

UP polls ends today: 80 killed in violence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The 51-day Union Parishad (UP) election ends today.

At least 80 people have been killed, some of them children and teenagers, and 7,500 injured in election violence since January 25.

The concluding race will be held in 30 UPs. So far, the election has taken place in 4,193 unions, while the polls at 134 centres under 100 unions were suspended due to rigging and clashes.

The Election Commission (EC) puts the number of UPs at 4,488. The election to other UPs did not start a week ago.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Launch with 100 sinks in Barisal

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Caught in a nor'wester, a launch with about 100 passengers sank in the Tetulia river yesterday afternoon 75 km off Barisal town.

No passenger could be rescued even after several hours of the disaster at 4:15pm.

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) received the mishap news at around 6:30pm and sent its officials to the spot near the mouth of the Tetulia river and Bheduria

canal.

"We are taking preparation for rescue operation," BIWTA Manager Habibur Rahman told The Daily Star.

ML Cyprus, started its regular trip from Bhola at 3:00pm but it sank.

Cyprus passed the Bheduria canal and was crossing the Tetulia river when it was caught in a nor'wester, according to operators of other launches. Within minutes, the launch sank.

Superintendent of Police Moniruzzaman and Deputy Commissioner Kabir Mohammad Ashraf Alam visited the mishap spot.

Owner of the launch Osman Ali claimed that the vessel did not have more than 50-60 passengers when it sank.

But other launch operators said there were around 100 passengers.

About a year ago, a launch, ML Jahangir, sank in the same place after collision with another double-decker, killing 45 persons.

Govt to offload its shares in 7 companies

UNB, Dhaka

The government has in principle decided to offload its shares in seven companies as part of continuing efforts towards privatisation.

Privatisation Commission will sell off the government's shares in Zill Bangla Sugar Mills (Jamalpur), Shyampur Sugar Mills (Rangpur), Rainwick Jogheshwar & Company (Kushtia), Bangladesh Monopool Paper Manufacturing Company (Narayanganj), Osmania Glass Sheet Factory (Chittagong), Padma Oil Company (Chittagong) and Eastern Lubricants Blenders (Chittagong).

The government owns 51 per cent of the companies.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Probe fails to pin down bombers

Fundamentalists behind Mymensingh cinema blasts, report says

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inquiry commission on the Mymensingh bomb blasts failed to identify the culprits as it submitted a report to the government yesterday.

However, it made recommendations to prevent recurrence of such bomb blasts.

Justice Sultan Hossain Khan, head of the one-member commission, submitted the report to the home ministry.

Fundamentalists or extremist groups controlled by forces outside the country carried the bomb attacks, the commission said. "They do not believe in independence and sovereignty of the country," Justice Sultan said last night.

The report added that no major political party was involved in the blasts.

"The bombs might be of Indian origin, but we could not specify whether the Indian government or any Indian agencies are involved in

it," Justice Khan said.

Ingredients used in the bombs are not available in Bangladesh, he said. "They have one agenda, which is to cripple the economy, upset political unity and create anarchy."

The commission recommended tightening border security, invigorating intelligence agencies, increasing number and allowance of police personnel, providing necessary

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Laurel for top business heroes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Business Awards 2002 were awarded on Friday to honour top businesspersons and enterprises.

Micro Electronics Limited received the Best Enterprise of the Year 2002 Award, GrameenPhone Ltd. received the Best Joint Venture Enterprise of the Year 2002 Award, Chairman and Managing Director of Adcomm Ltd. Geeteara Safiya Choudhury got the Outstanding Woman in Business of the Year 2002 Award and Chairman of Apex Group Syed Manzur Elahi got the Businessperson of the Year 2002 Award.

Details on Business Page

Jointly introduced by the DHL Worldwide Express and The Daily Star three years ago, the awards are given each year in recognition of the excellence of enterprises and individuals in different fields of business and to honour and inspire them.

Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman gave away the awards as chief guest at a gala ceremony at the Sonargaon Hotel.

Business leaders, intellectuals,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8



(From left) Mahfuz Anam, editor of The Daily Star; Manzur Elahi, Business Person of the Year 2002 and chairman of Apex Group; Geeteara Safiya Choudhury, Outstanding Woman in Business of the Year 2002 and chairman of Adcomm; M Saifur Rahman, finance minister; Hasina Doula, managing director of Micro Electronics, adjudged Enterprise of the Year 2002; Stephen Fenwick, area director, South Asia-Indo China, DHL Worldwide Express; Desmond Quiah, country manager, DHL; and Ola Ree, managing director of GrameenPhone, recipient of Best Joint Venture Enterprise of the Year 2002, at the Bangladesh Business Awards 2002 ceremony.

Special supplement on Bangladesh Business Awards 2002 will be published on Tuesday, March 18.

Peaceful lawyers' rallies at Supreme Court

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tension at the Supreme Court temporarily diffused Friday as two opposing groups of lawyers peacefully held separate rallies at the court premises on the issue of appointment of the High Court judge.

Awami League and anti-government lawyers, led by the Supreme Court Bar Association President Ozair Farooq, held a rally to protest the government's refusal to confirm services of six additional judges ignoring the Chief Justice's recommendation.

Pro-government lawyers led by the Bar Secretary MA Hafiz organised the other rally to counter their rival's move. Eleven office-bearers of the executive committee of the Bar have thrown their weight behind the president, while the secretary has two members of the committee with him.

Both groups accused each other of acting according to the wishes of their 'political masters' and said the other rally was illegal.

Three ministers attended the pro-government rally, while top

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

CEC takes flak for rigging remark

Nagorik Committee demands Rajshahi Mayor's ouster

Staff Correspondent, Rajshahi

A comment of the chief election commissioner (CEC) on 'rigging' of the last Rajshahi City Corporation (RCC) election whipped up both protest and demand for removal of the mayor.

MA Syed remarked at an Election Commission meeting in Dhaka on March 12 that the RCC polls on April 25 last year were heavily rigged'.

The remark came after a proposal for transfer of Deputy Election Commissioner AR Siddiqui from Rajshahi to Khulna

or Barisal. The CEC accused Siddiqui of involving in the rigging and opposed his transfer.

The CEC had 'insulted' voters, Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu told journalists.

"A man in a high position like him should not make such a careless comment. He himself published the election results gadget and is now complaining of rigging. This is self-contradictory," Minu said.

The 40 ward commissioners of the RCC at a press conference at the Nagar Bhaban yesterday morning

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Iraq war is only days away: UK
US, Britain and Spain to hold emergency summit today

REUTERS, Praia Da Vitoria

As President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair prepared for crisis talks in mid-Atlantic, Britain said yesterday that a US-led war on Iraq was increasingly likely -- and maybe just days away.

"The prospect of military action is now much more probable," Blair's Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said.

The White House said the summit in the Azores with Spain today was no council of war but a last chance for diplomacy after other

Security Council members rebuffed the trio's repeated efforts to win a clear UN mandate for an invasion.

But diplomats at the United Nations said Washington's swift rejection of a proposal by Chile to break the impasse on another resolution indicated that UN negotiations were all but over.

Adam Ingram, Britain's armed forces minister, agreed the world may be just days from a conflict. "I think that language which has been used over recent days in London negotiations were all but over.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Kenya Lee-struck

AFP, Durban

Brett Lee claimed a hattrick as reigning champions Australia restricted Kenya to 174 for eight after sending them to bat in the last World Cup Super Six match here on Saturday.

Lee finished with 3-14 while Andy Bichel and Darren Lehmann chipped in with two wickets each as the Kenyans found runs hard to come by against the Australian attack at Kingsmead.

Both Australia and Kenya have already qualified for the semifinals with the Africans due to take on India at the same venue on Thursday.

Australia will play the first

semifinal at Port Elizabeth on Tuesday against Sri Lanka, who secured the fourth spot by defeating Zimbabwe by 74 runs earlier on Saturday.

Lee began the destruction with the fourth ball of his second over when he felled Kennedy Otiemo with a rising delivery and the ball dislodged the bails.

Otiemo lay writhing in pain before he was taken off the field and rushed to hospital where X-rays revealed no fracture but only a bruised elbow.

Next ball, Brijal Patel was snapped up in the slips by Australian

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1