

AL demands withdrawal of police from party office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The leaders of the main opposition Awami League (AL) yesterday demanded immediate withdrawal of police from the party's central office.

They said at a press conference at party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue that days of the ruling alliance are numbered and recent atrocities on political opponents are nothing but a last bite to cling to power.

"A simultaneous movement against the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition will begin on March 6 with the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal, which is an onset to topple the alliance," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told newsmen.

He accused the government of



Students of the Fine Arts Institute at Dhaka University (DU), left, carry the caricatures of Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury in a demonstration and Gano Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain, right, addresses a symbolic hunger strike of DU teachers on the campus yesterday as part of the protests against the butcher's knife attack on prominent writer Humayun Azad on February 27.



PHOTO: STAR

Plan on to assign SSF to VVIPs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is planning to broaden the scope of work of the Special Security Forces (SSF) to ensure security blanket for both local and foreign VVIPs.

The third inter-ministerial meeting of the Committee for Formulation of Recommendations on the Security of VVIP, held at the Local Government Rural Development (LGRD) ministry yesterday, discussed the affair.

LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan chaired the meeting, which was also attended by home minister, state minister for home affairs, inspector general of police, and director general of intelligence agencies.

The meeting recommended bringing all government security agencies under direct supervision and control of the national security advisory committee. It suggested restructuring of the security ser

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Hartal across country tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mainstream opposition parties will enforce a daylong countrywide hartal tomorrow in the first opposition unity on hot-button issues since the BNP-led alliance with the Jamaat-e-Islami took office in 2001.

The main opposition Awami League (AL), Communist Party of Bangladesh, Workers Party and Jatitya Samjantrik Dal of Hasanul Haq Inu will stage the 6:00am to 6:00pm shutdown to protest the stabbing of eminent writer Humayun Azad, alleging communal forces in the life-threatening attack.

The author of over 50 books, the latest against fundamentalists, is now being treated at the Combined Military Hospital for head and jaw wounds he suffered in the February 27 machete attack.

A left-leaning party, Samyabadi Dal, yesterday expressed solidarity with other parties on the strike call.

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Top al-Qaeda leader caught in Yemen

AFP, Sanaa

Security forces have captured one of the top leaders of the al-Qaeda terror network in Yemen during a continuing hunt for dozens of Islamic extremists holed up in the southern province of Abyan, officials said yesterday.

"A senior official of al-Qaeda in Yemen who was wanted by the police was arrested Wednesday night," in the Lawder area, one official told AFP.

Islamist sources named the man as Abdul Rauf Nassib, one of the most senior al-Qaeda officials in the Arabian peninsula republic, and the sole survivor of a missile attack launched from a US drone aircraft that killed six suspected al-Qaeda men in Maarib province of eastern

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MICROCREDIT-LENDING NGOS

Saifur slams high rate on borrowers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday fired a broadside at microcredit-providing NGOs for charging high rates of interest from poor borrowers.

While answering to some queries in parliament, he accused the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) of doing brisk business in the guise of poverty alleviation.

"If their [NGOs] target was to eradicate poverty, how could they raise skyscrapers like the Rockefeller Centre, build multi-storeyed houses and set up banks?" the finance minister wondered.

On a question from KM Obaidur Rahman, a front-row treasury bench member, on whether the government will lower the high interest rates charged by the NGOs

on micro-lending, Saifur accused them of making money out of poor people's misery. "If poverty disappears, their business will collapse," was his biting remark.

The minister alleged the NGOs brought money from abroad free of interest, making a display of the country's poverty, and then

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SSC EXAMS

200 students expelled on the first day



PHOTO: STAR

Secondary School Certificate examinees write their answers at Maghbazar Girls High School yesterday, on the opening day of the tests.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some 200 examinees were expelled for cheating on the first day of Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations yesterday, according to reports received from across the country.

The examinations began amid tight security with imposition of Section 144 in and around the centres and other tough measures including summary trial.

However, 14 teachers--four in Mymensingh and 10 in Barisal--were expelled for their alleged involvement in helping the examinees cheating.

A total of 78 examinees were expelled from different examination centres under Rajshahi Education Board. Of them, 14 were expelled in Kurigram, 11 in Sirajganj, eight each

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Check mosque loudspeakers

Roundtable suggests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a roundtable on the 'Draft Noise Pollution Control Act, 2004' yesterday recommended for bringing the use of loudspeakers in mosques under the law's purview.

Considering the high density of mosques in the city, they said the environment and forest ministry should limit the use to tolerable decibel and covering the mosques' interior only.

Discussants at the roundtable, organised by Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) at the National Press Club, also proposed for introducing horns producing melodious sounds for vehicles plying in the city to relieve the citizens of the harsh and hazardous sounds of blaring transport horns currently in use.

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, a leading environment activist, moderated the discussion. Among others, Prof Atiur Rahman, a renowned economist, Prof Naser Ezazul Haque, research official of Bapa, Musfiqur Rahman Babla, an environmentalist, Prof Nurul Amin, a

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Manpower export to Malaysia gets delayed

Elections to drag process

RAFIQ HASAN

Resumption of manpower export to Malaysia has again become uncertain following the sudden political developments in Kuala Lumpur, according to sources.

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi yesterday dissolved parliament and announced the date for a fresh general election would be declared today. Political circle in Kuala Lumpur observes that the national polls may take place on March 20-21.

As a result, manpower export from Bangladesh is unlikely to resume before the general elections, the source observed. Visits by delegations from both countries to expedite the resumption process have also been stalled.

"The whole process of manpower

export resumption has slowed down following the dissolution of parliament in Malaysia," said State Minister for Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Quamrul Islam.

He said Dhaka was prepared to resume exporting fresh workers from this month.

Malaysia stopped recruiting workers from Bangladesh in 1997 following a huge inflow of undocumented workers.

The Malaysian government was supposed to start receiving application from the employers for recruiting workers from Bangladesh from March 1. But Dhaka is yet to confirm any development in this regard.

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Mobile park to amuse outlying people

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A private company is going to launch a door-to-door mobile amusement park to entertain people throughout the country in view of city-centred and inadequate recreational facilities.

The park is formally open to public today on Cox's Bazar sea beach for two months and will visit different districts by turns later, the company Neptune Aquatic Amusement Centre's Managing Director Rafiqul Islam told a press briefing yesterday at Hotel Purbani in the city.

Initially, Ananda Ghumee, as the company names the park, will run seven rides--Ranger, Jumping Frog, Dragon Coaster, Swing Chair, Baby Train, Break Dance and Freezebee--all imported from India, besides seasonal and folk fair, circus, cultural function and food and beverage.

On the basis of people's demand and response, the park entrepreneurs intend to install seven more

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Resignation demand an emotional one: Altaf

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury yesterday said the students and teachers at Dhaka University enraged by the brutal attack on prominent writer Humayun Azad demanded his resignation out of emotion and it is their democratic right.

The minister told this to the BBC Radio but dodged the question about whether he would resign or not.

Some incidents occurred leaving a number of students and police

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Norwegians move to salvage Lankan truce

Power struggle in Tamil Tiger leadership

AFP, Colombo

Scandinavian truce monitors opened talks with Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers as a rift within the rebel leadership threatened to undermine an already fragile ceasefire, officials said.

The head of the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), Trond Furuhoide flew to the rebel-held town of Kilinochchi, 330km north of here, spokeswoman Agnes Bragadottir said.

She said Furuhoide and his deputy were already in talks with the political wing head of the Liberation

Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), S. P. Thamilselvan. No details of the talks were immediately available.

The visit comes after the first major public airing of differences in the normally disciplined and unified Tigers, involving the outfit's eastern commander V. Muralitharan -- better known by his nom de guerre Karuna.

The pro-rebel Tamilnet.com website denied there was a "major split" in the LTTE, led by elusive supreme Velupillai Prabhakaran, 49, who is based in the north of the island.

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Singapore least corrupt in Asia, Indonesia worst

AFP, Singapore

Singapore is the least corrupt nation in Asia and Indonesia the worst, but most countries in the region have shown improvements in dealing with the problem, according to a survey of foreign business executives released yesterday.

This year's survey by the Political and Economic Risk Consultancy

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Prayer Timings		
March 5		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	5-55
Juma	12-15	1-20
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Dhaka, Delhi agree hydro data exchange

Move will help better flood forecast

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, from New Delhi

India agreed to take necessary steps for ensuring speedy transmission of hydrological data to help Bangladesh prepare for flood well ahead, said an official release following a bilateral meeting here on Wednesday.

In return, Bangladesh agreed to forward the hydro-meteorological data of Dinajpur area in its territory for Tangon, Punarbhava and Atrai rivers for dispatching flood forecast warnings in Uttar and Dakshin Dinajpur districts of West Bengal state of India.

India and Bangladesh agreed to

exchange the data at a two-day expert level meeting, which concluded here on Wednesday.

India has been providing Bangladesh with hydrological data on major rivers like the Ganges, Brahmaputra, Teesta and Barak during the monsoon since 1972.

Besides supplying the existing rainfall data to Bangladesh on a continuous basis, even when the rainfall is less than 50mm, India has agreed to examine the availability and feasibility of transmitting additional rainfall data in respect of rivers prone to fresh floods.

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PHOTO: STAR

The Shaheed Minar on the median of Rampura-Wapda Road in Khilgaon stands in ruin. Police say a truck might have mounted the road divider, smashing down most of the memorial for Language Movement martyrs of 1952.