

Book fair wears festive mood on the eve of Ekushey

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Amar Ekushe Book Fair 2004 wore a festive mood yesterday on the eve of Amar Ekushe as a big crowd of booklovers swarmed Bangla Academy premises. As many as 117 new books were shelved at the outlets of different publishing houses yesterday, marking a record for this year's fair. Thousands began to show up from the morning. The road in front of Bangla Academy experienced heavy traffic congestion as vehicles kept moving through the road. A large number of floating shops on the roadside footpath added extra colour to the festive mood of the book fair. The publishers said they succeeded to bring out the large number of new books though just a day ahead of the Amar Ekushey and huge number of people turned out and bought books. The sale of romance novels as well as poetry books and children's

books reached the top yesterday. The publishers said the booklovers mostly ask about the books of Humayan Azad, Humayan Ahmed and Muhammad Zafar Iqbal. Famous writers including Humayan Azad, Humayan Ahmed, Muhammad Zafar Iqbal came to the fair and gave autographs for their fans. Eminent journalist Ataus Samad unveiled the covers of the three books -- *Kotee Takar Vengchi*, *Bikalpa Dharar Rajnitir Mulkatha* and *Dukkh Shukher Chhelebel* -- by former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury. The fair has brought a novel titled Febo by Debo Priya Chakma, which is the first novel in print in the Chakma language, according to the writer. A discussion on contribution of Mohammad Enamul Haque in research of Muslim Bengali literature was held at the fair venue followed by a cultural programme.

Poverty alleviation confce WB starts field visit in Bangladesh tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank (WB) will begin a three-day field visit in Bangladesh tomorrow as part of a global learning process before the conference on poverty alleviation to be held in Shanghai, China next May. The Shanghai conference will represent Bangladesh as a role model for other countries in the areas of microcredit and girls' education, a WB press release said yesterday. The main objective of the field visit for policymakers, civil society groups and donor agencies from around the world is to achieve an understanding of economic, social and governance factors that have enabled Bangladesh to scale up its programmes in the areas.

Other participants include Maulana Abdul Wasey, minister of planning, Balochistan, Pakistan, Patricia Camacho, subdirectora de education, Departamento Nacional de Planeacion, Colombia, Benjamin Robert Gomez Berreto, administrator, Ateneo University, Ma Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, secretary of state, Department of State for Education, Gambia, Shiladitya Chatterjee, principal poverty reduction specialist, Asian Development Bank, Manila, Ray Tsutomu Uchida, chief representative, the JBIC, Dhaka, and James Adams, WB vice-president for Operations Policy and Country Services.

30 hurt as police, degree examinees clash in Rangpur

UNB, Rangpur

At least 30 people were injured in a clash between police and degree examinees at Haragachh Degree College in Kaunia upazila yesterday. College sources said the clash erupted at noon as the authorities of the examination centre rescheduled the exam of Islamic History (Part I) without prior notice. They said the authorities of National University deferred the date of the examination to February 20 from February 14 due to the countrywide hartal called by the Awami League. Police resorted to baton charge as the examinees went on the rampage and damaged furniture of the college, refusing to sit for the examination.

Language martyrs

FROM PAGE 1 scheduled to lead the nation in paying tributes to the language martyrs by placing wreaths at the Central Shaheed Minar, the venue for centrepiece February 21 observance, at 12:01am and in the following minutes today. "The Language Movement inspires us for sustained advancement in our language, literature and culture -- it is the responsibility of us all to keep high its flame to the future generation," Iajuddin said in a message. The leafy Dhaka University campus was abuzz with the milling crowd breaking the nighttime silence with the theme song -- *amar bhayer rokte rangano* -- in the final minutes to the great event. "The spirit of immortal Ekushey is... entwined with our national existence. Ekushey paved the way for achieving independent and sovereign Bangladesh. Now it is our responsibility to strengthen this state, bring dignity to it and make this state prosperous," Khaleda said in her message. Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina said the martyrs "created a new chapter in the history of Bangladesh by shedding their blood for establishing the right to mother language." She asked all to protest repression against humanity and said that would be the best way to pay homage to the martyrs. Dhaka University, supervising the Ekushey programmes, prohibited display of portraits, posters or banners and processions or rallies in and around the Shaheed Minar to keep the event apolitical. The day is a public holiday and the national flag will fly at half-mast atop all government, autonomous and private buildings. The Shaheed Minar and its environs were given a facelift to mark the

AL council at Rajshahi foiled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The council of Bagha upazila unit of the Awami League ended in pandemonium yesterday, as two factions clashed, leaving 15 leaders and workers injured. Tajul Islam Md Faruk, former lawmaker and the district AL general secretary, was rushed to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital after a feuding faction swooped on him with sharp weapons. The attackers also vandalised three vehicles of the guests at the venue at Bagha Madrassah premises. Sources said about 50 AL activists led by expelled AL leader Akkas attacked the leaders from Rajshahi and Dhaka and foiled the council.

3 murdered

FROM PAGE 12 the killing. An alleged criminal, Masud Reza alias Mental Masud, 41, was gunned down in Mohammadpur in the afternoon. Masud, also a construction assistant, was busy working at Dhaka Udayan near Mohammadpur embankment when a gang sprayed bullets on him. He received five bullets in the head and chest and died on the spot. Mohammadpur police recovered the body and sent it to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy. Police said Masud was a listed criminal and an accused in nine cases. No case was lodged till the filing of this report at 9:10pm.

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Ctg port

FROM PAGE 12 and strike. The commerce minister warned, "Strict legal action will be taken to frustrate any attempt to disrupt operation of the port even for a single second." He said, "The port area is a stronghold of nationalist (Jatiyatabadi) forces and they will resist the evil-doers' bid to mar activities at the port." State Minister Mir Nasiruddin, also Chittagong City BNP president, said, "The situation in 1996 (BNP's previous rule) and 2004 are not similar. This time we won't tolerate any attempt to create disorder at the port." Bandar Strand Road Sramik Dal organised the rally protesting hartal, violence and disorder. Bandar Sramik Dal President Shamsul Alam presided. Chittagong port suffered a stalemate for 17 day in a row in 1996 due to agitation initiated by the Awami League. City BNP secretary Dasgair Chowdhury, Workers' leaders Nurullah Bahar, Anwar Hossain and MA Gafur also addressed the rally. BNP sources said Food Minister Abdullah Al Noman, Foreign Minister M Morsheed Khan and State Minister for Forest and Environment Jafrul Islam Chowdhury will also join the campaign gradually.

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Hosts in Plate

FROM PAGE 1 winning note with a three-run win over Sri Lanka at Rajshahi but that was not enough to take them into the main competition. The Aussies defended a modest 186-9 at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium but they join Nepal, Scotland and Papua New Guinea in Plate Championship Group One. The other Plate contains Bangladesh, Canada, Ireland and Uganda. Despite the Lankan defeat they join India, South Africa and West Indies in Group 1 of the Super League while Group Two comprises England, New Zealand, Pakistan and Zimbabwe. There were also wins for South Africa over England by one wicket at Chittagong and Pakistan thrashed West Indies by 163 runs at the Khulna Divisional Stadium. The Super League matches will be played in the Dhaka region, the Plate Championship will be held in Chittagong. Both will start tomorrow.

Hasina's tour

FROM PAGE 12 Sources said police have prepared a list of 90 AL leaders and activists of Barisal to monitor their activities, adding that they could be arrested if deemed necessary. In Bhola, about the same number of AL men have been blacklisted by the administration. Police said most of these men are in trouble with the law and might be detained as they start showing up a day or two before the AL chief's tour of the region. Mohammad Mohsin, superintendent of police of Barisal, refused to comment about the alleged list of AL leaders and workers. He said the administration will do its utmost to ensure public safety and security during the opposition leader's visit. District BNP Secretary Advocate Nazrul Islam Rajon said they will not try to disrupt Sheikh Hasina's visit in any way. Two leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo League, AL's front organisations, were stabbed allegedly by their political opponents Thursday night as they were returning home from organisational work in connection with Hasina's visit. Party sources did not disclose their identities fearing harassment by police.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jaail addresses a meeting on Bangabandhu Avenue in Dhaka yesterday on the occasion of International Mother Language Day.

Tannery waste

FROM PAGE 1 Hazaribagh tanneries, an export-oriented cluster of industries, produce some 20,000 cubic metres of toxic waste laden with chromium and at least 30 other toxins every day. It flows untreated into the Buriganga through the Rayer Bazar sluice gate. During the rainy season, the high volume of water coming from the Himalayas dilutes and disperses waste. But this year's high tides and shrinking river flows allowed pollutants to concentrate. Former boatman Sona Mia, 55, sold his boat and purchased a rickshaw in Jhaocher village. Sona says he was sad to move into the city to pull a rickshaw because he was leaving behind a trade he had learnt from his father. He had no choice: pollution in the river and canals where he ferried people made him sick. "I found it difficult to breathe in the river," Sona says. "Now that I am pulling a rickshaw in the city, I feel more sick in the heavy, smoke-filled air. I don't think I can make a living any more." Thousands of others from peripheral villages are moving into the city to make a living. Lakhana, a third-generation fisherman from Basila, sold his nets and the boat he inher-

ited from his father to move to Rayer Bazar. Every morning he buys fish wholesale in the Karwan Bazar to sell in the Rayer Bazar kitchen market. "Pollution from tannery waste forced many fishermen in my community to migrate to as far away as India," Lakhana says. Lakhana points at the dead prawns floating by the bank. The area was once famous for lobsters and prawns, he says. "I recall the days when we caught several hundred kilograms of prawn and lobster every day from this river during rainy season," he says. "Such species as kali baus, boal, ruhi, tengra, bailla, koi and others were abundant. We have heard for years that the government planned to relocate the tanneries, but I think the government is not telling the truth." Kamala Rani Das, a housewife in Kamrangirchar, blames tannery pollution for the skin cancer that killed her husband, a boatman. "I sold all my belongings, including my ornaments and land, to pay for his treatment, but I could not save him," she says, weeping. "I do not know how to support my family of three."

Way out of woes

FROM PAGE 12 Khadija received her first loan 14 years ago when her friend Akhtara told her about microcredit being offered in Madhabpur. She took Tk 3,000 against two years of accrued interests and bought plots and a cow that she raised and later sold at Gabtali market. Khadija's friend Akhtara also found herself in slightly different circumstances with her husband working for two days and staying back home the following week, making it all but impossible to regularly feed her family. "I could not bring myself to ask for money. My husband was against it because he was not ready to pay the loan back," said Akhtara, a mother of two and a member of the bank for 14 years. "But I decided to go ahead because I needed to meet the demands of my growing children." Now in possession of four plots and three cows and her son soon to sit his SSC exams, Akhtara's happiness lies in the thought that she had the opportunity to achieve what she wanted and will continue to have the opportunity to nurture her dreams for the future. A couple of villages to the west, plucking paddy sheaves from the field day after day without much economic return made uncertain the future of Arzoo and her husband Bachchu Mian in Dori Rajnagar village. (We urge individuals and organisations to inform us about similar initiatives that we would be happy to write about. Please contact us by phone at The Daily Star or email at khan_ash@hotmail.com)

"Both of us would work without getting much in return, and when there wasn't much work, we and our children would go hungry for days," Bachchu recalled. Bachchu then went on to recount their path out of drudgery towards the now profitable venture of oil and rice mills. "We followed others in the village. We wanted to depend on ourselves so we borrowed some money," Bachchu said. Alluding to the high profit from trading cattle, Arzoo added: "That is when we realised that we were getting a worthwhile return for our hard work. We never got a fair share of our hard work before. Now we can save a lot more." Working amid the monotonous noise emanating from the oil and rice mills, Bachchu leaned back and spoke poignantly of the changes made by the microcredit. "The point is, we don't have to put in the extra 10 steps for even the smallest things anymore, like earning money for food or even the extra work we had to do for the education of our children. Now that those things are taken care of we can move on with life." (We urge individuals and organisations to inform us about similar initiatives that we would be happy to write about. Please contact us by phone at The Daily Star or email at khan_ash@hotmail.com)

Army-police divide

FROM PAGE 12 battalions will function in the capital alone. The Jatiya Sangsad passed the Armed Police Battalions (Amendment) Act 2003 in last July to pave the way for formation of Rab. Tk 402 crore is being spent to launch Rab and the government will have to allocate Tk 80 crore a year to run the force. The BJMC worked for more than five years. The BJMC mills currently employ 46,000 workers. Of them, 5,000 are being given voluntary retirement this time. Of the 7,000 BJMC staff, 690 including 190 at its head office will retire. The members of the Rapid Action Team (Rat) will be merged with Rab very soon. The government decided to put Rab into operation earlier than it had been originally planned in the wake of ongoing agitation including a series of shutdowns by the opposition, sources at the home ministry said. The over 5,000-men force unit draws its members from the armed forces, police and ansars. Initially seven battalions of the force will operate in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna, of which four

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Kashmir Dispute Indian cabinet to discuss timetable for fresh talks

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called a meeting of his security cabinet yesterday to discuss a proposed time-table for reopening talks with nuclear rival Pakistan over disputed Kashmir, officials here said. Indian Foreign Secretary Shashank and his deputy Arun Singh, who participated in the talks this week in Islamabad, briefed Vajpayee and other cabinet members, the government officials said. Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra were among those present in the meeting. India and Pakistan agreed Wednesday to open talks on Kashmir in May or June and in their three days of discussions both agreed to wait until after the Indian elections expected in April to launch the talks. They also decided the two foreign secretaries would hold a second meeting in August to review progress. Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and Vajpayee agreed last month to start the dialogue process, drawing a line under several years of tense ties which included a major skirmish in Kashmir in 1999 and a military build-up in 2002 which brought the two close to nuclear war.

The process of rapprochement was set in motion last April when Vajpayee offered a hand of friendship. Another report says, Indian troops shot dead nine militants in Indian Kashmir, where suspected rebels gunned down a Muslim schoolteacher and injured his student, police said yesterday. Seven of the militants were killed in the village of Doka Inderkote near the town of Surankote in southern Poonch district Friday, a police spokesman said. "They were killed during a gunfight that erupted after Indian troops launched an operation in the area," he said. Indian troops were searching the area for more militants. Police said some arms and ammunition had been recovered from the scene of encounter. Two more militants were killed in the southern district of Anantnag yesterday, the spokesman said. Police said suspected rebels shot dead Muslim schoolteacher Khurshid Ahmed Naikoo near the northern town of Handwara Friday morning. A student he was giving private tuition was injured in the shoot-out. Kashmir is in the grip of an anti-Indian rebellion that has left more than 40,000 people dead by official count. Separatists put the toll twice as high.

Opportunity probing mystery granules in Martian soil

AFP, Washington

The US space robot Opportunity, which landed on the surface of Mars about three weeks ago, is investigating mysterious round granules scattered in the Martian soil like blueberries in a muffin, NASA said Thursday. Scientists are highly intrigued by these objects and may investigate them further," said the Mars mission team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, California. "The question is what is the distribution of these things within the soil," said mission scientist Steve Squyres. "At the surface it is easy. But we have no idea what lies underneath." To learn what is underneath, the robot used one of its six wheels earlier this week to dig a small, shallow trench in the Martian soil. "The idea was to dig a hole and to see what lies down below," said Squyres. "Are we going to see granules below the surface or are they just distributed across the top. Are we going to see a dense concentration of granules all the way down?" NASA geologists noticed similar granules in a rocky outcropping examined by Opportunity early in its mission. "Where did these spherules that are embedded in the outcrop come from? asked Squyres. "Did they grow in place? What is the composition of the outcrop? What does it tell us about the possibility that water is

involved?" "We are looking for evidence of any salt product," said Albert Yen, another mission scientist. In the coming days, Opportunity will be investigating an area of rocky outcroppings dubbed El Capitan, whose unique strata have intrigued NASA geologists. Opportunity landed on Mars January 24. Its identical twin spirit landed on the opposite side of Mars on January 3. Both rovers have six wheels and weigh some 180 kilos (384 pounds). They are equipped with four instruments designed to carry out geological studies as well as a powerful drills. Their mission is to study the geology of Mars for three months, and try to determine if the conditions necessary to life once existed there.

Envoys ask AL

FROM PAGE 1 month, the government turned heat on the key opposition by blocking its leaders and activists from entering Bangabandhu Avenue to observe Mother Language Day programmes. The ruling alliance leader BNP threw a challenge to the AL by unveiling a rally in Motijheel commercial heart of Dhaka for February 28 in a virtual display of strength, further stoking tension in "the political cauldron". Amid the violence-packed hartals and counter-measures by the government, the business community, one of the key sufferers of the political face-off, appealed to the main opposition to look for alternatives to hartal. The left-leaning 11-party cluster at a meeting in Dhaka yesterday decided to add spark to the anti-government movement, but did not agree on a formal alliance with the AL. The AL held separate talks with 11-party constituents -- the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Workers Party and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) -- in the last 10 days with anti-government alliance-building high on the agenda. The left coalition meeting, held at BSD office with Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal leader Siddiqur Rahman in the chair, expressed

dismay at the rising acts of violence and persecution of opposition leaders and activists and rabble-rousing statements by government high-ups. The 11-party alliance coordinator, Khalequzzaman, said: "Prior to 2001 ballot we said in our manifesto that we'll evolve an alternative political force beyond the bipolar political scene in Bangladesh. Today, we still stick to that position." Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon told The Daily Star that the 11-party alliance would fire up the current movement and hold a workers'-peasants' grand rally in the city by March-end to that end. CPB General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said, "People are disillusioned about the twin big parties. We'll come up with a concrete movement step at a follow-up meeting by next week." CPB yesterday held a separate meeting with Dr Kamal Hossain-led Gano Forum, which is trying to consolidate opposition unity through a national convention on March 14. The effort, many believe, may offer a launch pad for a greater movement. Asked about the 11-party stance, Jaill said his party's dialogues with the left-coalition partners was still on and the next one with the Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal is slated for February 23.