

Kashmir under direct rule as deadlock drags on

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, where recent elections to a new legislature produced a fractured verdict, was brought under direct federal government rule on Thursday after major political parties failed to put together a coalition government and Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah refused to continue in caretaker capacity.

The new legislature, which has a strength of 87 members, has been put under suspended animation just four days after it was constituted on October 13.

The decision to bring the state under the rule of Governor Girish Chandra Saxena, was taken following the refusal of Abdullah, whose National Conference party was voted out of power, to remain as caretaker chief minister, rejecting a plea by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The National Conference, headed by Farooq's son Omar, had secured 28 seats in the elections and emerged as the largest single legislative group but clearly lacks the support to get majority and form a government.

Sources close to the Governor and Indian government said the

direct federal rule was imposed to avoid constitutional crisis following Abdullah's refusal to continue as Chief Minister till an alternative government is formed.

They said after the refusal of Abdullah the Governor also took into consideration the failure of Congress and People's Democratic Party (PDP), main parties in race for power in the state, so far to cobble a coalition with the help of independent legislators and other smaller parties.

The Congress and PDP, which together command a strength of 36 lawmakers as against the 44 required for simple majority in the 87-member Jammu and Kashmir legislature, have so far failed to resolve their differences over which party would head a possible coalition government in the state. Both the parties are claiming the post of Chief Minister.

Saxena informed major political parties in the state of his decision. Jammu and Kashmir Congress chief and a strong contender for the post of state Chief Minister Ghulam Nabi Azad blamed Farooq Abdullah for trying to push the state into a constitutional crisis by refusing to remain in caretaker capacity.

The imposition of the federal Indian rule in the state came four

days ahead of the October 21 deadline set by Saxena for major political parties to convince him of their ability to form a stable government in the state so that he can invite a party or combination of parties to form a new ministry.

But the state Governor told Ghulam Nabi Azad that the federal rule was for a short spell and would be revoked the moment the political parties are able to convince him that they are in a position to form a stable government in the state.

Abdullah earlier on Thursday had met Saxena and conveyed to him that he would not continue as caretaker chief minister. On coming to know of this, Vajpayee himself spoke to Abdullah on phone and requested him to continue till alternative government was formed.

Later, the Governor wrote a letter asking Abdullah to stay on as caretaker head of government. But nothing worked.

Farooq Abdullah's argument in not continuing as caretaker was: "I do not have the moral right to continue as chief minister since the (previous) assembly by virtue of which my government was in office will cease to exist from tonight (Thursday night)."

None sued

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Eighteen-year-old rickshaw-puller, son of Dudu Mia of Gopalpur village, was killed when he went to the nearby market to buy rice for his family. The body was buried at his village graveyard.

The army fired more than 100 rounds, also injuring 20 people, in retaliation for one round by an agitator.

The BNP activists barricaded the Bogra-Dhaka Highway, protesting the arrest of four leaders and workers of the party, including the upazila unit president Jan-e-Alam Khoka.

Two police camps were set up in Bogra -- one at the Sherpur Women's College and the other at the Bogra Central School yesterday.

Panic gripped locals as the troops were patrolling the major streets in the Sherpur and Bogra towns.

Many male members of families fled home in Ulipur, Palpara, Hajipur, Jagannathpara, Shahapara and Poddarpara.

Enzyme in onion makes our eyes water

AFP, Paris

A milestone in human progress -- that moment when we will all be able to chop an onion without weeping -- lies on the horizon, thanks to the discovery of what it is in onions that makes our eyes water.

Scientists reporting in today's issue of the British weekly Nature say that the chemical culprit is a pungent enzyme that they were appropriately named lachrymatory-factor synthase.

It plays no part in giving the onion flavour, for this comes from another compound called thiosulphinate, according to the researchers, from House Foods Corp in Chiba, Japan.

That means, they cautiously suggest, the time has come for a stab at the world's first super-onion.

Onion genes would be tweaked so that they lack the tear-inducing enzyme but at the same time boost their yield of thiosulphinate.

"It may be possible to develop a non-lachrymatory onion that still retains its characteristic flavour and high nutritional value by downregulating the activity of this synthase enzyme," the team writes.

AL rally

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opposition party guardedly welcomed terming it a manifestation of police and civil administration's failure in curbing crimes.

Party sources said Hasina would address today's rally in rebuttal to the prime minister's speech delivered at a rally organised by the ruling alliance at the same venue on October 12.

Miss Photogenic

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the dais.

Among others, Branch Manager of Lever Brothers Bangladesh Ahmed Zakaria Baig also spoke on the occasion.

Singers Sakila Jafar and Tapan Chowdhury enthralled the audience with a number of popular songs.

Lever Brothers Bangladesh and Anandadhara jointly organised the colourful contest. The organisers announced that similar contests would also be arranged in other divisional headquarters.

CHT peace

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ment to control the trouble here?"

But Larma was tight-lipped when asked to elaborate. He dodged questions about clashes between activists of PCJSS and UPDF.

However, at different public meetings, Larma earlier said fresh unrest was growing in the hills due to delay in "full implementation" of the peace agreement.

Another tribal leader, Upendra Lal Chakma, who resigned from the post of Chairman of CHT Refugee Welfare Association one year ago, declined to answer questions about violence and unrest in the hills, fearing a backlash.

"I don't like to comment as I don't want to face trouble," he said.

A senior government official on condition of anonymity said UPDF is fighting for more autonomy in the hills as it is not happy with the peace accord signed by Shantu Larma.

"The problem in CHT needs to be solved politically to restore total peace," he said.

"I don't find any improvement or change in situation. People still feel insecure", he added.

Deputy Commissioner of Rangamati Dr Jafor Ahmed Khan talking to this correspondent said, "We have taken measures to keep the situation under central by ensuring reinforcements."

"Some interior areas including Kawkhali and Naniarchar in Rangamati district are vulnerable" the DC said.

However, withdrawal of army camps remained suspended after 70 camps were withdrawn immediately after signing of the peace accord.

Road to Indo-Pak peace is quite long despite troop pullout

AFP, New Delhi

India and Pakistan are likely to maintain their cool diplomatic stand-off despite having announced the withdrawal of war-ready troops from their common border, analysts warned Friday, adding the road to peace was long.

"Substantially, nothing has changed on the ground. There is no appreciable drop in the infiltration" of Islamic militants from Pakistan-administered Kashmir into the Indian zone of the troubled state, said analyst Kanti Bajpai.

"So we are not in a rush to start talking," said Bajpai, professor at the New Delhi-based Jawaharlal Nehru University. "The government has also indicated it is not in a hurry, which is quite normal."

On Wednesday, India announced the pullback of a substantial number of troops from the border with Pakistan except in Kashmir.

British couple

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was also to break the stereotypical image of poverty that Bangladesh is associated with in the West. "Hopefully, when our walk and our work with ITDG is over, we will be able to go back to the UK and project Bangladesh in a positive light," Maryann said.

Back home in Durrington, Maryann is the Managing Director of Hygiene Cleaning Techniques while Phil works as a business consultant with small and medium enterprises.

"We don't need much luck," said Phil jokingly on the eve of their departure. "All we need is for the weather to be nice," he said, pointing to the overcast skies of Dhaka.

The Guide Tours Limited, a Bangladesh-based regional tour operator will be providing all the logistical support for Huxtor and Newton's trip.

Hasina: AL men

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SHREK Russel Jatiya Shishu Kishore Parishad (SRJKSP) organised the discussion meeting and prize-distribution ceremony marking the 38th birth anniversary of Sheikh Russel, the youngest son of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was killed along with other family members on August 15, 1975.

The AL chief also distributed prizes among the winners of an art competition, held in the morning at Bangabandhu Bhavan at Dhanmondi.

Addressing the function as chief guest, Sheikh Hasina said atrocities were meted out to children across the country after the 2001 parliamentary elections.

She said if the trial and punishment of the killers of Russel had taken place, they would never dare to touch any child.

"The people of Bangladesh want trial of the killers, but the BNP-Jamaat alliance wants to protect them," Hasina said making an appeal for halting repression on children.

Criticising the coalition government, the former Prime Minister said BNP and Jamaat are the organisations of "killers" and that's why children, women and people at large are not safe in the hands of such "killers".

"They failed to ensure security

of the people but succeeded in providing security to the killers," she told the audience.

A large number of children present at the auditorium chanted slogans during the speech of Sheikh Hasina, the chief patron of SRJKSP.

Reminiscing on the tragedy in a choked voice, Hasina said that had Russel been alive, he would have been 37 years old this day. "My mother named him after great philosopher Bertrand Russel as my father Bangabandhu translated different stories about the great man."

"The killers brutally killed Bangabandhu and did not even spare tiny Russel. Later Ziaur Rahman sent the killers to Bangladesh missions abroad instead of putting them on trial," she said.

After assuming power, AL government repealed the Indemnity Ordinance paving the way for the trial. "But, the verdict is yet to be executed. Rather, a conspiracy is going on to set free the killers," she said.

SRJKSP secretary general Mahmud-us-Samad Chowdhury chaired the discussion meeting. Prof Sultana Shafi, KM Shahidullah, M Mojibor Rahman and Arif Hossain also spoke on the occasion.



Phil Newton, flanked by his wife Maryann Huxter (left), and Hasan Mansur, managing director of the Guide Tours Limited (right), addresses a press conference in the city yesterday. (Story on page 12)

Giant black hole enslaves star at heart of Milky Way

AFP, Paris

A "super-massive" black hole lurking at the centre of our galaxy has snared a star, forcing it to perform a tortured orbital dance at speeds of up to 180 million kilometers per hour.

A snapshot of the stellar slave has been taken by European astronomers, who say this is the first visual proof that a black hole of leviathan size lies at the heart of the Milky Way.

Astronomers have long suspected that most galaxies have at their core a vast black hole, one of the most powerful and enigmatic forces in the known Universe.

A few years ago, X-ray sensors detected potent bursts of radiation from a source about 26,000 light years from Earth that indicated our galaxy was no different.

But some experts remained unconvinced, arguing that other forces might be the cause.

The latest work, to be published in today's issue of the British journal Nature, takes the voyage of discovery a state further and, the authors say, is damning evidence that a "super-massive" black hole is at work.

European astronomers led by Rainer Schoedel of the Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Garching, Germany, sifted through 10 years of imaging of a curious star, S2, that races around the location of the suspected black hole, which is called Sagittarius A.

Those pictures enabled the team to plot two-thirds of the star's orbit. Then, in May this year, the team used a revolutionary imaging system at the world's largest optical telescope in order to finetune their calculations.

They conclude that S2 is on a highly elliptical orbit around Sagittarius A that lasts only 15.2 Earth years. By comparison, our Sun takes 230 million years to circle the galaxy.

At its closest point, the gravitational pull of Sagittarius A forces S2 to whizz within a hair's breadth of its rapacious jaws, at an excruciating velocity of 50,000 kmps per second.

S2, at this point, is a mere 17 light hours (17 hours travelling at the speed of light) from potential oblivion before it makes its escape and goes around again.

The wealth of data has yielded a Photo-fit picture of Sagittarius A: a force with a tiny body and a mass between 2.2 million and 3.7 million times more than that of the Sun.

Only a "super-massive" black hole could be this, the authors say. Other options ranging over a dense cluster of so-called dark particles can be "robustly" ruled out.

"These new data probe the Galactic Centre more closely than ever before," says Karl Gebhardt, a University of Texas astronomer, in a commentary.

"The only compelling explanation is that there is a super-massive black hole lurking there. These results are

the best evidence yet that super-massive black holes are not just theory, but fact."

The study also highlights the benefits of a new tool, adaptive optics imaging, at the European Southern Observatory's very large telescope in Chile.

When stars are viewed from the Earth, their image is blurred by the light's passage through the atmosphere, an effect that also makes them twinkle.

The new system measures these distortions and sends them to a deformable mirror. The mirror is able to change its shape to correct the distortions and almost completely remove the blurring, making the image also as sharp as if it were viewed from a telescope in space.

The predominant theory about black holes is that they are created from massive stars that run out of fuel and collapse in on themselves, generating a body of extremely intense gravity. Not even light can escape their clutch, which is why they cannot be observed optically.

A growing body of opinion also holds that some black holes may be created by non-stellar means. The super-massive ones, at the centre of galaxies, may be born from large volumes of gas that suddenly collapse, becoming things of extraordinary mass but tiny volumes, according to this school of thought.

250 more netted, two die

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with severe knee and chest injuries. The DMCH doctors stated his condition to be critical.

In yesterday's raid, at least six ward commissioners were rounded up for their alleged involvement in crimes.

The army also continued searching vehicles at different points of cities.

Chittagong

In Chittagong, the army raided the Memon Maternity Hospital at Sadarghat owned by the Chittagong City Corporation. The troops broke open the door of the storeroom to search.

Also raided were different parts of the city, but most known criminals and their godfathers escaped the army crackdown.

Rajshahi

The army rounded up two persons, one of them a ward commissioner, on the second day of the raid.

Commissioner Abdul Hamid

Sarkar Tekon was arrested in his residence at Kumarpara. Rajshahi police said they had no information about the arrests.

Brother of the arrested commissioner, Advocate Rashedun Nabi, filed a case with the Boalia Police Station saying that although he was told by the army that his brother was being taken to the cantonment, he still could not trace the commissioner.

In Gaibandha of the district, five, including a municipal commissioner, were arrested yesterday. Rickshaw-pullers have called a half-day hartal today, protesting the arrest of one of their leaders.

Sylhet

The army nabbed six persons. The army handed the ward commissioner of the Sylhet City Corporation, Jagadish Das, who is also joint convenor of the Sylhet district Juba League, and Sufian, a Bangladesh Chhatra League activist of Bagbari, over to

police at 7.30pm yesterday about 38 hours after arrest.

In Satkhira, army seized a nine-shooter gun from the house of a district BNP leader and arrested four persons, two of them UP chairmen Thursday night, sources said.

Army raided the house of district BNP leader Nasim Faruq Khan Mithu, and recovered the arms.

However, they could not arrest any one from the house during the operation.

The armed forces in their drives Thursday night arrested former president of district Juba League Sheikh Saiddudin, UP chairman Asadul Haq and his son Sharif Reza and Abdur Rauf, another UP chairman.

They also searched the homes of local BNP general secretary and some "identified terrorists", the sources said.

Pak alliance

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leader Makhdoom Amin Fahim's marathon meetings with MMA and PML-Q, the ARD's Nasrullah replied: "There is no ban on meetings."

Nasrullah said a "consensus" on avoiding any union with pro-Musharrif parties among ARD members was reached in a meeting late Thursday.

PML-Q leaders have said they favoured allying with the MMA's bearded clerics, who won massive vote gains largely on their campaign pledge to expel both US troops from Pakistani airbases and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents helping to hunt down al-Qaida fugitives.

Since the election, however, the fundamentalist alliance has said it considered that element "negotiable," MMA vice president Qazi Hussain Ahmed told AFP Monday.

"I think we'll go with the mullahs," PML-Q's parliamentary leader Chaudry Shujaat Hussain told AFP.

MMA vice president Qazi Hussain Ahmed reiterated earlier Friday that Maulana Jamiat Ulema-Islam (JUI) was their candidate for the future prime ministership.

"We will cooperate with those who support our candidate," he told reporters.

But PML-Q have said their party deserves the premiership as the largest seat winners, and would offer the MMA key portfolios in the cabinet.

Ahmed also demanded a "thorough re-counting of votes" in more than 20 constituencies where he alleged tampering with results.

Two eyesores

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business district, the existence of a messy marketplace with an abominable environment is an eyesore to all who want to see an important commercial centre grow with due perfection.

An equally abominable and chaotic situation prevails at Jatrabari in old Dhaka. The eternal and horrendous traffic jams in the area is mainly due to the fact that most passengers arriving to or leaving the capital get off at the Jatrabari bus stop as all buses come to a dead stop here. It takes about one hour and a half to reach Shanir Akhra from Comilla, but it may take about two hours to cross the Jatrabari point, causing untold sufferings to passengers.

It is understood that a large number of vehicles from over 200 places in the country including the northern-eastern part have to use this route to enter the city, as there is no other alternative route. As a result, the extent and volume of traffic jams becomes nightmarish, with the line of waiting vehicles extending over five to six miles.

This state of affairs has been continuing for a long time but no effective measure has yet been taken to resolve this problem. On the part of the Dhaka City Corporation and the government, some palliative steps have been taken; construction of a footbridge at the Jatrabari road crossing

being one such step. But people say that pedestrians are loath to move up the bridge as it was built in an unplanned way as far as its location and accessibility is concerned. Moreover, there have been frequent incidents of begging on the over bridge, and beggars create a terrible persistent nuisance there by blocking the path of pedestrians. Besides, there are unauthorised shops on the over bridge that add to the problem.

All around the Jatrabari road crossing, unauthorised rickshaw and tempo stands have come up along with the sprawling kutcha bazaar there. All these unauthorised structures have taken up about two-thirds of the Jatrabari road, creating traffic jams in the area.

Some months ago, defence service personnel took up the task of regulating traffic at Saidabad and Jatrabari road crossings following which the traffic jam situation somewhat improved as unauthorised kutcha bazaar, scooter and tempo stands and roadside shops were removed. With the departure of the service personnel, all such undesirable activities re-appeared. Only those who suffer these interminable miseries can gauge the depth of the ordeal.

Mixed reaction

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any tangible improvement in the country's law and order, the public is looking to the army as the last resort. Many however expressed their confidence in the army's ability to break the impasse in the terrible law and order situation.

"Law and order should get back on the right track following the deployment of troops," said one such person, a resident of the city's Maghbazar area while commenting on the issue.

He felt the deployment of army was necessary as police have utterly failed to maintain law and order in the country.

The move would help boost public confidence, he said, adding that in many areas of the city people could not sleep in peace due to harassment by musclemen and extortionists.

However, the move has become a cause of frustration and fear for political activists of both the ruling and opposition parties, some of whom have gone into hiding.

The army has so far arrested suspected criminals with political affiliation with both the ruling and main opposition parties.

Leaders of the main opposition Awami League and left-leaning organisations have termed the deployment of troops as evidence of the government's a failure to maintain law and order.

Some opposition leaders added that army is not the solution to the prevailing anarchic situation in the country.

Many are viewing the army deployment as a desperate move of the one-year-old coalition government to rein in criminals engaged in killing, extortion, kidnap and other anti-social activities.

Meanwhile, the presence of army on the streets had a catalytic effect on the police in discharging their duties. There was less traffic jam in the capital on Thursday and Friday.

However, many city-dwellers have complained of delays caused by the frequent security check posts at different strategic points in the city as they were compelled to stop their vehicles at several points.

"We were stopped by police at one point and the army at another check post. It's a long process," said a motorist.

Prosecution system

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The law minister was addressing as the chief guest two seminars held consecutively at the CIRDP auditorium here yesterday. Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs organised the seminars on "Rule of Law and Judiciary in Bangladesh" and "Jatiya Sangsad and People's Expectation."

With former Chief Justice Mostafa Kamal in the chair, Vice Chancellor of the Open University Dr Irshadul Bari and Dr Aftab Ahmed of Dhaka University presented key note papers on subject matters.

The discussants included Advocate Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmad MA Mannan MP, Barrister Rafiqul Huq, Prof. Maniruzzaman Mia, Dr Mizanur Rahman Shelly, Kazi Shahed Ahmad, Barrister Abdur Razzak, Advocate M A Hafiz, Prof. Emajuddin Ahmad, Dr Mahbubullah and Dr Jafarullah Chowdhury.

Referring to the present government's sincere efforts to improve the overall prosecution system leading to ensure justice, Moudud said that the Speedy Trial Act had yielded a good result in a short span of time with disposal of as many as 650 cases so far.

"A good number of sensational cases has also been disposed of under the existing laws only because of the sincerity of present government," he said, adding that a few such cases like Shipu murder case and Bappi murder case would be settled as early as possible.

The law minister said the government is also actively considering to settle the cases under legal aid system of those in custody for years without trial. We are also working continuously towards establishing an independent

Human Rights Commission, Anti-Corruption Commission and Ombudsman in the greater interest of rule of law in the country, he said.

The present government, he mentioned, is also working upon other important tasks to carry out a comprehensive reform for judicial capacity building, train up judges and lawyers, remove flaws from the judicial system and make the Jatiya Sangsad more active and effective in the greater national interest.

"Participation of the oppositions is a must in the parliament session to make it really effective and accountable," he said.

What's next

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administration needs help.

The sources said that there has not been any plan as yet to revamp the police force after the army pullout. They said the deployment of army showed that policymakers lost confidence in police.

And this realisation has now made them thinking about how the police can tackle the post-army-raid situation.

A number of cabinet ministers said it is not possible to improve the quality of police force overnight, as politicisation and use of the law-enforcement agency for party purposes over the years have ruined the police administration.

They said the government should immediately take up a concrete plan for the future.

Khulna hartal

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Four persons were released from the army camp at mid night on Thursday. They are former whip's only son Shukarno, Abdul Berek, Abdur Rashid and Rupam of BNP. Abdul Berek and Abdur Rashid are bodyguards of former whip Shuja.

Thirteen others were brought to Khulna thana at noon yesterday. They were later sent to court showing arrested under Section 54.

Spl tribunals

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judges will lead the tribunals. But, if necessary, some retired district judges might be appointed to the tribunals.

"It's not like a military tribunal," Law and Justice Minister Barrister Moudud Ahmed told UNB last night. Although he declined to give details of the proposed ordinance, he said trial in the tribunals would be guided by existing laws.

Explaining the necessity of promulgation of the Presidential Ordinance, he said: "The matter is very urgent, we're doing it in the interest of the people."

Asked if the Ordinance would be promulgated today, the Law Minister said: "There's a strong possibility."

Army drive

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Of over 200 arrested in the capital early Thursday, only 30 were handed over to police. The fate of the rest is unknown.

The delay in producing the arrested before the court has also been reported from other parts of the country.

Kirsten's historic ton

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Kirsten, who hurried to a flight half-century off 58 balls with eight fours but then needed another 102 balls to reach his century without adding another boundary.

Although the home team were put into bat, Smith was untroubled by a weak bowling attack but he suffered a painful blow on the right thumb when he was struck by a throw from Alok Kapali, fielding at square leg, as he ran for a quick single shortly after lunch when his score was on 43.

Smith needed treatment on the field and called for further treatment midway through the afternoon.

Playing in his third Test, Smith took 96 balls to reach his second Test half-century before accelerating to notch up his hundred off 165 balls with 12 fours.

Run-scoring became progressively easier as the day went on and Bangladesh were reduced to employing defensive field

placings, with a sweeper in place on the cover boundary.

The tall Smith drove powerfully on both sides of the wicket as he went to his double century off 287 balls with 25 fours.

Having kept the ball on the ground almost throughout his innings, he went down the pitch to off-spinner Sanwar Hossain two balls later and was caught at mid-on.

South Africa included a new cap in 28-year-old batsman Martin van Jaarsveld.

With Shaun Pollock resting because of a strained left knee ligament, wicketkeeper Mark Boucher captained South Africa for the fourth time.

The match is the first in a two-Test series.

Nishimizu

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support will be extended to the areas that have merits.

Asked about the arsenic problem in Bangladesh, she said the WB was trying to glean facts to know the extent of the problem.

Asked about the problem with the arsenic mitigation project of the WB, Nishimizu said such problems reflect governance issues. "We told them to address the problems, which has been done."

Rain

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Samarendu Karmakar, deputy director of the Meteorology Department, told The Daily Star yesterday that the rainfall was a result of conjugation of easterly depression originating from the Arabian Sea and western depression from the Meridian Sea.