

Who's going to be next Indian president?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Considerable speculation is on as to who will be India's next President and Vice-president as the term of the incumbents K R Narayanan and Krishan Kant respectively expire later this year.

Narayanan's tenure as President ends in July and Krishan Kant's as Vice-President soon after.

The buzz in political corridors is that Narayanan may get a second term and a consensus about him can be easily achieved as main opposition Congress and the Left parties are sure to back him.

The other names doing the rounds for Presidentship are Krishan Kant himself and senior Congress leader and former Sadre-Riayatsat of Jammu and Kashmir Karan Singh.

Kant belongs to the Nehruvian socialist mould. He had been in Congress for sometime as a member of the socialist group but joined the Janata Party after the infamous Emergency imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975. He had joined the anti-Emergency movement and it remains to be seen if Congress, now headed by Indira's daughter-in-law Sonia Gandhi, will support Krishan

Kant. Kant's supporters also point to his efforts to promote scientific spirit in the country.

Those rooting for Karan Singh cite his combination of modern outlook and tradition. He had unsuccessfully contested against Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in Lucknow parliamentary constituency in Uttar Pradesh state in 1999.

NEWS ANALYSIS

One is not sure if ruling BJP will agree to Singh's candidature.

For the post of Vice President, names of Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and senior Congress leader Najma Heptullaah are being heard.

Abdullah, chief of National Conference party, has already indicated he is ready to shift to New Delhi from his state and that his son Omar Abdullah, now Minister of State for External Affairs, is likely to take over as well as Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister if National Conference wins assembly elections in the state later this year.

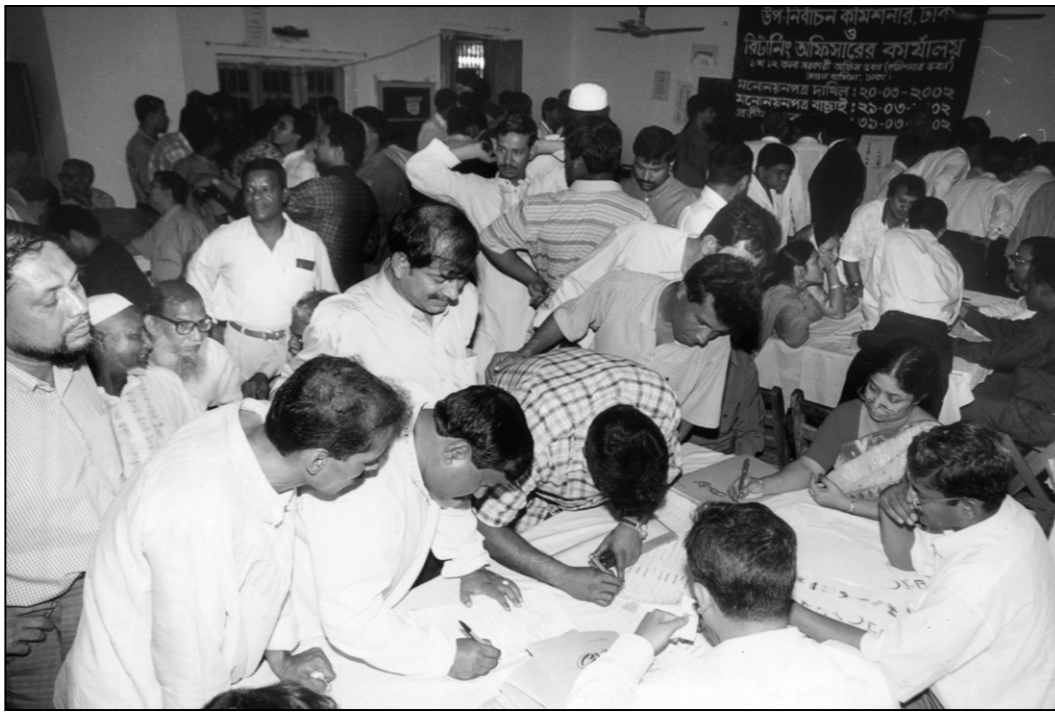
Najma Heptullaah is the Deputy Chairperson of Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament and her supporters say her choice as Vice

President would send right signal to women and minorities. But Farooq Abdullah now appears to be slightly more favourite in BJP circles.

The electoral college for Presidential election consists of elected members of both Houses of Parliament and state assemblies. The Vice President is elected by members of only the two houses of Parliament.

While BJP and its allies could think of pushing through its candidate for Vice President post as was evident during last week's voting on the anti-terrorism law in the two houses of Parliament, they may not take the risk in the case of Presidential poll as parties outside the alliance led by BJP are in power in most of the Indian states now, analysts say. Uttar Pradesh, which has the biggest state assembly, is now under Federal Indian government rule.

The arithmetic in the two houses of Parliament as well as in state assemblies may prompt parties on both sides of political divide to search for a consensus for the posts of President and Vice President, analysts say.



The Election Commission allocates symbols to candidates for the city corporation elections yesterday.

BCL: Power fray

FROM PAGE 12 committee members be extended to 201.

And to this end, the organisational constitution of the student body will be amended at the April 3 council, the sources said.

The number of secretary-level members will be extended to 75 from 56 and that of the executive members to 126 from 45.

The purpose of extension of the central executive body with induction of more leaders into the key posts is to defuse internal conflict facing the party. The executive body will also engage more leaders in the political programmes as part of the anti-government movement.

At several meetings with the BCL delegates, Sheikh Hasina asked them to gear up movement against the government after formation of

the next leadership.

Joint-Secretary of the central committee Liakot Sikdar and International Affairs Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu have high prospects for the posts of president and general secretary respectively. Next are Ashrafur Azim Ruban, Rafiqul Islam Kotwal and Abdul Wadud Khokon.

Earlier, detectives have arrested ten BCL leaders under Section 54 of the CrPC in front of the residence of Sheikh Hasina on February 25 without showing any charges against them. Of them, seven were given a one-month detention.

The arrests include those of the aspirants for the post of president — Liakot Sikdar, Rafiqul Islam Kotwal and General Secretary Nazrul Islam Babu.

On March 24, the High Court declared the arrest of the seven BCL leaders illegal and ordered the government to release them immediately.

But police arrested them again in front of the Dhaka Central Jail, implicating them in several murder cases, although they were not the FIR-named.

The last central council of BCL was held on October 22, 1998 and Bahadur Bepari was made president and Ajay Kar Khokon general secretary.

Ershad

FROM PAGE 12 state one dismissed Sultan Alam Mallick in his (Sultan) previous post (Office Super, Accounts of the Shahid Suhrawardi Hospital, Dhaka). It allegedly caused a loss of Tk 132,061 to the government.

The Bureau of Anti-Corruption (BFC) filed a graft case with Tejgaon thana against two people, including HM Ershad on January 2, 1992.

The Investigation Officer (IO) of the case submitted a charge sheet against the two showing 19 people as prosecution witnesses on February 13, 1995.

Earlier, 15 of the prosecution witnesses were cross-examined.

Ershad and Sultan Alam were present in the court during the hearing.

Saifur

FROM PAGE 12 could be pushed up to 14 per cent of the GDP from the present nine per cent.

"We spend about nine per cent of the GDP for revenue expenditure including defence spending. If we can save five per cent from revenue collection it will be enough to continue development programmes," he added.

"Only the resources on the surface of the country will be enough to substitute the foreign aid if we can utilise those. We will not require the resources under the ground," Saifur said.

He also said the country does not need financial assistance provided that the world community keep open their market for the exports from Bangladesh.

Saifur also said the people should be in the driving sit in the country's development pursuit, not the donors.

The minister stressed the need for a pro-poor development and investment strategy in a cost-effective way to sustain in the globalisation process. He also viewed that investment including those from abroad should come to the employment generating technology-based industries.

"We don't want trash investments like soft drink plants or fast food chains. The priority area should be agro-based industries," Saifur said.

He said there should be a socially responsible free market and also a mechanism to save people from disorderly behaviour of the market.

President of the ERF Shamsul Huq Zahid also spoke on the occasion. General Secretary of the forum Shawkat Hossain Masum, among others, was present.

Businessman

FROM PAGE 1 kidnapped man over telephone.

The arrested kidnappers were identified as Bellal Hossain (22), Bellal Miah (18) and Rana Miah (18).

On the basis of the statements of the arrested kidnappers, police rescued Abdullah Al-Raji alias Babu, and executive of an Internet farm at Bangla Motor from a slum at Bhasantek Baunia embankment area.

Acting on the information given by the victim, police later arrested four other members of the gang, including a woman from the area.

Babu was kidnapped from near the old airport Saturday afternoon while he was returning to his Malibag Chowdhurypara residence after his duty at BCS Computer Show at China-Bangladesh International Conference Centre.

Review

FROM PAGE 1 and moderate Islam are threatened by rising fundamentalism and religious intolerance."

The issue can be viewed on the Internet (www.feer.com).

The Review also issued a press release where it says "While the Western-led international war on terrorism continues to focus on a few high profile countries, Bangladesh, a nation with 120 million Muslims and 10 million Hindus, is moving away from its tradition of moderate Islam."

The cover story highlighted how some analysts believe that a 'revolution' is taking place in the country which could spell trouble for Asia and beyond. "FEER reports on growing religious extremism and intolerance within Bangladesh and an alarming rise in militant Muslim groups with links to international terrorist organizations."

The number of radicals in the country has been swelled over the past decade by graduates from the country's 64,000 madrassahs, or religious schools. They have been described by a retired high-ranking civil servant as a "political time bomb", the FEER report added.

Titu's bail

FROM PAGE 1 Police also submitted a report to the court stating that they got 'important secret information' on the killing from Titu during the remand period.

Information derived from Titu has been verified, police said in the report.

The defence lawyers submitted a petition for bail. They stated that Titu was not named in the FIR of the murder case, but was falsely implicated, as his enemies wanted to harass him. Moreover, the complainant of the case did not accuse Titu, the lawyers argued.

The prosecution side opposed the bail petition.

After hearing both sides, Magistrate Biman Bihari Barua rejected bail petition and ordered to send Titu to the Central Jail.

Wahiduzzaman, general secretary of ward 42 unit of the BNP-backed Jubo Dal, was shot dead by a group of assailants on Tuesday night.

Raozan terrorists

FROM PAGE 1 Mahmudul Hai and Moniruzzaman and Habibur Md. Mohiuddin.

A police team led by Officer-in-Charge Nikhil Chandra Mondal of Raozan Police Station encircled a one-storey abandoned building owned by Nurul Afsar, an expatriate, at around 2.30am, sources said.

Sensing police presence, Saikya and Abbas fired off shots, which led police to retaliate by firing about 20 rounds of shots.

At one stage, the police personnel forced their way into the building, which prompted a tussle with the terrorists before they fled the scene, leaving behind the rifle. Saikya is accused in three cases, including murder.

Two cases were filed under the Arms Act with Raozan Police Station.

Hunger strike

FROM PAGE 1 nationals are in jail although their prison terms ended long ago. They included 473 from Myanmar and 79 from Thailand, thrown into jail for pirating in the sea or illegally trespassing into Bangladesh.

They are in jail as negotiations to take them back is unnecessarily lingered by their governments, jail officials said.

They said these prisoners, mostly trained in marshal art, often posed threat to other inmates of the jail and the jail authorities as well. "In fact, we want to get rid of them immediately," said an official.

Log-in hitch

FROM PAGE 1 for fixing the damage.

Meantime, the ISP congratulated the BTTB for taking steps to remove the problem.

In a statement Akhteruzzaman and ISPA General Secretary Ershad Shafi Chowdhury regretted the undue distress and financial losses the their subscribers faced due to the breakdown in BTTB service.

Dhaka condemns

FROM PAGE 1 ported UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's call to the world leaders to free all Palestinian lands including Gaza and West Bank from Israeli occupation.

Extending unequivocal support to the UN Security Council's resolution, the prime minister asked Israel to immediately withdraw troops from Ramallah where Arafat has been kept confined and isolated.

Hasina UNB adds: Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed deep concern over the safety and security of Yasser Arafat.

Condemning Israeli aggression, Hasina in a statement also expressed solidarity with the cause of the Palestinian people and asked Israel to pullout its troops and withdraw the siege to Arafat's Ramallah headquarters.

Liberation war

FROM PAGE 1 The freedom fighters' council will have a director general as its chief executive.

Liberation War Affairs Minister Redwan Ahmed said in his statement on the aims and objectives of the bill said there has been no national body to uphold the spirit of the war or oversee the welfare of the freedom fighters for the past 30 years although scattered initiatives were taken at the government and private levels.

"This caused an anarchic situation in running the official and private organisations related to the war and the freedom fighters," he said.

The minister blamed the previous Awami League government for allowing a handful of people to use such organisations for their vested interests. As a result, he alleged that corruption and irregularities bred there.

"The genuine freedom fighters were not given the proper honour, while fake freedom fighters outstripped the genuine ones," he said, accusing the AL government of acting against the ideals of the war.

About the country's War of Independence, the minister only mentioned that the countrymen inspired by the proclamation of late president Ziaur Rahman fought a war from March 26 to December 17 in 1971 and liberated the country.

He did not acknowledge the role of the country's independence leader Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman or any other war heroes.

Goldsmith

FROM PAGE 12 Family sources said a group of youths identifying themselves as Chhatra Dal activists demanded a toll of Tk 2 lakh about a week ago and asked him to give the money by Friday.

A case was filed with Kotwali police in this connection.

Gas cylinder

FROM PAGE 1 absence of its owner went into hiding. Badda police seized the cylinder.

The duty officer of Badda Police Station said that when the employees tried to uncup the container, it blew out.

Police, however, could not confirm who brought the container to the shop.

A case was filed with Badda Police Station in this regard.

Toll collectors

FROM PAGE 1 decided to collect Tk 5 from each hauler at New Airport and Tongi station road terminals.

"The decision was taken unanimously at a meeting of the union" the protest letter said.

However, The Daily Star investigation revealed that the union was collecting Tk 10 from each hauler, and has set up an office at Farmgate to monitor toll collections at different points.

Meantime, the 21st meeting of the Sarak Paribahan Upadesta Parishad, a committee of the communications ministry, in November last decided to stop toll collection on roads, highways and at terminals.

The meeting was presided over by Communications Minister Nazmul Huda.

"The workers' and owners' association can collect toll only from their members at their offices, the meeting observed."

But it was found that a human hauler owner has to pay Tk 80 per day as toll for serving the Dhaka-Gazipur route. A big chunk of the money goes to local political leaders, it is alleged.

"We have become hostage to a section of trade union leaders and local musclemen," said an owner of a human hauler. "Because, if we don't pay money, we are not allowed to operate our vehicles."

"The unionists damage our vehicle if we refuse to pay them and even police do not bring the criminals to book," he said.

Regional investment strategy

FROM PAGE 12 He further said Bangladesh economy offers important investment opportunities for foreign companies.

"International investors may consider investing in Bangladesh to access a growing market with low production cost and abundant natural resources," he pointed out.

M K Anwar underscored the need for harmonisation of economic policies for evolving a common investment strategy for South Asia.

Addressing a session, Prof. Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the CPD, proposed a forum of the governors of the central banks of the South Asian countries for discussing various fiscal policy issues.

"The forum is needed for exchange of views among them for at least once a year regarding exchange rate management," he observed.

Governor of the Bangladesh Bank Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed told the seminar that although many neighbouring countries have already made their exchange rates market-

oriented, Bangladesh is yet to take such a step.

He however said such a proposal is under consideration.

The technical sessions in the morning were participated by the Maldives Minister for Planning and National Development Ibrahim Hussain Zaki, former finance minister M Syeeduzzaman, former foreign secretary Faruq Sobhan and former advisor to the caretaker government Syed Monjur Elahi. Dr. Mirza Azizul Islam, former director of UN-ESCAP, Prof. Arjun K Sengupta, chairman of SACEP and the Centre for Development and Human Rights, Syed Babar Ali and Dr. Faisal Bari of Lahore University, and Amjad Hossain Khan Chowdhury, president of the Bangladesh Agro-processors' Association.

Syed Monjur Elahi emphasised good governance for economic development in the region. He identified frequent import policy changes as the biggest barrier to business in the country.

According to him, the chain of command in the government has already broken down. Although three general elections have been held in the country there was no change in the situation, he observed.

"Now should we propose a training for the prime minister or members of parliament for good governance?" he asked.

Regarding the flow of foreign direct investment in the country, Elahi, also a prominent businessman, said, "We already missed the bus."

Faruq Sobhan said systematic corruption in the country is holding back investment. He said the Chittagong port was not competitive, as its transaction cost is 25 per cent higher than those of the ports in China.

He urged India to open up its trade policies for forging economic cooperation in the region.

Boraigram UZ of Natore AL men go into hiding fearing fresh attack

ANWAR ALI, Natore

There was none in the Bonpara in Boraigram upazila to file a case with police for the killing of the Awami League leader and freedom fighter Dr. Aynal Haque who died Friday after being injured by BNP cadres in a retaliatory attack earlier.

Almost all the AL leaders, workers and their relatives went into hiding in fear of further attack as well as arrest by police after BNP cadres had burnt down at least 30 houses of AL men in retaliation for the murder of BNP leader Alam by miscreants on Thursday.

At least 30 houses in the upazila including 15 houses of AL leaders and activists at Mohishdanga, Malpara and Sanjhipara villages were torched by BNP cadres on Thursday night and Friday morning.

An estimated Tk Two crore worth of property was damaged, including a minibus and four motorcycles.

The agitated BNP workers had also set fire to the three local offices of AL and office of the weekly Dipta Kantha as a sequel to the murder of their leader Alam.

Abdul Alim Mollah alias Alam, 32, the upazila convener of the ruling party's front organization Jatiyatabadi Sechhshasek Dal, was shot dead by miscreants allegedly belonging to AL in front of Hiramon Cinema Hall in Bonpara on Thursday night.

Just after the killing of Alam, the BNP cadres dragged out the upazila AL president Dr Aynal Haque from his chamber in the bazaar area and hacked the physician mercilessly with sharp weapons.

Haque, 65, succumbed to his injuries at the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on Friday afternoon.

Police, however, could not find any definite clue to the murder of Alam so far. Investigation authorities concerned have only learnt that two hired killers from Kushtia had shot Alam, sources said.

BNP leaders in a protest meeting yesterday at Bonpara bazaar held the local AL responsible for Alam's murder and demanded exemplary punishment for those involved.

Sayer Uddin Mollah, brother of Alam and chairman of Mahjgram union lodged a murder case with Boraigram thana accusing 13 AL leaders and workers.

Police arrested Abul Kashem Mircha, one of the accused and three other workers of local AL in connection with Alam's murder.

The district AL general secretary Advocate Hanif Ali Sheikh while talking to local journalists yesterday blamed the ruling party for the devastating fire that ruined many AL leaders and workers.

Hanif also said that torching houses was a typical BNP strategy. On 23rd April in 1995, the then BNP cadres torched at least 2000 houses and shops at Gosairpur, Dhananjaypara, Milkypara and Abdulpur bazaar in Lalpur upazila, he informed.

Ctg port

FROM PAGE 12 It again threatened to paralyse the port immediately should there be any agreement facilitating installation of the private container terminal proposed by the Stevedoring Services of America (SSA).

The Parishad held the protest rally at the Bandar Bhaban premises in the morning. The rally held on the fourth day of the Parishad's week-long campaign programme against the private terminal installation process followed a demonstration.

JU factions

FROM PAGE 12 Imamuddin in procession.

By this time, police were deployed in front of SSB Hall. At around 10:30pm, they raided AFM Kamaluddin Hall, Al Beruni Hall extension building and Al Beruni Hall main building for about two hours.

Police recovered one shotgun, one revolver and two rounds of fresh bullets of 7.62 SLR from AFM Kamaluddin Hall. None was arrested in this connection.

Police raided Kamaluddin Hall once again at 1:30pm yesterday but found nothing.

Talking to this correspondent, campus insiders said the raid was a farce as police failed to recover the huge amount of arms and ammunition that are in the possession of activists of both groups.

Gunfight at Arafat's doorsteps

FROM PAGE 1 a wall and doors.

Abed Rabbo also said the Israelis had a blown a hole in the ceiling of the second-floor dining room in the governor's section, but there was no confirmation.

Nabil Abu Rudeina, a top Arafat aide in the Ramallah headquarters, said the Palestinians fought off an initial Israeli bid to storm Arafat's offices.

"The attempt was blocked and there are several injured," he told Qatar's Al-Jazeera satellite television. He said the Israelis were regrouping for another try.

Meanwhile, Arafat, speaking to US television network Fox from his compound, vowed that he would never surrender to an Israeli campaign to root out Palestinian militants.

"They have declared it many times: 'We want Arafat dead or a prisoner or to kick him outside of Palestine,'" he said. "And I have told them I have one choice: to be one of the Palestinian martyrs."

West Bank intelligence chief Tawfiq Tirwai told his security staff by walkie-talkie that two Palestinian security officials were injured by Israeli gunfire.

One of them, Zeki Razi Daweish, was in critical condition but could not receive medical assistance, Tirwai said. The other, Mohammed Mahmud Suleiman, was moderately injured.

The Israeli army acknowledged there had been an exchange of fire around the building but denied its troops had entered Arafat's offices.

"There is no soldier in the building where the personal offices of Yasser Arafat are located," said an army spokesman.

He said an armed Palestinian came out of the building and Israelis

deployed outside opened fire. "That's when the other Palestinians in the building opened fire from windows on the soldiers, who responded."

Three tanks and an armoured transport vehicle were positioned at the edge of the battle-scarred buildings inside the once-proud headquarters of Arafat's Palestinian Authority in Ramallah.

A tank was parked 20 metres (yards) from Arafat's office with its gun barrels pointed at Arafat's office.

Despite the escalation, there were fewer armoured vehicles here than on Saturday when the compound was transformed into an Israeli military parking lot with 20 armoured vehicles and tanks.

But the compound was still tense; however, a stalemate ensued into the afternoon.

Next to the compound, Palestinian children stepped into the street for the first time in three days.

While the Israeli security cabinet was to meet yesterday to decide the next stage in its military operations, the Palestinians appealed for international help and said they placed no faith in assurances Arafat would not be harmed.

They were particularly critical of the United States, which has defended the right of the Jewish state to protect itself against continuing attacks on its people. They saw this as a tacit green light for the Ramallah incursion.

"The operation is going ahead under total American cover," Abed Rabbo told Al-Jazeera. "Everything is happening in a manner co-ordinated and planned by the two parties."

Sporadic heavy machine-gun and automatic weapons fire was

also heard in the centre of Ramallah. Israeli soldiers continued their door-to-door search for suspected militants and arms after rounding up hundreds of men Friday and Saturday.

Four Palestinian men were found shot dead on yesterday at a social club, which had been taken over by Israeli forces in southern Ramallah, Palestinian security officials said.

The bodies of five Palestinians were found Saturday and reports have suggested they were police officers killed execution-style.

Bursts of gunfire rocked the streets of the city. Soldiers searched homes for wanted Palestinian militants and weapon caches.

On a street in the city center, three armoured vehicles parked by a four-floor shopping mall.

Soldiers stepped out in their khaki pants, helmets and black armoured vests and gripped their scoped assault rifles. They proceeded to fan out inside the building.

Some crouched, others pointed their rifles overhead and prepared for enemy fire as the soldiers stormed inside. But silence reigned. There was no Palestinian fire.

On another street, some soldiers washed up by their vehicles. Peeking out of the lid from his tank, a soldier cleaned twin 12.7 millimetre machineguns attached to the top of the tank.

Most streets, scarred by tank treads, were cut off. Cars were forced back by tanks. Other routes were simply clogged by armoured vehicles.