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Arafat confined in ravaged HQ

UN calls for troops withdrawal, ceasefire

AFP, AP, *Ramallah*

With a mobile phone his lone link to the world, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat remained confined to his three-storey office building yesterday by Israeli troops who have cut the electricity and water, and taken over the rest of his headquarters compound.

"President Arafat has no communication with the outside world, all the phone lines are cut," said a senior Palestinian official, who asked not be named. "The situation is very dangerous."

With no electricity, Arafat and his staff used candles during the night. The batteries on Arafat's mobile phones ran out by mid-day.

Israeli troops also rounded up hundreds of Palestinians, enforced a strict curfew and traded fire with roaming gunmen.

Meanwhile in New York, the United Nations Security Council passed Norwegian-sponsored Resolution 1402 on the crisis by a margin of 14-0 with the Syrian delegation staying away from the vote.

The resolution "calls upon both parties to move immediately to a meaningful ceasefire" and "calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Palestinian cities, including Ramallah."

The Palestinians gave a qualified endorsement of the vote but Israel condemned it as unacceptable. Yehuda Lancry, its permanent representative to the United Nations, said the Security Council was "giving a prize to the Palestinian terrorists."

Early yesterday morning, Israeli tanks rumbled into the Palestinian town of Beit Jalla, adjacent to biblical Bethlehem, where Christians are observing E a s t e r

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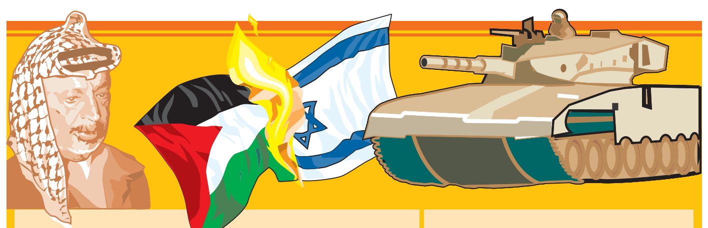
PHOTO: AFP

Palestinian men give themselves up to Israeli troops in the West Bank city of Ramallah yesterday. Earlier, an all-night street battle took place between armed Palestinians and Israeli troops.



Arafat under siege
- Confined to one floor in Ramallah compound
- Water and electricity supply snapped
- Mobile phone only link to outside world

UN reacts
- Calls for Israeli withdrawal from Ramallah and other West Bank cities
- Calls for immediate moves towards ceasefire

Israeli incursion
- Five Palestinians, two Israelis killed; some 30 wounded
- About 145 Palestinians arrested
- Israeli tanks also storm into the Palestinian area of Beit Jala, near Bethlehem

21 SoEs up for grabs

Parjatan motels, BSRS on the list

SHAHRIAR KARIM AND RAZIUR RAHMAN

In its first major pro-privatisation step, the government has decided to immediately sell off 21 state-owned enterprises (SOEs) including the ailing Bangladesh Shilpa Rin Sangstha (BSRS) and the motels under the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation.

The cabinet committee on economic affairs at its meeting yesterday endorsed the list of units to be privatised prepared by the Privatisation Commission.

The commission prepared a list of 78 SOEs in January last as part of its massive privatisation programme. But the cabinet committee picked 21 of them in the first phase, according to sources.

The committee first chose 39 SOEs from the list, but later decided to privatise 21 of them. The rest would be sold off in phases, the sources added.

The commission will soon invite bids for the 21 SOEs, they said.

The cabinet committee decided that the SOEs would be handed over to the highest bidders without any negotiation on prices, the meeting sources said.

Also on the list of immediate privatisation are Ahmed Bawani Textile Mills Ltd., Khulna Newsprint Mills Ltd, Bangladesh Diesel Plant Ltd., LP Gas Ltd and Eastern Lubricant Ltd.

Under the Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation, motels Shaibal and Laboni at Cox's Bazar, Hotel Pasur at Mongla, the motels at Rangpur and Sylhet will be privatised.

The list also includes Rangpur Sugar Mills Ltd, Shetabganj Sugar Mills Ltd at Panchagar, Daorachhora Tea Garden at Srimangal, Patia Tea Garden, Khulna Hardboard, People Jute Mills, Narayarnganj Dockyard, Magura Textile Mills, North Bengal Paper Mills and Sylhet Pulp Industries Ltd.

ETV licence

Execution of HC verdict stayed till Apr 23

UNB, *Dhaka*

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court yesterday stayed till April 23 operation of the High Court verdict that declared the ETV licence illegal.

Justice M Ruhul Amin passed the stay order in his chamber upon a provisional stay petition.

Barrister Syed Ishtiaq Ahmed along with Barrister Rafiqul Huq and Barrister Moniruzzaman moved the petition on behalf of ETV, which was opposed by Barrister Abdur Razzaq.

Earlier on March 27, the High Court on a writ petition filed by two professors of Dhaka University and a journalist declared illegal ETV's licence issued during previous Awami League government. The court had, however, granted stay of operation of the verdict for 10 days enabling ETV to appeal to the

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Log-in hitch partly solved

SHAHRIAR KARIM

After more than two days of Internet woes, the Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTTB) has partly fixed the log-in problem the city's Internet users faced.

"We have identified the problem and it has been mostly fixed. Hopefully, the whole system will be up by tonight," Md Jamil, member (Operations and Maintainance) of the BTTB, told The Daily Star last night.

The BTTB yesterday afternoon identified that there were some disruptions in its clock pulse which synchronises with the dial-up system of the Internet Service Providers (ISPs). "The synchronisation was not properly working," Jamil said.

He said the BTTB people are working in different city telephone exchanges to repair the damage.

Thousands of Internet users of the city have been shut out of the information superhighway since Thursday morning as they could not log on to the ISPs.

"We are yet to identify what caused the disruption. But the most probable reason could be high surge in voltage caused by Wednesday night's storm," he added.

However, the ISPs alleged that mysteriously only those ISPs, which had earlier lodged complaints with the Bangladesh Telecom Regulatory

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We regret

In yesterday's issue we inadvertently carried a wrong picture with the news item captioned "Butcher of Bangladesh dead". We deeply regret the error and apologise to our readers for this.

Graft cases: 6 ex-AL ministers get anticipatory bail

UNB, *Dhaka*

The High Court yesterday granted anticipatory bail to six former ministers and an additional secretary for three months and issued rule upon the government to show cause why they should not be granted bail.

They are Shah AMS Kibria, ASHK Sadique, Tofail Ahmed, Mohammad Nasim, Motia Chowdhury, Lt Gen (Retd) Nooruddin Khan and Maruf

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Alamgir's detention

HC asks govt to show cause

UNB, *Dhaka*

The High Court yesterday issued rule upon the government to show cause within two weeks why the detention of Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, a former minister, should not be declared illegal and without lawful authority.

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20 to vie for DCC mayoral post

5 in Rajshahi, 3 in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Twenty candidates will vie for the post of mayor in Dhaka, five in Rajshahi and three in Khulna in the April 25 elections of the three city corporations.

The number of ward commissioner candidates is 570 in the 90 wards in Dhaka, 270 in 30 wards in Rajshahi and 214 in 31 wards in Khulna.

One hundred candidates will contest for the 30 women's reserved seats in Dhaka,

103 for 10 in Rajshahi and 61 for 10 in Khulna.

In Dhaka, city BNP President and Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadeque Hossain Khoka is contesting as mayoral candidate of the BNP-led four-party alliance.

The four persons who withdrew their candidature include Jahangir Mohammad Adel of Jatiya Party and three independent candidates.

A total of 370 people have withdrawn their candidature for posts of ward

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Hearing of graft cases against Hasina, 23 others Apr 28

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The four graft cases against former prime minister and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina, seven ex-ministers and 16 government officials were sent to the chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

CMM Mohammad Ayub accepted the FIRs (First Information Reports) of the cases and fixed April 28 for hearing of the cases.

The Bureau of Anti-corruption (BAC) filed the cases with different police stations against the accused on Wednesday and Thursday.

Hold talks with opposition, save economy, MCCI urges PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (MCCI) yesterday urged the government to continue dialogue with the main opposition party.

A delegation of newly elected office bearers of the MCCI led by its President Tapan Chowdhury met with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office yesterday.

The chamber regretted that the country's politics is again becoming 'extremely confrontational', which is more damaging for the country's economy than anything else is.

It observed that the government's prime task should be to strengthen the aid and investment climate.

The MCCI pointed out to the prime minister that the government needed to put an end to political patronisation of the anti-social elements.

The overall situation remains delicate due to unstable foreign exchange reserve as well as lack of firm indication of buyers' interest in the country's export products, the MCCI observed.

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