

# Venezuelan military forces president Chavez to quit

AP, Caracas

President Hugo Chavez, the former army paratrooper who polarised Venezuela with his strongarm rule, resigned under military pressure yesterday after a massive opposition demonstration ended in a bloodbath.

Chavez, 47, presented his resignation to three officers after he was confronted by the military high command at the presidential palace, said the Air Force Chief, Gen Regulo Anselmi, who was present at the time.

At 3 am yesterday Chavez, wearing military fatigues and a red beret -- as he did when he led a failed 1992 coup against then President Carlos Andres Perez -- left the palace for Caracas' Fort Tiuna army base. He was being held there while investigators decide what charges he could face for Thursday's violence, said army commander Gen. Efraim Vasquez Velasco. Thirteen people died and more than 100 were wounded.

Oil prices dipped amid hopes Chavez' downfall would bring greater stability in the world's fourth biggest oil exporter. A strike at the state-run oil monopoly protesting moves by Chavez had sharply cut

production.

Thousands of Venezuelans celebrated overnight, waving flags, blowing whistles and jamming a main highway in Caracas. Police warned that Chavez supporters



Hugo Chavez

reportedly were distributing weapons, especially in the hillside slums surrounding the capital. Officers raided storerooms, seizing dozens of firearms.

Down town, streets were littered with debris -- and in some places,

stained with blood. Most shops and businesses remained closed, and most people simply stayed home, stunned and wondering what would come next. Buses were half-empty, and those reporting to work hurried amidst rubble-strewn sidewalks.

Pedro Carmona, head of Venezuela's largest business association, announced he would head a transitional government to be installed later yesterday. He also announced an immediate end to a general strike called earlier this week against Chavez.

The one million-member Venezuelan Workers Confederation, and the business association Fedecamaras, called the strike to support executives within the state oil company, Petroleos de Venezuela, who were protesting Chavez's appointments to top company posts.

Chavez quit just hours after at least 13 people were killed and 110 wounded during a 150,000-strong opposition demonstration in downtown Caracas. Chavez had ordered National Guard troops and civilian gunmen, including rooftop snipers, to stop the marchers from reaching the palace, military officers said.



Star file photo by A K M Mohsin shows mawalis on honey collection drive in the Sundarbans during this time of last year.

# Mawalis stay off honey collection in Sundarbans

## Raising of entry fee protested

SHEHAB AHMED

The Forest Department is planning to reduce the 'entry fee' for *mawalis* (honey collectors) in the Sundarbans to Tk 200 from Tk 410 as they protested the new rate, staying off the traditional ceremony of honey collection period, sources said.

The ceremony takes place on April 3 every year at three forest range offices in the world's biggest mangrove forest. Hundreds of *mawalis* gather there and sprint towards the forest to claim their respective patches full of honeycombs as forest officials start the race by exploding firecracker.

This time also they gathered near the range offices but when they heard that the entry fee was raised to Tk 410 from Tk 100, they refused to join the race.

Some forest officials then allegedly devised a way to attract them, saying that they could go to the forest as fishermen. But they have to give 10 litres of honey as '*salam*' while returning from their collection drive. Ten litres of honey is worth

around Tk 300 in the region.

When contacted, Chief Conservator of Forests Anwar Faruq denied the allegation.

He said a local MP took up the issue of increased entry fee with the environment and forest minister, who assured of looking into it and reducing the fee. Accordingly, a proposal was made to re-fix the rate at Tk 210 for the honey collectors. But it is yet to be announced.

The forest department recently raised fees for entering the Sundarbans, which has been declared by the UNESCO a World Heritage Site.

The new rates are Tk 300 per day for foreign tourists and Tk 50 for local tourists. The rate is Tk 200 per day for launches entering the forest.

The new rates have been criticised by tour operators, who said this would discourage tourists from visiting the Sundarbans which has come into focus worldwide following the UNESCO declaration.

# Govt to go ahead with plan to shift tanneries to Gazipur

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The government is going ahead with its decision to shift the tanneries from Hazaribagh to a site in Gazipur, authoritative sources said.

The sources said the tanneries, numbering over 200 and without any waste treatment plants, dump toxic effluents containing chromium into the river Buriganga, turning its water septic and causing the aquatic life in the river to die slowly.

The tanneries are also responsible for polluting their surrounding areas, a densely populated low-income group neighbourhood in western Dhaka. People there have long been demanding relocation of the tanneries elsewhere and far away from the area.

After a long period of persuasion, tannery owners have agreed to relocate their industries to a suitable location with government's help, the sources said.

The government recently held a meeting with the tannery-owners in this regard and has successfully persuaded them to relocate the tanneries in Gazipur, secretary of the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) Sabihuddin Ahmed told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

His comments came upon a demonstration staged by some residents of Gazipur along with the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolan on Tuesday, demanding of the government not to relocate the tanneries at Madhyapara union in the district.

Sabihuddin Ahmed said relocation of the tanneries has become an urgent task before the government to protect the capital's environment. He dismissed the idea that relocation of the industries would pollute the local environment since, he said, the tanneries would not be allowed to release untreated effluents into the environment.

# Sylhet judges

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District Judge's courts in Sylhet. Besides, there are three special courts having the status of District Judge's Court. These are Divisional Special Court for trial of anti-corruption cases, Women and Children Repression Prevention Court and Public Safety Act Court.

Legal aid service is also being hampered due to the existing procedure for allotment of government-sanctioned funds. Every year the government sanctions Tk 50,000 for this purpose but the funds are almost unutilised for the last three years, the sources said.

A committee headed by the District and Sessions Judge takes decisions who should get legal aid. The committee includes a government pleader (GP), a public prosecutor (PP) and representatives from local NGOs, women's bodies and the Sylhet Bar.

The committee is to sit every month but meetings are not held regularly for many reasons. Judges should be given the responsibility of allocating the legal aid funds to applicants, the sources said.

# Wife chopped

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the hands and legs of his wife following an argument between the two. As Milan screamed for help, Nazrul slashed her body with a sharp weapon.

Hearing the commotion, other family members woke up and found Milan in a pool of blood. She died on the spot.

They caught Nazrul red-handed and handed him over to police. Uttara police recovered the body and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. Nazma Rahman, elder sister of the victim, filed a murder case with the Uttara Police accusing Nazrul Islam for the killing of Milan.

# Moudud

FROM PAGE 1

His predecessor Abdul Matin Khasru offered cooperation in this regard on behalf of his party. He stressed the need for creating public awareness to put an end to the situation.

"Let there be some mechanism for safeguarding the rights of the commonman." These people never violate the Constitution, rather those who are supposed to protect it violate it, the former law minister noted.

He said 'godfathers and the highest quarters misused' their power through police, creating a situation in which the Constitution and laws were violated.

The Constitution of Bangladesh is one of the best in the world, Khasru noted. But Moudud said the Constitution was changed through its first amendment.

Barrister Amirul Islam alleged that the ruling BNP-led alliance is pursuing 'politics of vengeance,' behaving with the opposition in an inhuman manner.

He blamed the government for 'torturing' religious minorities and opposition supporters. "There must be an end to politics of vengeance," he said.

"Whatever happening in the country now is nothing but a reflection of political values and culture during Pakistani rule. This mentality must have to be changed," he went on.

Barrister Islam said magistrates' courts are not independent as they are appointed and promoted by the home ministry and not by the Chief Justice.

But Moudud said people still accept verdicts of magistrates' courts.

Brushing aside criticism of the newly made Law and Order Disruption Crimes (Speedy Trial) Act 2002 as black law, the minister said, "There is no clause in it to be branded as black law, unlike the Special Security Act (SPA) passed by AL."

The other speakers included Barrister Sigma Huda, JSD leaders Nur-e-Alam Ziku, Hasanul Haq Inu, Ain O Salish Kendra representatives John Asit Das and Ela Chandra.

# Train-bus

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Hareram Biswas, 40, and bus driver Alam, 41. Another unidentified man succumbed to his injury at Comilla Medical College Hospital.

Of the injured, 12 were admitted to Comilla Medical College Hospital and 26 to Laksham Upazila Health Complex.

Witnesses said the level crossing was unmanned and open when the accident occurred.

A relief train from Laksham was carrying out salvage operation till filing of this report at 6 pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, the authorities suspended driver of the train Abdul Khaleq Bhuiyan and Assistant driver Ferdous Alam. High railway officials also visited the spot.

In a similar accident on July 29, 2000, Iqbal Hossain, a student of Jagannath College, was killed.

# 38 cases

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After reviewing about 300 cases, the committee sent a list of 145 to the home ministry recommending withdrawal.

However, the home ministry has approved withdrawal of 38 cases against BNP and Jamaat leaders and activists.

The committee at a meeting yesterday reviewed the progress in the process of withdrawing the 38 cases and identified three more cases filed with Panchlalis, Chandaon and Kotwali police stations.

The cases include the murder of JCD leader Litol, killing of a number of people in intra-party clashes in 1997 centring Khaleda Zia's meeting at Outer Stadium and killings at the Chittagong Medical College Hospital during her visit also in 1997.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Meer Mohammad Nasir Uddin, PM's Parliamentary Affairs Advisor Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury and Whip Syed Wahidul Alam were among those charged in the cases.

# Gujarat CM

FROM PAGE 1

Following Modi's move, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee stressed the party's commitment to India's secular traditions, while warning of the dangers of Islamic militancy around the world.

"We have always been secular. We don't believe in religious violence or religious fundamentalism," Vajpayee told the meeting.

The BJP leadership had come under heavy pressure from opposition parties to sack Modi for failing to curb the bloody Hindu backlash that followed a Muslim attack on a train carrying Hindu activists in Gujarat in late February.

Hindu mobs went on the rampage across the state, killing Muslims, burning their homes and looting their businesses, in the worst eruption of communal violence for nearly a decade.

Modi's BJP administration and the Gujarat police were heavily criticised for standing by as the riots gathered pace and, in some cases, even encouraging the mobs.

The nail in Modi's coffin came on Thursday when the largest ally of the BJP-led coalition government joined the opposition and human rights groups' calls for his removal.

If his resignation is accepted, it will be a major victory for the main opposition Congress party, whose leader Sonia Gandhi had been at the forefront of the "sack Modi" campaign.

Referring to the Gujarat riots in his speech, Vajpayee condemned the violence, but stressed that the initial Muslim attack on the train should not be overlooked because of the Hindu backlash that followed.

"We should not forget how it all began. Who started the fire?" he said.

# Fresh tremor

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Denker, who is based about 90 kilometers north of Nahrin, said that he had been told by partner organizations close to the epicenter that yesterday's quake had been closer to the surface than the last.

Quakes closer to the surface can often do more damage than would be apparent from their magnitude.

# Maoists

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10:15 pm local time, triggering a battle that lasted several hours. At least 35 policemen were killed, said Kadel. It is not known if any guerrillas were killed.

However, Sarad Khatri Chetri, a local newspaper reporter in the area, said 41 policemen were killed and 29 others were injured, most of them critically. Chetri's account could not be independently verified.

Kadel said the Khadka, the interior security minister, was the midnight shootout led to a raging battle that continued for half an hour. Yet again at about 6.00am, hundreds of workers belonging to the Khwaja group attacked the Dhaka Baju colony.

President of the Adamjee Jute Mills Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal Abul Khayer Khwaja and General Secretary Giassuddin Kalu claimed that Rahim was their activist.

Both the Ruhul Amin and Khwaja

# 52 hurt

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Howlader, Elin Sardar, Mannan Howlader, Sehih Alamgir, Akhter Bayati and Saleha Begum.

All the injured were admitted to different hospitals at Gournadi, Barisal, Kalkini and Madaripur. Traffic on the Dhaka-Barisal highway remained suspended for about five hours following the violence.

Later, police reinforcements were sent to the scene early yesterday.

Meanwhile, MP Zahiruddin Swapan and senior officials of local administration visited the spot yesterday.

# Army: City polls

FROM PAGE 1

contesting the DCC polls for posts of ward commissioner, taking advantage of loopholes in the existing election laws. Of them, four are 'most wanted' in police records, but mysteriously they are still at large despite a government announced award of Tk 50,000 each for their arrest.

Although the Election Commission (EC) at its April 4 meeting on law and order directed the authorities concerned to 'arrest on sight' all wanted criminals including those in the April 25 fray, the law enforcers could not track them down as yet.

In the latest incident of violence, a 'rebel' commissioner candidate from the ruling BNP-led alliance, Tanvirul Adel Khan Babu, was shot in the city's ward-36 on Friday night. Earlier on Wednesday, there was an untoward incident between ruling party lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu and his associates and supporters of three 'rebel' commissioner candidates from the alliance in Rahmatganj area in ward-65 under Lalbagh thana. Pintu went there to campaign in favour of the alliance nominee for commissioner.

On March 26, Wahiduzzaman alias Zaman, a commissioner candidate was murdered, by his rivals in Mohammadpur. Police could not arrest any of the FIR-named accused in the case.

Before the announcement of the

election schedule, another commissioner aspirant, Khaled Immam, was shot dead in Maghbazar area on December 31.

In the last couple of days, incidents of violence centring the DCC polls took place in Karwan Bazar, Tejgaon, Mohakhali, Dhakkhinpara and Nawabganj area, leaving at least seven people bullet-hit.

As in Dhaka, electioneering is also getting momentum in Khulna and Rajshahi cities. Processions, rallies and door to door campaigns are now common sights, according to reports received in the capital.

The main opposition Awami League is keeping off the elections, virtually making it a ruling alliance show.

Meanwhile, the Election Commission has published a gazette notification on polling centers. It will organise a brief training of field level election officials on April 16.

Although the EC has asked contestants not to go for wall writings seeking votes in violation of the election code of conduct, they are defying it.

The EC at a meeting with all the DCC mayor candidates on April 9, gave an ultimatum for erasing all such wall writings within 48 hours. The DMP commissioner was also asked to take necessary action in this regard. But nothing tangible happened as yet.

# Discussion on 'invasive alien species' resumes at Hague convention

REZAUL KARIM, from The Hague

Delegates from across the world at the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) yesterday resumed discussion on 'invasive alien species' and considered 'thematic reports' on implementation of policies.

Divided in working and contact groups, the delegates continued discussions throughout the day at the National Congress Centre. But they disagreed on referring the relevant provisions as "guidelines" or "guiding principles."

Switzerland suggested identifying a mechanism to address the problems of definitions after adoption of principles.

Iran and some other countries preferred a clear reference to rights of states in exploitation of resources and defining activities but other delegates said this could be risky for other states.

Bangladesh delegates told the conference that the country has to assess the impact of alien invasive species and living modified organisms on protection of forests and the biodiversity. They tried to draw a balance between accelerated rate of loss of biodiversity and their sustainable use.

However, most delegates stressed 'border control and quarantine' by specifying that states should put in place appropriate measures for this.

Chile and India emphasised exchange of information at regional and sub-regional levels while South Africa and some others called for adequate funding of the Global Invasive Species Programme.

On Inland Water Ecosystems, most delegates welcomed collaboration with Ramsar Convention. Turkey however opposed reference to the report of the World Commission on Dams.

About marine and coastal biodiversity, Spain on behalf of the EU and the US, supported integration of coral reefs as a new element in the work programme. The EU also stressed further study on coral reefs and coast management by local communities.

Bangladesh delegates supported increased cooperation with FAO on sustainable aquaculture

# Saifur

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import through land port will remain.

Criticising India for allowing duty-free access to only 40 items, he said in fact Bangladesh will be able to export not more than nine items to that country under this facility.

Apart from the yawning gap in official trade, huge smuggling is also taking place, he noted.

"They should be a little bit reasonable with Bangladesh", he added.

Saifur said Bangladesh has to protect its interest. "We have to have a sound textile sector so that we can compete after 2004. If I can not protect the interest of textile units, hundreds of crores of taka taken as bank loans will become sick. I can not accept that as finance minister," he said.

Referring to the country's macro-economic scenario, he said foreign exchange reserve has shown signs of significant improvement in the last three months.

"The main basis of an economy is a sound banking system. The country's banking system is yet to find a sound footing. Although the situation has improved, lot of things have to be done", the finance minister said.

Earlier, just a month after AL's polls debacle, the party expelled 24 "rebels" who took part in the October polls defying party nominations. The "rebels" included a member of AL Presidium, Dr Mohammad Selim.

# Sharon-Powell talks

FROM PAGE 12

"Israel is conducting a war against the Palestinian infrastructure of terror and hopes to end it as soon as possible," Sharon said.

Powell's visit with Sharon will be followed today by talks with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in his devastated office in the West Bank city of Ramallah, in which Arafat will be pressed to take a tough stand against violence.

Powell said this week that Israel must deal with Arafat as a partner in peacemaking.

In what appeared to be a gesture ahead of Powell's arrival, Israeli forces withdrew from about two dozen small towns and villages. However, they briefly moved into a new one: Kalil near the northern city of Nablus, where troops made arrests before leaving, the military said in a statement yesterday.

Military activity continued in a number of other cities, including Jenin, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Dura and Dahariyah, south of Hebron. Another report adds: Israel has handed the United States documents it says show the direct involvement of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and his top aides in terror attacks on Israelis, a government official said yesterday.

The documents were seized during Israel's 2-week-old military offensive in the West Bank, Israeli officials said. As part of the cam-

and fisheries.

Speaking on genetic technology and agricultural biodiversity, Bangladesh delegate Dr Mahfuzul Haq of environment and forest ministry called for collection of appropriate scientific data before field test and commercial application.

At the session on forest biodiversity, delegates expressed deep concern at the continued deforestation for the last 10 years. The session was told that forest areas larger than the size of France and Bolivia have disappeared since the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Syed M Lutfulah of the environment ministry told the session that Bangladesh attaches great importance to conservation of forest and has taken up a 80 million dollar Sundarbans Biodiversity Conservation Project to protect the 6,200 sq km mangrove forest, the largest in the world.

He supported Brazil which said global policies taken in various international forums like CBD should be compatible with national policies for their better implementation for protection of forest biodiversity.

NGOs participating in the CBD have put forward a 6-point demand to protest forests and the biodiversity. They called for setting 'action targets' for conservation and sustainable use of natural forests.

The demands include halting deforestation in all natural forests throughout the world by 2008, stopping illegal commercial and industrial exploitation of non-timber forest products and genetic resources and withdrawal of incentives and subsidies that encourage deforestation and forest degradation, including 'destructive' bilateral and multilateral aid and lending.

The NGOs also demanded protection of rights of indigenous people in the management of protected forest areas.

# AL meets today

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Disruption Crimes (Speedy Trial) Act, 2002 on April 9.

The party has already strongly protested enactment of the new stringent law, saying it will be used as a tool to "victimise" opposition activists. People will also be denied justice because of the provisions in the law for speedy trial, it said.

At the meeting, AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman is likely to place a detailed report on over 500 party men, served with show cause notices earlier to explain their "anti-party activities" during the October 1 general election.

In late November, a joint meeting of AL Presidium, ALCWC, its Advisory Council and lawmakers resolved to revamp the party and go tough against the "betrayers".

By the first week of December, letters were sent to party leaders at grassroots level, seeking lists of party members who "worked against party interest" during the election. The party high command issued the showcause notices after it received the lists.

The sources said that in most of the cases, replies to the notices were not satisfactory to the party high command.

Earlier, just a month after AL's polls debacle, the party expelled 24 "rebels" who took part in the October polls defying party nominations. The "rebels" included a member of AL Presidium, Dr Mohammad Selim.

paign, Israeli forces have taken over large areas of Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah, confining him to a few rooms, and have searched other Palestinian security headquarters, including that of West Bank security chief Jibril Rajouh.

"We have documents linking Arafat and his top aides directly to organising, directing and financing terror," said Danny Ayalon, an adviser to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Ayalon said Israel was sharing the information with the United States.

# Food habit

FROM PAGE 12

and sanitary conditions in preparing and handling the foods is lacking in most cases.

Some of our citizens are fond of biriani, kabab, ice cream and Chinese food, evident in the growing number of establishments catering these items.

A significant aspect of our Bengali culture is reflected in our fondness for sweets. This is quite evident from the growing number of sweetmeat shops all over the city.

This urban food culture is getting diversified with the march of time. And it is quite likely that in the near future, we may be witnessing a chain of big food shops like Macdonald's and Wimpeys as operating in many Western countries.