

# Free press imperative for govt to know its flaws, says Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina said yesterday a free press is imperative for a government to know its flaws and that is why the AL government in the past never interfered with press freedom.

Referring to recent murders of businessmen and assault on journalists, the leader of the opposition in parliament said the coalition government is resorting to repression and intimidation to deny people their right to security and media persons their freedom to project the truth.

"About 750 journalists have been subjected to various forms of repression and more than seven killed during the rule of the BNP-Jamaat coalition," Hasina said at the national convention of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists at the National Press Club.

"The country's image abroad is tarnished if media persons are subjected to repression," she remarked.

Hasina said democracy, rule of law, human rights and freedom of expression cannot be ensured in a society where law enforcers are made to protect lawbreakers.

Journalists can never keep mum and eyes closed if the government indulges in condemnable acts, the opposition leader said, referring to the prime minister's reported instruction to the media recently not to run such news items or photographs that may jeopardise the country's image.

As to the Time magazine's rating of Bangladesh as a 'state of disgrace' in Asia, the former prime minister said such degradation of

the country's image was unacceptable and it showed the government's failure to retain the fame and glory the country earned through the independence war.

President of the Supreme Court Bar Association Rokonuddin Mahmud said journalists are being repressed by influential quarters abusing some outdated defamation laws.

"There has not been any criminal defamation suit anywhere in the world excepting in Bangladesh, where some obsolete laws are misused against the journalists," he said. "But no civil suit is filed claiming compensation as a court would then look into the background of the aggrieved."

The media in Bangladesh brought to light more than 90 percent of corruption and other crimes when various government agencies failed to discharge their duties properly, Rokonuddin said.

President of Dhaka University Teachers Association AAMS Arefin Siddiq said, "Attacks on journalists are attacks on truth."

President of Dhaka Union of Journalists Altaf Mahmud called upon both the government and the opposition to strive to ensure a safe and free press.

AL central leaders Tofail Ahmed, Abu Sayed, Obaidul Kader and Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir and former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University AK Azad Chowdhury were present on the occasion.

Journalists' representatives from across the country attended the convention.

# DB nabs one after shootout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday arrested an alleged criminal and recovered firearms after a shootout at Dinonath Sen Road in Sutrapur.

On suspicion, a team of Detective Branch (DB) of police challenged two people passing by a rickshaw near Eastern Club at Dhupkhola at 7:00pm. The criminals opened fire on the DB men who then retaliated, Mohammad Khokon fell bullet-hit while his accomplice escaped.

The DB team arrested Khokon and rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). They also recovered a revolver and 23 bullets from Khokon, Sutrapur police said.

Police, however, could not confirm immediately whether Khokon is a listed criminal.

"Khokon's condition is critical due to profuse bleeding," DMCH sources said.

# Two shot by criminals in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were shot in the city last night.

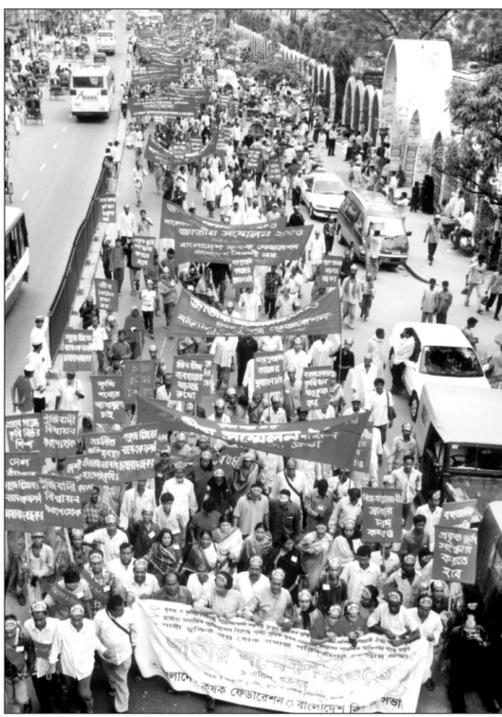
Extortionists shot a stationary shop owner in Tejaona and looted around two lakh taka from his shop.

Sources said a gang of eight entered Awal Store at Babla Bazar in Tejaona Industrial Area at about 8:00pm, shot Abdul Awal in the left hand and took away Tk 1.80 lakh.

He was admitted to a local clinic and later shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

His son Anwar said the gang led by Shahadat, Bachchu and Zia demanded Tk 1 lakh of his father two months back and threatened him with death as he refused to give in to their demand.

In Mirpur, unknown criminals sprayed bullets on one Hafizur Rahman, 25, at Pikipara at about 10:00pm. Hafizur was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with bullet wounds in the chest.



Activists of Bangladesh Krishak Federation bring out a procession in Dhaka yesterday after the organisation's national conference.

# Step beyond isolated life

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ning to purchase a piece of land and whose son is being rehabilitated by the SSS.

Earlier, bankers embezzled a number of Kandapara women's life's savings after their death and their children could not make the banks accountable. When a CSW died and left Tk 1 lakh in her bank account, bankers did not acknowledge the existence of any account in her name and refused her daughter the cash.

The SSS also ran a rights-campaign inside Kandapara informing the women of their rights and providing them with legal and psychological support. "We had to give them the confidence to move out of Kandapara if they could afford it, but after they moved out they weren't receiving the same protection from the rest of society," said Rumi, a social mobiliser who has worked with Kandapara women since 1995.

Runa, another CSW, came to know the rights turned out to be inadequate when she and members of the SSS had to go through a rigorous process to guarantee the landlords that Runa would pay her rent and bills like any other tenant.

"I had the money, I had all they wanted but the social status, and that's why they would curse me and humiliate me in front of everyone," said Runa. For now, she is trying to erase the humiliations and giving more time to the store she now owns to break out of the disgraceful life.

But all CSWs have not been as successful as Runa and they have to encounter the hazards of living and working in Kandapara.

One of the hazards of Kandapara women was their restriction of entry into hospitals, and sometimes the fear exacerbated their physical vulnerability. Social mobilisers initiated health counselling to improve awareness of STDs that brought the rate of the diseases from over 50% percent to about 30% in just four years.

The dehumanisation of the Kandapara women was not spared even in death. They had to silently witness their deceased colleagues, sisters and mothers being deprived of even funeral rites before they were buried in makeshift graves in their own graveyard. The local madrasas were then contacted by the SSS to collaborate in an effort to make sure that the women received a respectful ceremony and were buried properly.

The social changes that the mobilisers have brought have transformed a great number of lives in Kandapara, where the dignity and rights of the women were long downtrodden. These are not everything for lives still in social isolation, but some degrees of dignity and human rights are a good start and something they had never enjoyed before.

# Time for unity of honest people, says Dr Kamal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain yesterday called for unity of honest people for an effective role of the civil society.

Kamal said the long cherished changes in society will take place only when the silent majority is organised. The civil society should play the prime role in this regard, he thought.

Dr Kamal, who is president of the Jatiya Oikya Mancha, was addressing the first meeting of the national advisory group for research on 'Civil Society Index', initiated by the Priv Trust and Human Development Research Centre.

The meeting was also addressed by Prof Abul Barakat of Dhaka University.

Participants at the meeting included Prof Nim Chandra Bhounik and Prof Shafiquzzaman of the DU, litterateur Selina Hossain, Tasmia Hossain, editor of Ain O Salsish Kendra and Nilufar Banu of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad.

# JCD declares series of anti-govt programmes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) yesterday declared a series of anti-government programmes featuring a mass procession towards the Prime Minister's Office on April 21.

The April 21 programme of the Inu-led JSD coincides with the main opposition Awami League's (AL) Jay-siege-to-Hawa Bhavan programme on the same day. Both these parties earlier enforced back-to-back day to back hartals on April 7 and 8.

"Observance of 'public safety day' on April 12, 'demand day' on April 15, and 'women empowerment day' on April 16 are the other programmes that were declared by Hasanul Haq Inu from a protest rally at Muktangan in the city yesterday.

JSD held the rally protesting the attacks on its leaders and activists allegedly by the ruling partymen and the police during the two-day hartal across the country.

Inu while speaking at the rally said the ruling BNP-Jamaat government is now trying to cling to the power, oppressing the opposition activists by the police and its own partymen.

A demonstration on the city street with JSD activists released from the police custody after they had been arrested during the two-day hartal, followed the meeting.

# Red alert

FROM PAGE 1 according to interior ministry sources.

"We will kill you anywhere and anytime... Our innocents are dying in their thousands in Afghanistan and Iraq. Is your blood worth more than ours?" it said.

Britain, and especially London, was also on high alert in the wake of a fresh warning from the country's top police officer that a terrorist attack was extremely likely.

Britain was "now in a state of real danger", Metropolitan Police Commissioner John Stevens, the head of London's police force, said in a magazine interview published Wednesday.

His remarks came a day after media reported that police had thwarted a plot to explode a bomb containing a highly toxic chemical, osmium tetroxide, after US and British intelligence intercepted communications between al-Qaeda sympathisers.

In a separate case, five British men were due in court on Saturday to face terrorism-related charges linked to the discovery last week in London of more than half a tonne of fertiliser, which can be used to make powerful bombs.

# 14 pvt banks

FROM PAGE 1 from Tk 40 crore in two years. In the first year to March 30, 2004, the banks were supposed to recoup their capital shortfall by 50 percent.

According to the BB data, as of December 30 last, the four nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) together had a capital shortfall of Tk 1,765 crore and the three state-owned specialised banks Tk 464 crore, 10 private banks Tk 263 crore and four foreign banks Tk 76 crore.

Of the defaulters, five private banks together have a Tk 108-crore capital shortfall. "From December to March, the status of their capital remained more or less the same," a central bank official said.

While private banks have comparatively low capital shortfall, as their risk-weighted asset values are low, the NCBs have been operating amid severe capital shortfall for long.

"We'll try to recoup the NCBs' capital deficit through the ongoing reform programmes soon," said a finance ministry source, adding the NCBs already had signed a memorandum of understanding with the central bank to improve their performance.

# US occupation

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tary into the south, where US allies have struggled to deal with the militia's uprising.

The militia still controls the city of Kufa and the central part of Najaf, and US commanders announced a major operation on Wednesday to crush them.

This weekend thousands of pilgrims are expected to mark the Shia ceremonies of Arbaben, which commemorate the end of the period of mourning for a 7th-century martyred Shia saint.

Yesterday Sadr demanded US forces leave Iraq, saying they now face "a civil revolt."

"I direct my speech to my enemy Bush, and I tell him that if your excuse was that you are fighting Saddam, then this thing is a past - and now you are fighting the entire Iraqi people," Sadr said in a prayer sermon, delivered by one of his deputies at the Imam Ali Shrine, Shia Islam's holiest site, in Najaf.

Meanwhile, militants were holding in at least 12 foreign hostages in unknown locations in the country. Japan's prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, vowed not to withdraw 530 troops in the south after kidnappers threatened to burn three Japanese captives alive unless the troops leave the country.

Yesterday afternoon insurgents in Iraq said they had seized four Italians and two Americans on the western outskirts of Baghdad. A Reuters journalist saw two captive foreigners, said by the insurgents to be Italians, in a mosque in a village in the Abu Ghraib district. One had been wounded in the shoulder. Both were weeping. On the first anniversary of its capture by US forces, Baghdad was tense yesterday. A curfew was imposed in Firdous Square, where at least two armoured vehicles were parked.

At the western entrance to the capital, gunmen freely roamed the main highway, destroying a tanker truck yesterday that sent a huge pall of smoke over the city.

Other gunmen on the highway were seen stopping a car carrying two western civilians - apparently private security guards - since both had side-arms. The gunmen pulled the men from the car, firing at the ground to warn them to obey. Their fate was not immediately known.

US troops also came under heavy attack in the town of Muqadiyah, 55 miles north-east of Baghdad. Up to 80 insurgents ambushed a US patrol last night, prompting a battle that lasted into this morning, when US soldiers swept through the town. At least three insurgents were killed and up to 20 wounded, said Lt Col Peter Newell.

The siege of Falluja was prompted by the slaying of four US civilians in the city last week. Their burned bodies were then paraded through the streets by a cheering mob that hung two of them from a bridge.

The security firm that employed the four men, Blackwater USA, told the New York Times that they were lured into an ambush by members of the Iraqi Civil Defence Corps.

US forces moved into Kut two days after Ukrainian forces abandoned the city in the face of heavy fighting with al-Sadr followers. Police in several cities have also abandoned their stations or stood aside as the gunmen roam the streets - raising concerns over the performance and loyalty of a force US administrators are counting on to keep security in the future Iraq.

US forces that swept into Kut before dawn seized police stations, forcing out both Iraqi police and militiamen and confiscating all police weapons stores throughout the city, witnesses said. There was little resistance.

A US helicopter struck Sadr's main office in Kut, killing two people, witnesses said. During the day, Americans were out in force, patrolling Kut's streets.

# Arms haul: AL team due in Ctg today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A seven-member parliamentary team of the opposition Awami League (AL) will visit Chittagong today to gather information about the largest-ever arms haul at Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Limited (CUFL) jetty in the early hours of April 2.

Headed by Abdul Hamid MP, deputy leader of the opposition in parliament, the AL MPs are likely to arrive here in the morning by a Biman flight.

The team will visit the CUFL jetty, talk to the police officials concerned and CUFL security and ansar personnel. It will also see the seized arms cache now in army custody at Chittagong Cantonment, sources said.

Other members of the team are Shawkat Ali MP, Faruq Khan MP, Agriculturist Dr Abdur Razzak MP, Bir Bahadur MP, Rafiqul Anwar MP and ABM Fazle Karim Chowdhury MP. Chittagong Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, also the general secretary of Chittagong city Awami League, will accompany the team during its visit.

# Hamid

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Sources said Hamid, 35, who led one of the 10 Fatikhkhari-based infamous sub-groups, felt sick at Hathazari Police Station at 7:30pm. Sub Inspector Abdul Latif and two constables, Nannu and Biplob, took Hamid to the health complex where he died at around 8:00pm.

Dr Abu Taiyeb of the health complex handed over the body to the police officials present there. He also gave them a death certificate, stating that Hamid died of cardiac respiratory failure.

The six arrested Shibir cadres were sent to jail yesterday. Police said they will be taken on remand soon.

# Rice sets stage

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She cited other intelligence chatter picked up during the spring and summer of 2001 that she called "frustratingly vague" "Unbelievable news in coming weeks. Big event... there will be a very, very, very big uproar."

"Troubling yes. But they don't tell us when; they don't tell us where; they don't tell us who; and they don't tell us how," Rice told the commissioners.

Next week's hearing also will highlight poor communication among the intelligence and law enforcement groups.

Among the missed signals was a July 2001 memo by a Phoenix-based FBI agent warning that al-Qaeda terrorists might have been undergoing flight training at US schools and the August 2001 arrest of student pilot Zacarias Moussaoui on immigration charges. Moussaoui has since been charged with conspiring in the attacks.

The CIA also failed to share information about two of the future hijackers after they were spotted attending an al-Qaeda meeting in Malaysia in January 2000.

"The director of central intelligence and I think Director Freeh had an excellent relationship," Rice testified. "They were trying hard to bridge that seam."

"But when it came right down to it, this country, for reasons of history and culture and therefore law, had an allergy to the notion of domestic intelligence, and we were organized on that basis," she said. "And it just made it very hard to have all of the pieces come together."

Rice's testimony, under oath and on live national television, came after weeks of White House resistance. Bush yielded after repeated public requests from members of the commission that an on-the-record rebuttal was needed in response to explosive charges from former White House counterterrorism chief Richard Clarke.

Clarke told the commission last month that the Bush administration

gave a lower priority to combatting terrorism than had former President Clinton, and that the decision to invade Iraq undermined the war on terror.

Rice responded that Bush "understood the threat and he understood its importance." She said Bush came into office determined to develop a "more robust" policy to combat al-Qaeda and told his national security adviser he was "tired of swatting at flies."

Picking up on her testimony, commissioner Bob Kerrey, a former Democratic senator from Nebraska, noted that Bush failed to order a military strike in response to an attack on the destroyer USS Cole in Yemen that killed 17 US sailors three months before Bush took office.

"Dr. Rice, we only swatted a fly once. ... How the hell could he (Bush) be tired?" Kerrey asked. That was a reference to a 1998 missile strike Clinton ordered against suspected terror training camps in Afghanistan.

Rice said the administration decided not to respond "tit for tat" with an inadequate response that would simply embolden terrorists.

After hearing from Rice, the commission met with Clinton for more than three hours. A person familiar with the session said on condition of anonymity that the former president discussed his terrorism policies and his decision not to retaliate for the Cole attacks.

The person familiar with Clinton's testimony said Clinton told the panel he did not order retaliatory military strikes after the USS Cole was bombed in the autumn of 2000 because he could not get "a clear, firm judgment of responsibility" from US intelligence before he left office the following January.

US intelligence determined al-Qaeda sponsored the attack only after the Bush administration took office.

# Indian ruling alliance

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defeated its purpose, as only 1,500 illegal immigrants had been detected and deported from Assam since its legislation, while thousands of Bangladeshis entered Assam without valid documents.

The Indian prime minister also proposed a dialogue between New Delhi and Dhaka to solve what he called illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India.

Reacting to Vajpayee's remarks on the act, Tarun Gogoi, chief minister of Congress-ruled Assam, said the purpose of the law was not to stop infiltration but to protect Indian citizens from being summarily deported merely on suspicion and without judicial scrutiny.

Under the act, the onus of proving a person's citizenship rests on the complainant, not on the person whose citizenship is questioned.

"The responsibility to check infiltration from Bangladesh lies with the federal government," Gogoi said. He said he suggested several measures, like fencing the entire border of Assam with Bangladesh, reducing the distance between BSF posts from eight to four kilometres and issuing photo-identity cards to those residing along the border to check infiltration. He wanted to know what the federal government did to implement them.

The Assamese chief minister also alleged the BJP raised the infiltration issue whenever elections were around but forgot it soon as it came to power.

Some political observers view the inclusion of the illegal immigration issue in the NDA election manifesto as a success of the BJP in taking a subject on board which has been high on the agenda of its allies, especially in Assam.

The issue was not raised in the NDA manifesto for the 1999 general elections.

Two other pet ideological concerns of the BJP -- a uniform civil code and abrogation of the special constitutional status to predominantly Muslim states of Jammu and Kashmir -- however remained out of the NDA 2004 election manifesto, as was in 1999.

Illegal immigration is one of the major issues, the others being the Ram temple in Ayodhya and a ban on cow slaughter, on which the BJP has managed to enlist its allies' support in the run-up to the 2004 parliamentary polls. This stands in sharp contrast to the alliance's 1999 election manifesto, when the saffron party kept these issues on the backburner.

Five years down the line, on the Ram temple issue, the 2004 NDA manifesto says, "We continue to

# Biman airliner skids off ZIA runway

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Biman Bangladesh airliner coming from Hong Kong skidded off the runway during landing at Zia International Airport (ZIA) last night, sources at the airport said.

Over 100 passengers and crew, however, alighted from the BG-079 flight safely at about 8:20pm.

The luggage was unloaded and the passengers were taken to the airport lounge by buses, sources said.

hold that the judiciary's verdict in this matter (temple) should be accepted by all. At the same time, efforts should be intensified for dialogue and a negotiated settlement in an atmosphere of mutual trust and goodwill."

Political observers say one of the reasons the allies agreed with the BJP on including the temple issue in the joint manifesto is the shift of the BJP itself from its earlier stand for legislation in parliament to build the temple in Ayodhya.

In an attempt to reach out to the Muslims, who constitute around 15 percent of India's population, the NDA manifesto this year promises a development package for the minorities by introducing government-sponsored schemes in education and housing sectors. It also pledges to increase the presence of minorities in the administration and public bodies.

# Extortionists attack traders: 10 injured

UNB, Manikganj

Ten people were injured in an attack by extortionists at Saturia Bazaar yesterday.

Police said a gang of ten attacked a rally organised by Saturia Bazaar Traders Association at Saturia upazila headquarters in the afternoon protesting illegal toll collection.

Earlier, a group of extortionists had collected Tk 30,000 from a shopkeeper of the bazaar.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

# Vaccine plant

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10 this year demanded that the government must have a national laboratory that would act as National Regulatory Authority (NRA) for all vaccines.

The letter also said that without the NRA, the WHO would no longer supply the IPH laboratory the ingredients needed to produce the vaccine.

In response, the health ministry informed the WHO representative in Bangladesh that the Drug Administration was declared as the NRA. But it proved futile.

Programme Manager of the Extended Programme of Immunisation (EPI) Dr Luther Raman said the EPI requires 1,80,000 vials of TT vaccines to vaccinate females of childbearing age -- 15 to 49 years.

Dr Sitar Naha, chief superintendent of the plant, said: "Each vial produced at the plant used to cost only Tk 15 but proved equally effective compared with similar products of any country."

"Bangladesh now imports the vaccine mainly from India, Indonesia and Switzerland. The vaccine from India costs Tk 30 a vial and that from Indonesia around Tk 70," said Dr Manner in charge of immunisation section of Unicef here.

# Extortionists

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said with tears in his eyes.

The extortionists threatening him were moving freely in Bhasantek area, he said.

"Earlier on March 17, these criminals snatched Tk 35,000 from my shop. Then they took my manager Ayub Ali and me to a slum in the area at gunpoint and tortured me for about half an hour as I refused to pay the toll," Yaquub said. "They later freed us asking me to pay the toll. Since then I have kept my shop closed."

Yaquub also said he filed a case with Kafrul Police Station on April 2 but police arrested only Mohammad Ali. The others were now pressing him to withdraw the case and also issuing death threat for toll, he added.

Only two weeks ago, Old Dhaka businessman Shamsul Haq and his son Russell Sheikh were killed and their shredded bodies in more than 250 pieces were recovered from Gazipur.

# Hasina

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everything and she just acts on its instructions."

Alluding to a news story published recently in TIME, Hasina said the country's image was tarnished by the alliance government.

On the prime minister's offer to join parliament, Hasina repeated the accusation that the government made parliament inactive, forcing the opposition to keep mum in the House.

The AL president listed her party's 15-point charter of demands to the rally and said: "To implement the demands, we must unseat the government."

AL leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Mohammad Hanif also addressed the rally, with former lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder in the chair.

# Ganguly

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per column on Friday.

The 26-year-old Chopra, who made his debut against New Zealand at Ahmedabad last year, had proved invaluable in India's surprise 1-1 Test series draw in Australia earlier this year.

But while he was praised for his ability to stay at the wicket for long hours, he was criticised for failing to keep the scoreboard moving.

Chopra's Test average over eight matches is just 28.13. In the second Test at Lahore, he scored four and five in the two innings.

"Chopra, after his