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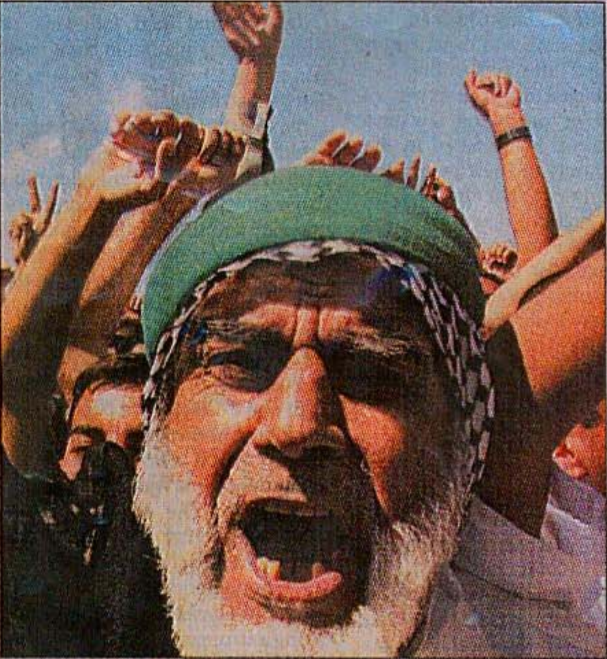
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Iraqis, left, shout anti-US slogans at a rally outside Baghdad's Umm Qura Sunni mosque; and Iraqi insurgents, right, wave their national flag as they celebrate in front of a burning US military tanker after attacking it with rocket-propelled grenades in Abu Gharib, 15km west of the Iraqi capital, yesterday.

Step down paving way for snap polls: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday asked Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to step down immediately admitting what she said was the alliance government's absolute failure to deliver during the last 30 months.

"Quit the office before the time is up... Your days are numbered," she said demanding midterm polls to take a fresh mandate from the voters.

Hasina, also the leader of the opposition in parliament, was addressing a big public meeting near Mirpur stadium organised by the local AL unit.

Khaleda Zia, the AL chief said, "You've failed to provide food for people and jobs for the unemployed youths. You've failed to control prices of essentials and the law and order slide." Giving a detailed picture of the BNP-led coalition government's failure, Hasina maintained, "People now want a change through snap polls."

"Inshallah, we'd free people from the misrule," she said calling upon all to unite against the "torture and repression" by the alliance government, as "She [Khaleda] wouldn't be able to bring peace to the people."

This fresh call from the leader of the main opposition party came after observance of two consecutive days of hartal and announcement of

fresh agitation that would culminate in laying siege on the Hawa Bhaban on April 21.

On the country's biggest ever arms haul in Chittagong, Hasina reiterated her party's demand for international probe into the gun-running. She also hinted at involvement of government high-ups, including the prime minister, who is in charge of the home ministry, Industries Minister Matiar Rahman Nizami, Prime Minister's Advisor Salauddin Quader Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar and prime minister's son Tareq Rahman in smuggling the arms in to kill people.

She said the arms recovered in

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FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF SADDAM FALL

US occupation sinks deeper in turmoil

Nine killed in attack on convoy in Iraq; Koizumi vows not to withdraw troops

AGENCIES, Baghdad

Bloody turmoil reigned in Iraq yesterday, the first anniversary of Saddam Hussein's fall, with Sunni and Shia rebels battling US-led forces and holding three Japanese and other foreign hostages.

Insurgents attacked a US convoy carrying fuel west of Baghdad, killing at least nine people, witnesses said.

A Reuters photographer on the scene said he saw bodies burning inside the vehicles, which were still on fire near Abu Gharib. He said the convoy included US military vehicles and fuel tankers.

Huge clouds of black smoke hung over the area, visible from

several kilometres away. There was heavy fighting between US troops and guerrillas in Abu Gharib yesterday.

Truckloads of people from the area have also tried to head further west to help other insurgents battling US forces in Falluja and Ramadi. Marines tried to hold a temporary ceasefire in their assault on Falluja.

Iraq's most senior US administrator, Paul Bremer, said the halt aimed to allow negotiations with city leaders and the entry of humanitarian aid and to let beleaguered residents deal with their dead after five days of bloody street fighting against Sunni insurgents. A stream of cars carrying women and elderly

headed out of the city.

One of the strongest pro-American voices in Iraq's US-appointed governing council, Adnan Pachachi, condemned the operation in Falluja as "unacceptable and illegal" - a sign of Iraqi anger at the siege, which for some has become a symbol of resistance.

The Marines called a halt to offensive operations at noon (0800 GMT). But just 90 minutes later, Lt Col Brennan Byrne, commander of the 1st Battalion 5th Marine Regiment, said he had permission to resume offensive operations.

Since then there has been sporadic shooting in Falluja. Marines remained in positions around the city and in an industrial zone just

inside, without entering residential areas. There was fighting before the ceasefire around a mosque that has been the focus of battles for the last three days.

In a symbol of the state of Iraq a year after the US invasion, a portrait of Muqtada al-Sadr - the radical Shia cleric whose militia has rebelled across the south - was today hung on the plinth in Firdous Square, where one year ago today marines toppled a statue of ousted leader Saddam Hussein.

The felling of Saddam's statue on April 9 was an iconic image of liberation in Iraq. Today US soldiers climbed the unfinished bronze statue that replaced Saddam's to tear down the poster of Sadr, the new enemy of US forces.

In the south, US troops fanned out across Kut, driving out members of Sadr's al-Mahdi Army militia who seized the city this week.

The operation represented a

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Red alert across Europe

AFP, London

Europe was facing ever more serious fears of another major terrorism attack yesterday, perhaps even over the Easter holiday period, as a series of security alerts spread fear through Spain, France, Britain and Italy.

Paris was the latest city to find itself on the apparent frontline of efforts to avert an attack by extremists groups, with the city's rail traffic temporarily brought to a halt and five stations evacuated on Thursday evening.

The move alert followed a CIA alert about a possible bomb attack, French police and US officials said.

Police said that the warning had come to the CIA via an anonymous e-mail message from Madrid, where a series of massive and coordinated bomb attacks at rail stations on March 11 left 191 people dead.

Spain was on Friday also bracing itself for the prospect of another imminent attack as police hunted for Islamic militants still at large after the Madrid bombings.

Police combing through the wreckage of an apartment where a group of militants blew themselves up during a police stakeout last weekend uncovered a video tape telling Spain to withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan.

If this did not happen within a week further attacks would take place, the ultimatum warned.

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CAPITAL DEFICITS

14 pvt banks marked for punishment

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The central bank is going to take punitive measures against 14 private banks for failing to cover their capital shortfalls on target set a year ago.

The banks will not be allowed to open new branches and distribute dividends, barring their shareholders from drawing profits, until they cover up the shortfall, Bangladesh Bank (BB) sources said.

Besides the 14 private banks, seven public sector banks also have failed to meet the target. But the BB is sparing the government banks,

where a number of reform measures are being implemented to improve their performance.

These 21 banks, out of the 44 banks working in the country, together lack a capital of Tk 2,569 crore.

By a November 2002 circular, the BB asked the banks to raise their ratio of capital to risk-weighted assets to no less than 9 percent by June 30, 2003.

Later, in another circular on March 30, 2003, the central bank directed them to increase their minimum capital to Tk 100 crore

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Death certificate says Hamid died of heart failure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Notorious Shibir cadre Hamidullah, arrested along with six others after a gunfight with police early Thursday, died of 'cardiac failure' in police custody at Hathazari Health Complex at night.

Seven Shibir cadres, including Hamid, were arrested with sophisticated firearms after the hour-long shootout on the west bank of Halda river in Mondakini of Hathazari upazila.

The clash left Mohammad Yakub, chief of a notorious gang known as 'Yakub Bahini', dead and four policemen injured. Yakub was shot in the chest and died instantly.

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CTG ARMS HAUL

Clues link Anwara gang

NURUL ALAM, Ctg

Clues gathered by the probe body into the April-02 arms haul indicate an Anwara-based smuggling syndicate was involved in the gun-running.

The syndicate comprises 10 smugglers, including Din Mohammad and Hafizur Rahman, a source linked to the high-powered probe committee said here yesterday on condition of anonymity.

Hafiz, who hails from Patiya upazila, is believed to had been

entrusted with offloading the deadly cargo at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited (CUFL) jetty. And Din, son of Nurul Islam of South Bandar Kuttapara under Karnaphuli upazila, is suspected to be in charge of transporting the haul. Both have been on the run since the seizure.

"We've collected enough clues and received a tip-off about the involvement of the syndicate. We need to arrest them for thorough interrogation to unravel the whole picture. Interrogation of Din Mohammad and Hafizur Rahman is

essential for the investigation," the source said.

"We need more time to complete the investigation process and the high-powered probe body have to come down to Chittagong soon again," he added.

Special teams of law enforcers drawn from intelligence agencies and the Criminal Investigation Department of Police are now out on a massive manhunt for the racketeers, including Hafiz and Din, the source said. All border points,

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Positive Bangladesh

See our special story titled 'the strength within' on page 12.

NU education falls apart

STAR REPORT

Acute shortage of teachers, their preoccupation with private tuition, inadequate infrastructure and traditional examination system dog education under the National University (NU), the National Education Commission report says.

Almost 85 percent teachers of science subjects, 65 percent of commerce, 45 percent of social science and 20 percent of humanities are engaged in private tuition, greatly impeding proper education in colleges under the NU, the report points out.

Many colleges run mainly with guest teachers and too insufficient classrooms and take examinations without completing the courses in

thesyllabus.

Some 91 percent students sit final examinations without the required class attendance of 75 percent.

Only 9 percent students attend classes as per the rule to be 'collegiate', says the report based on a survey of 48 degree and postgraduate colleges in the six divisions.

Class attendance is vital for proper education, but the college authorities ignored it. They allow a large section of 'non-collegiate' students to sit examinations in exchange for money, it mentioned.

Students are deprived of 40 percent classes due to lack of examination halls in many colleges. On average, eight examinations take place in an academic year and

classes routinely remain suspended during the examinations. Most colleges cannot complete their syllabus due to frequent class cuts.

The report says honours and master's classes were held on only 105 days on average in a year in 48 colleges. But classes should be held on at least 200 days a year.

Some students were allowed to sit for examinations although they attended only six classes out of 254 in an academic year.

None of the 102 colleges with honours and masters' courses under the NU has the required number of teachers.

There should be eight teachers for honours courses and 12 for masters' courses, according to NU

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Lone tetanus vaccine plant set to close down

NAIMUL HAQ

The lone tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccine producing plant in Bangladesh is going to close down due to a prolonged tussle between the government and the World Health Organisation (WHO), officials at the Institute of Public Health (IPH) said.

Production at the state-owned plant under a WHO-supported project started in 1982 and has remained suspended since March 1997.

"Many countries do not have TT vaccine plants of their own. We are proud to have one. But undue

international pressure and conspiracy are leading to closure of the plant," a top official said.

The government now imports the vaccine that costs more than four times the locally produced vaccine, which was priced at Tk 15 a vial.

An estimated 16,000 newborns die of tetanus each year in the country. The disease is preventable.

The TT plant under the IPH used to produce 10-dose 5-ml vials of vaccine and supply about 1,20,000 of vials for the National Immunisation Programme until the suspension of production.

Since then it is being imported through Unicef (United Nations Children's Fund) but at more than four times the cost of the local production, officials pointed out.

In 1992, the WHO sent a taskforce called 'Children Vaccine Initiative' led by Dr Juli Mestlin to assess the quality of the vaccine. It certified the vaccine to be of 'international standards'.

Later, 25 batches of TT vaccine evaluated under the WHO supervision in a laboratory in Finland gave similar views about its quality.

Despite this, the WHO in a letter to the health ministry on February

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COMING OUT ON

Bengali New Year's Day!

The Daily Star

GUIDE TO EXCLUSIVE SHOPPING IN DHAKA

GULSHAN
BANANI
DHANMONDI
BAIY ROAD

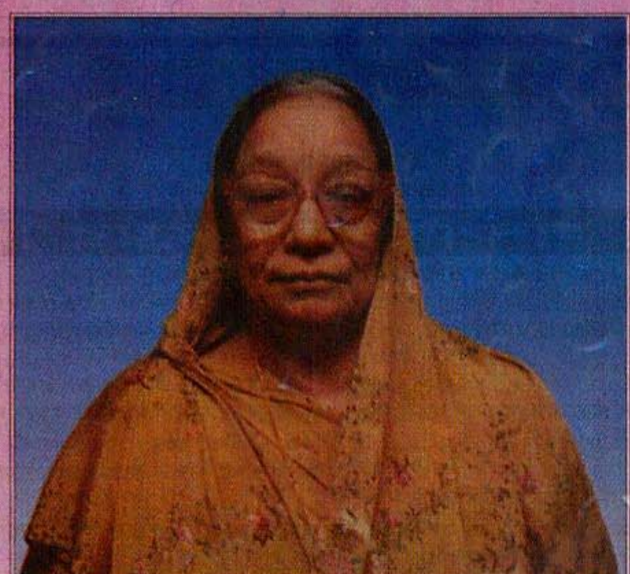
RICHA JHA

This 160-page Shopping Guide printed in 4 colours on matt paper will cover select shops, boutiques and shopping malls in Gulshan, Banani, Dhanmandi and Baiy Road areas.

A MUST-BUY book for the discerning buyers and hard bargainers.

DON'T MISS IT!

1st Death Anniversary



The 10th April 2004 is the 1st death anniversary of **BEGUM BADRUN NAHAR**, Co- Founder of ERBA Ltd.

Her enthusiasm, foresight, wisdom, devotion, hardwork and innovative abilities made Agha Industries & Commerce Ltd., Agro Process (BD) Ltd., Alpha Management & Consultant Ltd., Alpha Pharmaceuticals Ltd., Alpha Tobacco Mfg. Co. Ltd., Bangladesh Leaf Tobacco Co. Ltd., Erba Ltd., Erba-China Engineering Workshop Ltd., Kanak Handicrafts Ltd., Northern Jute Mfg. Co. Ltd. well organized and reputed companies.

We the Workers, Staff, Officers, Directors of the above-mentioned companies and family members pray for the Salvation of her departed soul. May Almighty Allah bless her with Jannatul Ferdous.