

## Arches again sprout all over for PM's rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Erecting overhead arches continues in the city streets, causing inconveniences to the traffic ahead of the prime minister's scheduled April-10 rally on Physical College premises in Mohammadpur.

Dozens of bamboo arches, each costing over Tk 15,000, are now taking shape in Dhanmondi, Mohammadpur, Rayer Bazar and Shaymoli areas. Most of the arches

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PHOTO: STAR

Colourful arches draped with welcome banners mark Mirpur Road from Dhanmondi to Mohammadpur's Physical Training Institute Ground where Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is scheduled to address a public meeting on April 10. Despite a prime ministerial directive, such structures were built wasting money and causing traffic jam.

## 14TH AMENDMENT AL again rejects JS body offer for talks

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A parliamentary committee on Tuesday invited opposition parties to a meeting seeking their opinions on the 14th constitution amendment bill, but the Awami League (AL) rejected the repeat appeal.

Advocate Khandaker Mahbub Uddin Ahmed, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry, wrote to Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, calling on her to nominate two deputies for the meeting on April 11.

The committee also invited Rawshan Ershad of Jatiya Party (Ershad), Abdul Kader Siddiqui of Krishak Samik Janata League, Anwar Hossain Manju of Jatiya Party (Manju) and independent lawmaker MM Shahin.

The amendment bill was tabled in the House on March 17 with a set

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## Drought brings windfall to water traders

Boro in Barind region hit, yield may slide 10pc

ANWAR ALI, Rajshahi

A government-subsidised development agency and an NGO are apparently cashing in on the prevailing acute scarcity of irrigation water for Boro rice cultivation in the Barind region.

Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) is reportedly charging an exorbitant price for irrigation in the region, where a draught-like situation coupled with power crisis is all set to decimate the Boro production by at least 10 percent this year.

The BMDA that enjoys an average of Tk 50-crore government subsidies a year is collecting around Tk 100 for an hour of irrigation using

a deep tube-well of it.

Besides, CARB, a local NGO owned by the BMDA executive director, is also exploiting the farmers' plight for profiteering by selling irrigation water at twice the rate of the BMDA in Godagari upazila of Rajshahi, sources alleged.

The Barind region consists of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj and Naogaon districts. A senior BMDA official said they had already informed the agriculture ministry of their apprehension of a 10 percent reduction in Boro harvest in the region this year following the irrigation exigency.

Abu Bakar Siddique, a farmer of Jotefatur village, said they were being compelled to buy water at high

rates, as there was no alternative.

Mobarak Hossain of Amtali in Godagari has cultivated Boro on five acres of land. "I could water my land only 10 times, instead of the required 18 times for a sufficient irrigation. If two more weeks go with such scanty irrigation, my paddy will dry up in the fields."

The BMDA buys power from Power Development Board at Tk 1.86 per unit and a BMDA deep tube-well consumes power worth Tk 25 to Tk 30 per hour to pump up water, sources said. Adding overhead and other expenditures to that, the total cost for running a BMDA deep tube-well remains below Tk 40

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## CHT refugees demand double ration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Too poor to afford this year's Baisabi celebrations, the indigenous internal refugees of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) have asked Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to double their yearly ration.

On March 21, Chittagong Hill Tracts Repatriated Jumma Refugees Welfare Association sent an application to the prime minister through the deputy commissioner of Khagrachhari requesting her to allocate six more months of food grain for them. Otherwise it would be impossible for them to celebrate Baisabi, the application said.

Baisabi, the biggest festival of the hill people, begins April 12.

Nearly 65,000 indigenous people were repatriated from refugee camps of India's Tripura after signing of the CHT peace treaty in 1997.

These refugees have to make do

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## When dream fizzles out

Story of a job seeker cheated by recruiting agent

RAFIQ HASAN

Abdul Hakim of Tongji in Gazipur went to Jordan on February 26. He had given Tk 1.50 lakh to the local recruiting agency that promised him an overseas job.

The recruiting agency -- Grand Overseas Business Limited at Uttara in Dhaka -- had assured Hakim of a job as machine operator in a garments factory in Jordan on a pay of \$ 200 a month. The agency arranged 'necessary documents' for him.

Hakim was in a group of 17 Bangladeshis who went to Jordan for jobs. All of them gave the agency between Tk 1.50 lakh and Tk 2.20 lakh for various categories of jobs including hospital cleaner, hotel boy, hotel cleaner, driver, tailor, machine operator and shopkeeper.

But on arrival in Amman, they were kept in a hotel for seven days. The hotel authorities did not allow them to go out and no representatives of the recruiting agency met them. Jordan police then came to the hotel and asked all of them to get into a minibus. The vehicle then left for an undisclosed destination and

reached Jordan-Iraq border after several hours.

Hakim and his 16 companions met another group of 19 Bangladeshis in a minibus there and came to know they had similar fate. The two vehicles then took the 36 Bangladeshis to Baghdad, left them on a street and returned to Jordan.

The helpless got terrified as fighting was on between American troops and Iraqi guerillas on the streets. To save their lives, they went to the Mazar of Hazrat Abdul Quader Zilani (RA) and sought shelter.

Caretakers of the mazar were kind enough to give them shelter in the mazar complex. They also arranged Irani visa for the Bangladeshis since there was no Bangladesh mission in Baghdad.

The mazar authorities spent around \$4,000 on them. The group then reached Bangladesh embassy in Iran and reported to the labour counsellor. Counsellor Abdullah Al Mamun found that the recruiting agency gave them forged documents, government permission, passport and visa.

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## AL begins fresh talks with close parties

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League yesterday began a fresh round of talks with other political parties to consolidate a united effort for unseating the ruling alliance much ahead of its tenure.

AL President Sheikh Hasina along with her senior party colleagues discussed strategies with Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (Inu) leaders over dinner at the opposition leader's Dhanmondi residence last night. Hasanul Haq Inu led the JSD delegates.

Having enforced the first day's hartal of their two-day general strike yesterday, both parties talked over future agitation programmes keeping an eye on the AL-set April-30 deadline for fall of the government.

The AL will continue to exchange views with other like-minded, progressive opposition political parties over the next two weeks, party sources said.

## Gono Forum leaders meet Khaleda

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gono Forum leaders Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Shamsuddoha yesterday met Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at her office.

Yesterday's meeting came at a time when the Gono Forum is leading the National Platform for Unity, which maintains ousting the present government as one of its main demands.

"We went to visit Mosaddeq Ali Falu, political secretary to Khaleda, on a personal matter. He then asked us to make a cordial visit at the PM's office, so we talked to her informally for ten minutes," Saifuddin told The Daily Star in the evening.

The meeting was completely unscheduled and no political matters were discussed, he added.

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PHOTO: STAR

A Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) worker yesterday channels water out of the road to Bangabhaban after two days of rain caused by seasonal Nor'wester storm submerged part of it.

## Maoists kidnap 1,500 children in Nepal

AFF, Kathmandu

Maoist rebels abducted around 1,500 youths from three villages in a remote corner of southwestern Nepal, a local village official said yesterday.

The kidnappings late Tuesday were the latest in a wave of abductions by the rebels who security officials say take students, teachers and others to draft them into their ranks and "re-educate" them at Maoist camps.

"The Maoists kidnapped 1,500 youths and students including teenage girls from Tribhuvan Basti, Kalipa and Parasa villages in Kanchanpur district," Rajendra Singh Rawal, an elected council official, told AFP by telephone.

"The rebels took these 1,500 people in 27 tractor-trailers to an unknown destination," said Rawal.

Before departing, the Maoists said they would return to round up more young men from the villages, he said.

Locals were fleeing across the Nepal border to the Indian town of Piliwih in Sonpura Nagar district because they feared more abductions, Rawal said.

Army officials say the Maoists are kidnapping youths and forcing them to join their ranks in the face of mounting guerrilla losses at the hands of security forces.

Human rights groups say both troops and rebels have abducted their opponents during the insurgency that has claimed over 9,500 lives.

The rebels have been waging

their 'People's War' since 1996 to overthrow the constitutional monarchy and install a communist republic in the desperately poor nation of more than 23 million people.

Last month, security forces said more than 500 guerillas were killed in a bloody clash in west Nepal. The rebels said just 40 of their fighters died.

Meanwhile, around 250 of 1,000 teachers and students kidnapped last week from Bajhang district in Nepal's far west have been released but the fate of the other 750 was unknown, a district official said.

The Maoists also abducted 150 teachers earlier this week from the Dadeldhura district in western Nepal, police said.

## Notorious Shibir criminal 'Gittu Nasir' nabbed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police yesterday arrested a man believed to be notorious Islami-Chhatra Shibir cadre Gittu Nasir hours after he was injured in a road accident on Dhaka-Chittagong Highway in Comilla.

Accused in a string of criminal cases, Nasir faces a death sentence a speedy trial tribunal handed down over the killing of principal Gopal Krishna Muhuri in Chittagong in 2001.

He is believed to have a part in the looting of Tk 56 lakh from a security van in the port city in the latest such criminal activity on April 1.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) dispatched a seven-member team to confirm the identity of the man wounded in the head-on collision between a car and a truck that left two persons killed in Chowddagram. Nasir was travelling in the car with four others, including

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## Arafat not scared of Sharon threat

REUTERS, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat said in an interview published yesterday he did not fear Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's threats to assassinate him.

"I am not afraid of Sharon's threats," Arafat told the Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth. "Do you know me as a person who is afraid? I fear only Allah."

Sharon has been slapped down twice by Washington in recent days for speaking of his longtime foe as a possible future target after Israel's March 22 assassination of Hamas leader Ahmed Yassin in Gaza.

Israel says Arafat has fomented violence during 3-1/2 years of conflict, an accusation he denies.

"Whoever kills Jews or orders Jews and Israeli citizens to be killed... is a marked man," Sharon told Ynet, Yedioth's Web site, in an interview published on Monday.

Sharon acknowledged that he had promised President Bush not to harm Arafat physically. But he said: "There have been changes since then," including a U.S. decision to adopt Israel's refusal to negotiate with Arafat.

"This is not the first time Sharon has threatened my life. He forgets he also threatened me in Beirut," Arafat said, referring to Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

Sharon, then defense minister and architect of the offensive, has since voiced regret that Israel did not "liquidate" Arafat.

But any move now against the 74-year-old former guerrilla leader would anger the United States, Israel's main ally.

"We have made it clear that sending him into exile or otherwise dealing with him is not part of the solution to the situation in the Middle East," White House spokesman Scott McClellan told reporters.

Israel's government declared in September that Arafat -- confined to his battered headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah for more than two years -- should be "removed."

But Arafat, regarded by Palestinians as a symbol of their struggle for statehood, has scoffed at such threats, saying he would welcome martyrdom.

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## Biman flights back to normal after engineers end strike

Int'l, domestic flights delayed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman's flight operations returned to normal yesterday after Tuesday's daylong disruptions to international and domestic flights due to a wildcat strike by 250 ground engineers.

Although the strike was called off Tuesday evening, the logjam continued well past midnight, forcing four international flights to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Kathmandu and Kolkata and several domestic flights to be rescheduled.

The effect was somewhat less on the domestic flights as two leased Boeing 737s maintained by its Singaporean owner were used to service the routes.

Society of Aircraft Engineers of Bangladesh called the strike following a dispute between ground engineers and Biman Managing Director (MD) Air Commodore Mohammad Liaqat Ali.

Sources said six engineers were supposed to fly to Indonesia for

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## New feat in bypass surgery

NAIMUL HAQ

For the first time in Bangladesh, surgeons have carried out a second bypass surgery on a heart patient.

The surgery was conducted at Z H Sikder Cardiac Hospital at Rayerbazar in Dhaka recently.

The team of surgeons that conducted the operation described it as a milestone in the history of cardiovascular surgery in the country.

"It was an extremely difficult surgery attempting to remove blockages in both the arteries or channels having over 95 per cent obstruction to blood flow to the heart," said Dr Luthfor Rahman, chief cardiac surgeon at the hospital, who led the surgical team.

Never before has any surgeon in the country performed such opera-



Dr Luthfor Rahman

tion on a patient already having a bypass surgery done on him or her, he pointed out.

Delwar Hossain, 61, an executive of a private organisation, had both

his coronary arteries that supply blood to the heart almost blocked. He was admitted to the hospital with severe chest pain.

Surgeons found his condition grave and initially thought he had little chances of surviving an open-heart surgery. Usually about 15 out of every 100 patients in such condition die globally during second bypass surgery, they mentioned.

"He was a dying man. But we decided to do whatever we could to save a life," said Dr Rahman, who has already conducted over 700 open-heart surgeries.

Team member Dr Shams Monwar said both the arteries in his heart were blocked despite a bypass surgery in November last year.

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Prayer Timings		
April 8		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-40	5-15
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-21	6-24
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation