development Board (PDB) has "arbitrarily" decided to kick-start the 250 MW Barapukuria coal-fired power project by paying its Chinese developers the first tranche of government funds.

A top PDB official said it is preparing for a payment of Tk 5.5 crore to the Chinese consortium so that it can arrange its own share of pay-

ment from the Exim Bank of China and the 220 million dollar project can move on.

However, prior to that, PDB will also have to get a Letter of Guarantee from the finance ministry and give it to the Chinese consortium. Otherwise, the project work can not be started.

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman earlier told PDB that his ministry would not issue any guarantee for any project under supplier's credit, including the Barapukuria power project. Without this guaran-

tee, the Chinese builders will not be able to mobilise funds.

"But we signed a contract with the Chinese company for this project in the middle of last year. The government decision against supplier's credit is applicable for new projects and we are hopeful that we will be able to convince the finance ministry why it should issue the guarantee," the PDB official said.

But finance ministry sources said it is not convinced with PDB's arguments in favour of such a costly

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Friend turns foe over DCC polls

Wahid was killed by rivals?

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jubo Dal leader Wahiduzzaman was killed apparently in a conspiracy by his rivals following his refusal to withdraw from the race for ward commissioner in the coming Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) election.

According to police sources and residents of Mohammadpur area, Wahid, general secretary of ward 42 unit of the BNP-backed Jubo Dal, was asked to withdraw from the polls race by Salimullah Salu, another candidate for ward commissioner from the same ward, after Wahid submitted his nomination papers.

Seeing that he stood no chance of winning the election against Wahid, Salu, allegedly a notorious criminal of Mohammadpur area, met Wahid a few days ago and asked him to withdraw from the race.

"They were very close friends, but a bitter rivalry was created between them over the DCC election," said a police official.



Wahiduzzaman

"Later Salu warned that he would not hesitate to kill Wahid if he refused to withdraw his candidature and help him (Salu) get elected as commissioner from ward 42," said the police official requesting ano

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DCC election 100 AL men may contest as independent candidates

ABUL KALAM AZAD

Although the main opposition Awami League has decided not to participate in any polls under the present CEC MA Syed, nearly a hundred AL leaders, including 29 incumbent ward commissioners, are set to take part in the coming Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) elections.

After a debacle in the October 1 parliamentary election, the AL accused CEC (Chief Election Commissioner) MA Syed of partisan role in the general election and decided not to participate in any election under Syed.

Accordingly, after the announcement of the city polls, the AL officially rejected the election and did not nominate any mayoral candidate. The main opposition party also asked its party leaders and workers to boycott the elections.

But sources said that a good number of party leaders including

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BNP to go by Constitution if AL rejects dialogue offer: Huda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP would wait for a 'positive response' from the Awami League to its offer for dialogue to resolve some contentious political issues including display of the portrait of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

But it will go by the Constitution if the main opposition party sticks to its present position and cannot reach a consensus on the issues, Minister for Communications Nazmul Huda said.

He told BBC Bengali Service last night that BNP would continue its initiatives. There is no last word in

politics, he said referring to the conditional acceptance of the dialogue offer by Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister and BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan on Thursday

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Motia obstructed from attending Gazipur rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Activists belonging to the ruling BNP prevented Awami League leader Motia Chowdhury and some other party leaders from attending a scheduled party rally at Amria in Gazipur yesterday, she claimed at a press conference at Gazipur Press Club.

They put up road barricade and held back the ferry on the other side of Shitalakhyia river so that they cannot cross it. They also fired two blank shots, she alleged.

The former minister also alleged that the district administration also banned any rally at Amria yesterday.

Failing to advance further, Matia addressed a gathering near the ferry ghat and later returned to the capital.

However, the OC of Kapasia thana, Gazi Moinuddin, when contacted, said, "We escorted Motia to the venue and there was no untoward incident on the way."

But Motia termed the OC's claim a "blatant lie".

The local unit of AL organised the rally to protest last Sunday's alleged police attack Tanjim Ahmed Soheli, MP from the area, near the Jatiya Press Club in the city.

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