

## Sackful of skulls found on bus

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A sackful of human skulls numbering 15 and a bag full of human bones were recovered by Kotwali Police from a Dhaka-bound bus from Kushtia at Rajbari crossing on Faridpur-Jessore highway at 11:30am yesterday.

Police arrested the owner of the carton and the bag, a passenger identified as Mostafa Kamal, 35, son of Muslemuddin of village Bairagir Char.

According to sources, a police team headed by Md. Asaduzzaman, officer-in-charge (OC) of Kotwali thana while searching vehicles for contrabands found the human body parts from the bus.

The OC suspects that the skulls and the bones were dug out of graveyards and being sent to Dhaka for sale.

## Alliance's mass procession in divn HQ today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Four-Party Alliance will bring out mass processions in the divisional headquarters today to protest what it said evil efforts to create anarchy, disorder and unrest in the country.

Processions will be brought out in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Sylhet and Barisal in afternoon.

In Dhaka, the alliance will hold a rally at Paltan Maidan prior to bringing out the procession, said a press release.

## Commissioner candidate shot at Tejgaon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) ward commissioner candidate was shot by his rivals at Begunbari in the city's Tejgaon area yesterday evening.

Witnesses said Ruhul Amin Jahangir, a BNP candidate for Ward No 37, was shot in his head and chest at about 6:30 pm.

The gang left the scene firing gunshots and exploding crackers.

Sources said the attackers were hired allegedly by another ward commissioner candidate from the same ward, Alauddin. Alauddin is one of the listed criminals.

Critically injured Jahangir was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

## Portfolios of 2 state ministers reallocated

BSS, Dhaka

The government yesterday reallocated the portfolios of two state ministers, according to an official handout.

State Minister for Land Barrister Mohammad Shahjahan Omar, Bir Uttam, was given the charge of the State Minister of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ministry while the State Minister for Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Ukil Abdus Sattar was given the Land Ministry portfolio as state minister.

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Apr 8		6-18 pm
Apr 9	5-43 am	

## Prayer Timings

Apr 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-45	5-20
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-20	6-25
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation

# New anti-crime bill tabled

## It's not a black law, says home minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bill seeking quick disposal of cases related to disruption of law and order was tabled in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury placed the bill titled "Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Summary Trial) Act, 2002".

The proposed law provides for special court to try offenders in a period ranging from 30 to 60 days. It suggests rigorous imprisonment from two to five years for crimes disrupting social peace.

"It's not a black law. It will be used against criminals and not against any gentleman," he told the House.

There are concerns that the tough law is aimed to throttle anti-government street agitation.

The proposed law comes less than a week after the

parliament scrapped a similar legislation enacted by the immediate past Awami League government.

Once passed, the stringent law will remain in force for two years.

Offences under the proposed law include hindrance to normal air, rail, road and river traffic movement, vandalism on transport and public and private property, mugging, illicit toll collection, terrorism in public places, obstruction to tender bidding, and obstruction to works of government officers and employees and their relatives.

According to the bill, the police will produce the offenders before the court within 24 hours of their arrest and press charges against them within next seven days if

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## Gas committee to submit report by Apr 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The committee on gas resource assessment yesterday decided to submit its report to the government by April 30.

Headed by BUET Vice Chancellor Dr. Prof. Nuruddin Ahmed, the committee at a meeting yesterday concluded that the USGS-Petrobangla 2001 Gas Resource Study was the most credible one and should be the reference point for Bangladesh's gas resource potentials.

Formed in January on a directive of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia with a one-month target to submit the report, the committee is assessing the country's gas reserves taking recourse to the Petrobangla's previous scientific studies -- the USGS-Petrobangla 2001 Gas Resource Study and the recent Norwegian

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# Talks begin today on yawning trade gap

INAM AHMED

Bangladesh opens trade talks with India here today with New Delhi indicating that it may at best discuss free market access to 25-category Bangladeshi items under the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA).

However, Dhaka wants such facility under the existing trade agreement between the two countries signed on October 4, 1980, according to commerce ministry sources.

Any negotiation under SAPTA would be a time-consuming process and no-one knows when local products will actually get the market access. And meantime, the trade gap would further tilt against Bangladesh.

The ministry has already consulted the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) on the issue and the independent think-tank has made it clear that India can allow such bilateral preferential treatment on a non-reciprocal basis.

"And this is the best option before us," said a high commerce ministry official last night. "We are ready for

the talks and would voice our concerns and ask for the access."

The CPD has pointed out that Article III of the 1980 trade agreement lies at the heart of the deal. The article stresses on taking 'appropriate measures through negotiations with a view to augmenting and diversifying their mutual trade specially in respect of specific products currently or potentially of export interest to them'.

"It is argued that given the huge trade deficit which Bangladesh suffers with India, the issue of augmentation and diversification of trade is more relevant in case of the flow of goods from Bangladesh to the Indian market," the CPD pointed out.

Five yearly trade figures between the two next-door neighbours show how drastically Dhaka lost its export thrust and became a happy hunting ground for New Delhi.

Bangladesh exported goods worth US\$ 29.6 million to India in 1985, but it dropped to \$19.5 million in 1990 before growing again to \$45 million in 1995 and then to \$

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PHOTO: STAR

Onslaught once again... the floating people have found themselves squatting in the city's Osmany Udyan, erecting polythene-made shacks on the parkland. As usual, all sorts of refuse litter one of the few remaining green spaces of the capital.

# Banks detail closure of 500 losing branches

## December deadline set, no job cut

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs) and two state-owned specialised banks have finalised plans to close down as many as 500 loss-making branches in three phases by December this year.

But none of the bank staff will be declared redundant and they would be merged with those of the nearest branches.

"The programme, chalked out by the bank management, will be completed by December this year. The objective of the exercise is to make the banks run commercially under prudent policy," Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed, governor of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), said at a press conference at the BB conference room yesterday.

He also said such mergers and closures of loss-making branches should be an annual exercise.

The banks, including two specialised ones namely the

Bangladesh Krishi Bank (BKB) and Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank (RAKUB), drew up their plans following a finance ministry directive in February to shut down branches incurring losses for the last five years. The banks submitted their plans to the BB in March.

The managing directors (MDs) of the four NCBs and the BKB disclosed their own plans for branch closures yesterday. However, none from RAKUB was present at the briefing.

Rabiul Hossain of the Sonali Bank, Murshid Kuli Khan of the Janata Bank, ASM Emdadul Huq of the Agrani Bank, Yeasin Ali of the Rupali Bank and Sajedur Rahman of the BKB spoke on the occasion. Deputy Governor of the BB Allah Malik Kazmi and other BB officials were present.

According to the plans disclosed by the MDs at the press conference, 472 branches of the five banks will be closed down by December.

RAKUB has 52 such loss-making branches, but it could be known how many of them would be closed. The BB governor said RAKUB is still discussing the issue with the BB.

Of the total 4860 branches of the banks, 806 have been incurring losses for the last five years. However, as the policy planners decided that one NCB branch should be in operation within a distance of five kilometres, 200 loss-making branches will escape the exercise.

Hoping against hope, the MDs of the banks said the rest 106 branches, which have been incurring losses for the last five years, would emerge profitable by December this year.

Sonali Bank, the largest of the NCBs, will close down or merge 165 of its 210 branches incurring losses for the last five years. Janata Bank will close down 170 branches

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# 'Killer' confesses to Shihab's murder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Abu Sayed, arrested in connection with the abduction and killing of Shihab, yesterday narrated before a magistrate how he along with four others killed the schoolboy.

After recording his confessional statement, Metropolitan Magistrate Mohammad Shahidul Islam sent him to Dhaka Central Jail, court sources said.

Sayed was produced before the CMM's Court at about 3 pm. He was taken to the chamber of the magistrate at about 4 pm where he narrated the horrifying incident. Yesterday was the fourth day of Sayed's seven-day remand. Khandaker Shihab Ahmed, 13, a student of class seven at Motijheel Model High School in the city, was kidnapped for ransom from in front of the school in the afternoon



Shihab

of February 7. But things turned worst for the boy as he recognised one of the culprits who resided in his locality. He was sliced into six pieces.

In his statement, Sayed said Raju and Monir Hossain Liton were the masterminds behind the abduction and killing.

On the day of the incident, Sayed and Liton lured Shihab by telling him that they would give him a bicycle to ride and took him to Dhaka Biriani House. Sayed and Liton took biriani (a delicious food) and Shihab took noodles.

Sayed said Liton took Shihab to a club in the area, riding a bicycle together. Raju, Sabuj, Sayed and Nasim were waiting in the club which was used by eleven-party candidate Julekha Akhter Mridha in the last parliamentary election.

The youths then asked Shihab to give them his residence telephone numbers. They also asked about the financial condition of his family.

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## Planned law will victimise innocent : Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Awami League president Sheikh Hasina yesterday said people lost confidence in the coalition government. The government would not be able to hold on to office by means of terrorism and repression, she forecast.

"For massive torture and repression across the country the people have lost their trust in the alliance government," she said addressing a delegation of the Mymensingh Awami Ulema League at her Dahnmondi residence.

She said the people's anger and grievances were demonstrated through their spontaneous response to Saturday's countryside dawn-to-dusk hartal.

Referring to a new law introduced in parliament yesterday, the

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## Cabinet body finalises draft on appointment of judiciary officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A cabinet committee yesterday finalised a draft of the Judicial Service Commission Regulations, 2002 to form a service commission for the appointment of judiciary officials.

The decision complies with the fourth instruction of the Supreme Court's 12-point directive for virtual separation of judiciary.

However, the draft would not be placed before the cabinet immediately, sources said. "There are two more related draft regulations and amendment of CrPC (Criminal Procedure Code) waiting to be finalised. Once these are done, we will send them to the cabinet," said a source.

After the implementation of these tasks, the appointment of judiciary officials -- now done by the executive wing of the government -- would be handled directly by the Supreme Court.

The decision was taken yesterday at the second meeting of the cabinet committee formed for implementation of the Supreme Court verdict on the separation of judiciary by May 30. Industries Minister MK Anwar chaired the meeting that also discussed other directives of the Supreme Court.

"We are expecting to implement the entire 12-point directive by May 30," convener of the committee MK Anwar told journalists immediately after the meeting at the Secretariat.

Till yesterday, the committee could not take any decision on how to overcome the basic conflicts between the judiciary and the administration cadre

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## Lakeside land at Gulshan still occupied

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rajuk is yet to recover more than two bigahs of green space along the Baridhara Lake beside the UN Road from illegal occupants.

The Baridhara Society, a 260-member local social welfare organisation, illegally occupied over about 25 kathas of land in the park. A woman -- Hasina Begum -- occupied more than five kathas of land in the same park allegedly by forging documents and raised a boundary wall.

Despite protests by environmentalists and residents of the area, Rajuk has not yet recovered the public land. The Daily Star published a story on January 25 about the illegal occupation of the public land.

It may be mentioned that a part of the same park was allocated to some influential persons during military rule earlier. The allottees

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# Israel ignores Bush's call, West Bank blitz goes on

AFP, Nablus, West Bank

Israel pressed ahead with its military push against the Palestinians yesterday, ignoring US calls to halt as Prime Minister Ariel Sharon vowed his nation was "past the point of no return".

But US Secretary of State Colin Powell said he was "pleased" with Israel's response to a demand by President George W Bush to begin a troop withdrawal from Palestinian areas "without delay".

"What the president asked Prime Minister (Ariel) Sharon to do was to begin the process of withdrawal and to do it now," Powell told "Fox News Sunday" ahead of his departure later yesterday for a trip to the region. "I'm pleased to hear that the prime minister says he is expediting his operations."

Meanwhile, fierce fighting raged again in the West Bank towns of Nablus and Jenin as Israeli forces kept up their assault, rolling into yet

another Palestinian village.

The Palestinians charged Washington was encouraging its close ally to continue the 10-day offensive, echoing scepticism over the timing of a visit by US Secretary of State Colin Powell intended to calm the bloodshed.

Powell was to leave the United States later Sunday but is not expected in Israel until the end of the week, after stopping in five other nations first.

Sharon said Israel had given up hope that any agreement with the Palestinians would bring his nation peace and end the waves of attacks and suicide bombings that have killed scores of Israelis.

"The Palestinian Authority will not fight terrorism no matter what, and we cannot accept going back to the situation as it was before the operation began," he said ahead of a cabinet meeting, state radio reported.

"Israel is at the point of no return because

Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority have no intention of respecting any accord," he said.

Israeli chief-of-staff General Shaul Mofaz told the cabinet that 200 Palestinians have been killed since March 29, and 1,500 wounded, when Israel launched the offensive to end the anti-Israeli attacks, sources said.

Thirteen Israeli soldiers have also been killed.

There is no independent confirmation of the death toll because reporters and medics have been barred from almost all combat areas. Palestinian information minister Yasser Abed Rabbo said 35 Palestinians were killed Saturday in Jenin.

At least 13 Palestinians were killed yesterday, including two in the Gaza Strip. According to an AFP tally more than 1,800 people have been killed

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