



STAR FILE PHOTO

The fifteenth century Shatgambuj Mosque in Bagerhat is now off-limits to female tourists, but not because of official rules. An imam and his assistant bar women from visiting the archaeologically important site.

# Shatgambuj Mosque shut to female tourists

MORSHED ALI KHAN, back from Bagerhat

The imam and his assistant at the historic 15th century Shatgambuj Mosque in Bagerhat are barring female tourists from entering the mosque defying official rules.

Tourists, particularly foreign women, were barred from entering the archaeological site in the presence of this correspondent last week. Sources in the Department of Archaeology in Khulna said the imam and his *khadem* (assistant) have imposed the restrictions 'totally illegally'. The chief of the department instantly issued show-cause notices on the two and asked them to reply within a week.

The department officials said as long as the visitors covered their legs and heads there should not be any problem. Hundreds of female tourists have been visiting the 60-dome mosque for years without any problem, they said.

Mohammad Fazlur Rahman, identifying himself as the *khadem* (assistant) of the mosque, told the tourists to have a look at the recently renovated structure from outside.

A group of angry local people accused Imam Mohammad Helal Uddin of 'gross misconduct' with foreign tourists. They said the imam was ille-

gally 'charging' entrance fees from some tourists for the 'development of the mosque, which recently underwent a Tk 75 lakh facelift under a UNESCO-aided Paharpur Bagerhat Development Project.

Fazlur Rahman denied having turned female tourists away but admitted that he had asked them to look inside the sixty-dome mosque from outside, through the window.

Local people also alleged that the duo was raising funds during congregation every Friday in the name of "welfare of Islam". Helal Uddin has been selling books issued by the Department of Archaeology, meant to be distributed free, they alleged.

Helal Uddin first identified himself as 'a local religious leader'. He said th 'local people' objected to the entrance of female tourists into the mosque. But a large crowd of local people, gathered at the site, strongly protested Helal Uddin's claim and said they were aware how important the mosque was to the heritage of Bangladesh.

"I have seen hundreds of foreign tourists of all sexes visiting the mosque and we feel proud for this. But these two men are introducing new laws to belittle our country to the outsiders," said Mujibur Rahman, a local r

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## Gangmembers collect money to free Shikder

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gang members of the top criminal Al-Amin Shikder collect money for release of their leader, locals and businessmen alleged yesterday.

They have already raised Tk 5 lakh to bribe police into freeing Shikder from an arms case filed with the Badda Police Station, said locals.

The Rapid Action Team (RAT) arrested Shikder, Shoaib Ahmed and Nazrul Islam in Dhaka on February 15.

The police also seized a foreign-made shotgun, a bullet-proof jacket and 250 bullets.

Shikder was escaping arrest for long. He tops the criminal list of the Pallabi Police Station, with 14 cases against him.

His gang controls garment factories and waqf estates in Pallabi.

The locals fear further violence after release of Shikder.

# Standing body formation ignored once again

NAZRUL ISLAM

The just concluded eighth Jatiya Sangsad session enacted scores of laws, but it once again ignored formation of important parliamentary standing committees on various ministries.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had pledged to form the standing committees, if needed, keeping the opposition's slot vacant. The government alleges that the opposition did not submit the names of its members for the committees, while the opposition whips say they were ready to give their names any time.

In October last year, Khaleda Zia had told a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation that she would certainly form the committees to make the parliament more effective. But, no-one knows for certain why this session failed to form them.

Opposition lawmakers during debates on bills in the House repeatedly asked the treasury benches about the non-formation of the committees. They said had there been a debate in the committees, the enacted laws could have been more effective.

During a recent visit to Bangladesh, a European Parliamentary delegation also noted that the parliament was passing bills without having a debate on them at standing committees.

Having 24 sittings spread over one and a half months, the parliament adopted a thanks-giving motion on the presidential speech, disposed of notices on various issues, passed important bills like the Energy Regulatory Commission Bill 2003 and the controversial Joint Drive Indemnity Bill 2003.

On Tuesday, the concluding day, the House saw Leader of the House Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina engage in a stormy debate on issues like indemnity, law and order, rise of extremism and development.

It was a lively session where most of the opposition lawmakers raised their points and debated bills and resolutions. In most cases, the lawmakers dug out pasts of the two political parties, the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and the Awami League (AL).

The parliament bypassed discussion on important issues like inclusion of Bangladesh in the US terror-risk list, push-in of Bangladesh speaking people by India, price hike of essen

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## CEC slaps rigging charge on official

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) MA Syed has accused a divisional election official of involvement in rigging in last year's Rajshahi City Corporation elections.

He made the accusation at an Election Commission meeting yesterday while reviewing the ongoing Union Parishad (UP) polls and recommending measures for a polling centre, meeting sources said.

A chairman candidate from Sariakandi upazila of Bogra sought EC intervention for a peaceful voting in some polling stations there where voting has been suspended. The candidate feared rigging and violence by the ruling party supporters.

An EC official said one of the commissioners recommended that Divisional Election Officer A.R. Siddique be sent to the spot to observe the situation.

But the CEC rejected the proposal saying that the official was involved in rigging in the Rajshahi City Corporation polls. "So, we can't send him there," the CEC was quoted as saying.

Meanwhile, the EC sent a letter to the Armed Forces Division seeking deployment of the armed forces for the Barisal and Sylhet city corporation elections scheduled for March 30.

Troops already deployed in the divisional headquarters will be asked by the government to be on election duty, said an EC secretariat source.

## Venue hopping for busy minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The venue for the inauguration of four overhauled BRTC buses was changed thrice in three hours yesterday as Communications Minister Nazmul Huda happened to be busy.

Top ministry officials, BRTC chairman and a host of other officials waited holding flowers to welcome Huda at the Joarshahara BRTC bus depot at around 10:00am.

After a prolonged wait, Huda let the waiting crowd know that he was unable to attend and asked them to come to the Railway Bhaban with the vehicles for the inauguration.

It was a tedious ride for the whole party to reach the Railway Bhaban on Abdul Ghani Road through the peak hour rush. As the buses were maneuvered through the narrow gate of the Railway Bhaban, a Mirpur-bound bus rammied into one of them.

To the utter disappointment of the enthusiastic officials and employees, the restored body of the well-decorated bus was badly dented.

Angry BRTC employees who had toiled to restore the four old buses, tried to drag down the offender --- the driver of the Mirpur-bound bus. After some serious altercations, the officials intervened to calm the situation.

As the enthusiastic officials waited, Huda emerged from his

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## BRTC circular city bus service starts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC) yesterday launched a circular bus service in the city.

Communication Minister Nazmul Huda inaugurated the service at Muktangan.

Initially, there will be four buses in the route and 12 more will be added in two months, BRTC Chairman Taimur Alam Khandakar said.

Starting from Mohammadpur, the vehicles will touch bus stands at Asadgate, Sobhanbagh, Shukrabad, Kalabagan, Science Laboratory, Nilkhet, Chankarpul, Bangabazar, DIT, Shapala Chattar, Dainik Bangla Crossing, Press Club, Motisha Bahaban and Sahabagh.

The fare is Tk five for any distance.

Communication Secretary Rezaul Hayat and other BRTC officials were present on the occasion.

# BB reforms run into resistance

STAR REPORT

The central bank and the private bank owners are on a collision course over implementation of some recommendations of the Bank Reforms Committee (BRC).

The sponsor directors of the banks believe certain reform provisions would curb their 'fundamental rights'.

They even threatened to take the authorities to the court if the latter are determined to implement go ahead with the provisions.

The reform initiative includes restriction on the number of directors of the banks to 11, with two of them being picked from a panel of

depositors by the central bank.

The BRC headed by Prof. Wahiduddin Mahmud made the recommendations to ensure effective bank management.

Agreeing that reforms are essential, the Bangladesh Bank (BB) however thinks it is more important to protect the fundamental rights and interest of the depositors of the banks.

But the Bangladesh Association of Banks (BAB), the umbrella organisation of the sponsor directors of the PCBs, said in a paper that political considerations may influence such nominations, if previous cases are anything to go by.

The central bank logic for the

reform is that banking is the only industry where equity of the "owners" is a very small fraction of the assets. The bank 'owners' do business with the depositors' funds and that is why the depositors' interest needs to be protected.

Also, the banking industry is the most highly regulated industry even in the most advanced economies.

The BAB however argues that the proposal restricting the number of directors to 11 would be undemocratic and affect fundamental rights of the shareholders

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PHOTO: AFP

CAUTIOUSLY APPROACHING HISTORY: Former Kenyan skipper Maurice Odumbe plays a defensive shot against Zimbabwe at Bloemfontein yesterday.

# 4 Sylhet mayor candidates demand army deployment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Four mayoral candidates yesterday reiterated their demand for army deployment during the Sylhet City Corporation polls scheduled for March 20.

They were speaking at an open dialogue organised by the daily Prothom Alo, held at a city hotel.

The Prothom Alo Editor Matuir Rahman moderated the discussion on 'Sylhet City Corporation Election: Peoples' Expectation'. Former Vice-chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology Prof Mohammad Habibur Rahman gave the introductory address.

The four are sitting mayor and Awami League-backed candidate Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, Sammilita Nagorik Committee nominee and rebel BNP leader AFM Kamal, Jatiya Party-backed candidate Prof Kazi Kamal Ahmed and independent candidate Advocate Abdal Ahmed Chowdhury.

They placed their programmes and replied to questions from the audience.

The speakers from among the audience sought commitments for solution of various problems like extortion, traffic jam, water logging, pollution of Surma river, encroachment of public places and water-power crisis.

The candidates assured them of proper steps to solve the problems. They stressed on maintaining law and order and keeping the local body free from political influence.

Kamal, who was elected Pourasabha chairman twice earlier, highlighted his successes.

The dialogue was also participated by, among others, Prof Kamal Ahmed Chowdhury, Brig Gen (Retd) Jubayer Siddiqui, district AL President ANM Shafique, Project Director of Asia-Urbs Partnership Programme Ayub K o r o m A l i , W a r d

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## Rakkhi Bahini did not exist on March 7, 1972, says Hasina

IUNB, Dhaka

Opposition leader and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday refuted Prime Minister haleda Zia's remarks in Parliament that activities of the Rakkhi Bahini were indemnified on March 7, 1972, saying that the paramilitary force didn't even exist on that day.

"Instigated by Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia told the Parliament that indemnity ordinance was passed by the Awami League government on March 7, 1972 exempting Rakkhi Bahini from trial by civil court, but Rakkhi Bahini was not even formed at that time," she said.

The AL chief said that after guerrilla war, general indemnity for those who fought for independence is a common matter in all countries.

"But, in Bangladesh, your (Khaleda Zia) husband first promulgated Indemnity Ordinance to exempt the killers of the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and my other family members," she said.

Hasina made the remarks yesterday afternoon when newly elected office-bearers of the Dhaka District Bar Association met her at h e r

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## Pro-govt, pro-AL lawyers heading for confrontation

UNB, Dhaka

Ainijibi Oikkya Parishad, a pro-government lawyers' organisation, yesterday announced a counter convention of lawyers on Friday at the Supreme Court premises where the Supreme Court Bar Association had earlier called a similar convention on the same day.

The decision came from a view exchange meeting with Attorney General AF Hasan Anif attended by a group of lawyers including ministers Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Barrister Aminul Haq and Barrister Nazmul Huda.

"You must make the March 14 convention a success, otherwise you lose the job," Barrister Nazmul Huda warned the office bearers of the lawyers' body. "We would like to show our strength on that day to those who are dreaming of toppling the government," added Huda who presided over the meeting.

Supreme Court Bar Association supported by majority of the members on the Executive Committee who are pro-Awami League called for a lawyers' convention on March 14 demanding confirmation of appointment of six additional judges in accordance with the C h i e f

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Mar 13	12-45	6-07 pm
Mar 14	6-09 am	
Prayer Timings		
Mar 13		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-15	5-45
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-32	5-00
Maghrib	6-13	6-20
Esha	7-35	8-00
Source: Islamic Foundation		

## Excavation at Ayodhya begins amidst boycott and fears

PTI, Ayodhya

The excavation process at the acquired land here to find whether a temple existed beneath the demolished structure began yesterday amidst a boycott the main plaintiff in the title suit even as other Muslim leaders raised fears of manipulation.

The process began around 10:30 hours with a general survey of the site and lay-out of the trenches in the presence of contending parties or their nominees as per fresh guidelines of the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court which ordered the excavation on March 5.

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PHOTO: AFP

A worker carrying wooden stakes enters the disputed area of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya yesterday. A 100-strong team of labourers supervised by archaeologists began digging in search of clues as to whether a Hindu shrine once existed there. The mosque was demolished in December 1992 by Hindu zealots.