

# Polls only after term

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politics of chaos and conspiracy. She threatened legal actions against 'lawbreakers' and 'people who are creating anarchy in the name of a movement'.

Khaleda asked the AL to uphold hard-earned democracy and ensure Bangladesh's development in her speech that came a day after Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina's rally in the city from where she asked the premier to step down paving way for snap polls.

"We never said there will not be polls. The elections will be held on time in 2007," she said.

"The government is elected by people and BNP is not a minor party. We will face all conspiracies of the opposition along with people," she asserted.

In a veiled reference to the AL, Khaleda said some political parties were conspiring against Bangladesh to jeopardise democracy and warned that the alliance government along with people would foil their schemes.

Dismissing Hasina's claim that her administration has failed to deliver, the premier listed her government's development programmes and sought people's support for their realisation.

"BNP presents the nation with effective governments. This is why people votes it into power several

times," she said.

Referring to Hasina's promise not to enforce hartal even when in the opposition, Khaleda came down heavily on opposition activists for 'torching public and private property' in the name of the oust-government movement.

"Fearful of the huge uplift efforts by the alliance government, they are trying to hinder development," she alleged, adding the past AL government did noting for people's welfare when in office.

Addressing the rally, frontline BNP leaders pledged to face 'all conspiracies of the AL' saying they were both in the office and in the streets.

Chaired by local lawmaker Khandaker Mahbubuddin Ahmed, the rally was also addressed by Health Minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, state ministers Amanullah Aman, Selima Rahman, Ziaul Haq Zia, Commerce Ministry Adviser Barkatullah Bhulu and BNP leaders Goyesshar Chandra Roy, Abdus Salam, legislator Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anny and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal President Shahabuddin Laltu, among others.

## 8 customs officials, importer, agent sued for tax evasion

UNB, Dhaka

Eight customs officials, an importer and a C&F (clearing and forwarding) agent have been sued for dodging taxes worth about Tk 37 lakh, on an import consignment by producing a forged court order.

M Khairul Huda, inspector of the Anti-corruption Task Force-1, filed six cases against the accused with Airport Police Station yesterday, officials said.

The accused importer is M Abu Taher Mia, also the owner of M/S Meghna Weaving Private Ltd, and the C&F agent is Rabindranath Roy Chowdhury.

Of the customs officials, two are deputy commissioners, two superintendents and four inspectors, assigned for pre-shipment inspection (PSI).

They are inspectors, PSI (Taxation Team of Customs House), Dhaka, KG Rafiq, Haripada Sarkar, SM Habibullah and Parimal Chandra Kundu, superintendent, PSI (Taxation Team of Customs House) M Sayeed Ali, former superintendent, PSI (Taxation Team of Customs House) M Meher Ali, Deputy Commissioners, Customs House, M Shawkat Hossain and Mashuk Al Hossain.

According to the case, the owner of Meghna Weaving had imported from India 88,890 kilograms of cotton yarn which the C&F agent cleared "in connivance with the customs officials by showing fake interim order of the High Court".

The forgery caused a loss over Tk 36.97 lakh to the exchequer in unpaid Value Added Tax (Vat) and advance income tax.

## 100 injured in clashes among villagers in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A series of clashes among inhabitants of Boroikandi and Khojarkhola villages on Sylhet city outskirts yesterday left about 100 people injured.

According to sources, Iqbal of Boroikandi village tried to snatch away a case of grape from a fruit seller in nearby Khojarkhola village Friday night. As the fruit seller resisted, Iqbal with some others from his area ransacked the shop later.

Khojarkhola villagers attacked a shop belonging to a rival villager last morning. Armed with firearms and sharp weapons, frenzied villagers swooped on each other in South Surma area in the afternoon, sources added.

At least 20 people received bullet injuries and 80 others were wounded during the row. Of the injured, 50 were admitted to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital and one was sent to Dhaka for treatment.

Local police used 48 teargas shells and fired 15 bullets in the air to disperse the fighting groups, another source said.

Hearing the incident, Sylhet City Corporation Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran, Sylhet district BNP President MA Haque and top police officials went to the spot and calmed the warring groups of villagers.

Among other officials, the deputy inspector general of police and local superintendent of police visited the area.

## Row over arms seized from MV Banga Lanka still unresolved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Customs authorities are still undecided about what to do with the three American M-16 rifles, one air-gun, nine magazines and 169 rounds of ammunition seized from Bangladesh flag vessel MV Banga Lanka at Mongla port last November.

The arms and ammunition are now lying in the armory of Khulna Metropolitan Police as the customs department and the vessel's owner HRC Shipping Limited of Dhaka are locked into a dispute over the legality of the arms.

The arms and ammunition were seized because the ship's captain could not produce any legal documents for carrying them. Customs officials allege that the unlicensed weapons were not declared either.

The owner of the ship still insists that there is no legal bar to carrying arms during deep-sea sailings. An official of HRC Shipping Limited added that the customs at Mongla port were informed that the vessel was carrying firearms for its protection.

On the other hand, the customs department rejected the argument for the vessel's protection saying no-one in MV Bangla Lanka knew how to operate M-16 rifles.

HRC Shipping Lines Limited purchased the ship a few years ago from a Singaporean shipping company.

# Extremists escape Philippine prison

AP, Isabela, Philippines

More than 50 inmates, including many suspected members of a Muslim extremist group, used a smuggled pistol to escape from a southern Philippine prison yesterday, officials said. At least nine were killed by police.

Provincial spokesman Christopher Puno said 53 of 137 inmates at the Basilan Provincial Jail, including many members of the al-Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf group, escaped.

At least eight were killed and eight others were recaptured, said Senior Inspector William Gadayan, police chief of Isabela city, the capital of Basilan. He said three guards were injured in the breakout, one seriously.

The escape came just two days after soldiers outside Isabela killed six alleged Abu Sayyaf members, including Hamsiraji Sali, one of five guerrilla leaders wanted by Washington in the deaths of two American hostages.

Gadayan said the escape may have been in retaliation for Sali's death

and an effort by the Abu Sayyaf to regroup.

Quoting guards, Puno said an inmate's wife smuggled in a .45-caliber pistol, which the inmates used to overpower the guards. They also seized a shotgun and two M-16 rifles equipped with grenade launchers from the guards, he said.

At least two of those killed and three who were recaptured were suspected Abu Sayyaf members, Puno said.

One of them, Janati Janatall, apprehended by government militiamen in the village Sumagandang outside Isabel, told police one of the leaders of the jailbreak pointed a shotgun at him and several others, warning they would be killed if they did not join the escape.

The spokesman for the military's Southern Command, Lt. Col. Renoir Pascua, said troops in Basilan, an island off the southern port city of Zamboanga, were ordered to help recapture the escaped convicts.

# BNP, AL face off

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closure of the Hawa Bhaban on ground that the office interfered with the government activities, which is unconstitutional.

The AL Central Working Committee with party chief and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina in the chair on Thursday night asked party's front organisations to lay siege to Hawa Bhaban on April 21, demanding shutdown of what it said was 'the seat of unbridled corruption'.

The AL, while placing a 15-point demand before the government on January 10, had also demanded closure of the office. Hasina in several public meetings accused 'the Hawa Bhaban men', including prime minister's elder son Tarique Rahman, of harbouring top criminals and taking bribes to get shady deals through.

programme," he told a rally yesterday.

Jubo League Chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanok and its General Secretary Mirza Azam meanwhile in a joint statement yesterday said the Hawa Bhaban men are engaged in gross corruption and criminal activities including killing, extortion and abduction.

"The opposition has declared the programme to lay siege to the Hawa Bhaban to ensure people's interest," the statement said. It said people are witnessing a 'dual government' in the country -- one of Khaleda Zia and another of her eldest son Tarique Rahman based at the Hawa Bhaban.

## Save Buriganga

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banks several times but, surprisingly, they reoccupied the lands.

He said public representatives from the areas concerned allegedly back the land grabbers. He called for public pledges by DCC ward commissioners that they would not support them.

Dr MA Moniem, deputy commissioner of Dhaka, said if political interference stops, necessary measures to save the Buriganga would be taken.

Abu Naser Khan, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon, mentioned that Sena Kalyan Sangstha filled up a portion of the river and it should be restored.

Prof Naser Rezaul Haq of Jahangirnagar University said highly polluted water from the Buriganga has started entering the surface water layer in Dhaka, which might pose a big health hazard.

Participants included Syed Monwar Hossain of the BIWTA, Bodul Alam Mojumder of Hunger Project and DCC Ward Commissioner Humayun Kabir.

## Naziur-led

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BJP Secretary General Kazi Feroz Rashid told The Daily Star that the four presidium members were removed from the party for their hobnobbing with Ershad.

"They have been expelled as we think that they are no more with us and their activities are against the four-party alliance," said Feroz Rashid.

## Mahbub

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requests for Bangladesh's deployment for reconstruction drive.

Washington has been insisting that Iraq's sovereignty will be handed over to an interim Iraqi government by June 30.

Mahbubur, also chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on defence ministry and a former army chief, was commenting on Indian press reports that India and Bangladesh might contribute troops to Iraq.

"We have, I think regular and ongoing contacts not only obviously, with the members of the coalition currently in Iraq, but possible new countries that might want to contribute. These include India and Bangladesh," Indian newspapers quoted US State Department's Deputy Spokesman J Adam Ereli as saying on Friday.

Ereli was replying to a question on US Secretary of State Colin L. Powell's reported statement that a dozen countries including Indian and Bangladesh were keeping an open mind on sending troops.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury, in Turkey to lobby for Bangladesh's candidature for the secretary general of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), could not be reached for comments. Foreign ministry officials declined to comment.

Troops from Italy, Spain, Japan and Georgia are working with the coalition forces in Iraq where bloody turmoil erupted in the wake of first anniversary of Saddam Hussein's fall, with Sunni and Shia rebels battling US-led forces.

## Babul gets bail in abduction, explosion cases

UNB, Dhaka

Industrialist Nurul Islam Babul was yesterday granted bail for three months in abduction and explosion cases by the High Court.

Babul, also owner of Bangla daily Jugantor, is unlikely to come out of the prison as he faces at least four other criminal cases including murder and rape.

A division bench comprising Justice M Awlad Ali and Justice Abdul Awal also issued rule upon the government, returnable in a week, to explain why the petitioner should not be granted regular bail.

Babul was accused of grabbing land in the city's Badda area, using explosive and gun on February 15 and kidnapping owner of the land, Mehedi Hasan Liton, on March 18.

Babul was arrested on March 20 in connection with the killing of a dredger worker at Badda in September last year. He was shown arrestee in three other cases after the High Court granted him bail in the murder case.

Contrary to usual practice Babul in this case directly moved the higher court seeking bail. He bypassed the lower court.

Opposing the bail, Deputy Attorney General Syed Abu Kawser argued that the bail petition is not maintainable as he ignored the lower court as the first step to seek bail.

Barister Rafique Ul Huq and Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud appearing for Babul contended that the High Court has the jurisdiction.

## Ershad Shikdar petitions for clemency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Ershad Shikdar, who is being held on death row at Khulna District Jail for the murder of Jubo League leader Khalid Hossain, has appealed to the president for clemency.

Jail sources said the condemned prisoner, whose close relatives including his wife, two sons and a daughter refused to meet him before the capital punishment is carried out, was looking very pale while signing the 'mercy petition'.

"I know the president will not pardon me," Shikdar said, as he signed the paper with a trembling hand.

The petition was sent on an urgent basis through the office of the superintendent of Khulna District Jail yesterday.

Earlier on April 6, Shikdar was informed about the Supreme Court's dismissal of his review petition conveyed in a letter to the superintendent's office.

If the president rejects his plea for clemency, the convict will be executed within 28 days from the date of receipt of the letter, said Jail Superintendent Mohammad Farhad Mian.

## Home secretary

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job. He cannot give a fair report on the matter," he added.

Kamal alleged, "Instead of conducting an independent investigation, the government is now trying to conceal the origin of the arms cache at the risk of national security." No one should take the matter lightly because it concerns national security, he felt.

Kamal, also President of the Gono Forum, came down heavily on the role of members of parliament, saying most of them are engaged in 'negative activities'. They are not working for the welfare of people who elected them as their representatives, he felt.

He expressed concern at the 'deplorable' law and order and said, "The country has virtually plunged into corruption, disorder and dominance of black money."

Saifuddin Ahmed Manik and Pankaj Bhattachariya also addressed the meeting chaired by Oikya Mancha Chittagong unit convener and former lawmaker M Kafiluddin.

Some programmes were announced from the meeting. These include exchange of view today and public meetings in Pabna and Rangpur on April 24 and April 25.

## Biman rejoinder

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is not true that it received the highest bid of \$0.3 million for each of the F28s. The fact is that the bidder proposed \$0.3 million to assist Biman in selling each of its three F28s, the rejoinder claimed.

On the purchase of old F28 aircraft, Biman said the current procurement of two F28s is meant to replace the already-sold two ATP aircraft as an interim measure till procurement of the new-generation aircraft.

The price of the two F28s was negotiated with Hiebert Group Ltd. of Indonesia and was finally agreed at \$2.91 million. This includes many additional modifications to suit Biman's requirement, the rejoinder added.

# Clashes erupt in Baghdad

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cease-fire and the reliance on political solutions in all areas of the country, especially Falluja."

The violence has put severe pressure on the council and on the interim Iraqi government, several of whose members resigned or threatened to do so unless the bloodshed stops.

The director of Falluja's main hospital said on Friday about 450 people had been killed and 1,000 wounded since the Marines launched "Operation Vigilant Resolve" five days earlier.

US Marines were ordered to suspend offensive operations in Falluja at midday on Friday, but this did not halt fighting.

Battles in Falluja and elsewhere in the Sunni heartlands of central Iraq have coincided with an uprising led by radical Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr across the south.

Hospital officials in the mixed Sunni-Shia town of Baquba, north of Baghdad, said Friday's fighting with US forces there had killed nine people and wounded 35.

Aspate of kidnapping has added to the turmoil in Iraq, where gunmen are holding three Japanese and several other foreign hostages.

The US-led administration says more than a million pilgrims are in Kerbala for Arba'in and has warned it cannot guarantee their safety.

Sheikh Hamza al-Tai, a leader of Sadr's Mehdi Army, said it had suspended "liberation operations" in Kerbala until after the ceremonies, according to a tape aired by Al Jazeera television.

US officials say they fear a repeat of

## Listed criminal

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attention as those were built within a few yards of Mohammadpur Police Station a few days ago.

Imamul Hossain alias Pichhi Helal is at 16 on the list of the country's top 23 criminals. The ruling four-party coalition government announced Tk 50,000 bounty for Helal when the list was prepared in December 2001. Helal was however in jail when police put him on the list.

Mohammadpur police arrested Helal from near Dhaka Housing in Adabar during the Awami League rule in 2001.

Helal's supporters introduced him on the arches as a leader of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the BNP's student wing, although he is not involved in any party activities for long.

Son of one Abdul Jabbar alias Shafiq Ahmed of Das Anil village in Matlab, Chandpur, Helal has six cases, five for murder and one for possessing illegal firearms, against him with Mohammadpur Police Station.

Helal was General Secretary of Mohammadpur unit of the JCD and lived at Pisciculture Housing Society in Mohammadpur during his arrest.

Local BNP and his rival JCD leaders have failed to form a new committee since Helal's arrest as his supporters reign supreme in the area. "When the local BNP leaders themselves fail to form a new committee fearing reprisal from Helal's supporters, it is obvious that no-one would dare to speak against erection of the arches," said a local JCD activist, wishing anonymity.

Abdul Malek, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur Police Station, however, said no arches carrying the name of Helal was built near his police station.

# Indian rebels at CHT camps

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of some Indian rebel groups are being trained in those camps on Bangladesh territory and (this is) known very well by our government, too," Mohiuddin told a news conference at his office yesterday.

Security sources however dismissed his statement reiterating that no Indian rebel camps existed in the hill tracts.

The mayor said, "The arms cache seized at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Limited [CUFL] jetty was smuggled in to hand them over to the secessionist groups of north-eastern Indian states including Assam, Nagaland and Mizoram," adding the government was now frantically trying to cover up the facts.

He also alleged that the huge consignment of arms had landed at the CUFL jetty as per an arrangement made by the government and its signals to coastguard, police and other agencies.

The mayor claimed the firearms were sent by the USA to create unrest in India by arming its secessionists. "I'm say this with a challenge to prove me wrong: the US wants to create unrest in the sub-continent to prepare grounds for an invasion," he said, adding, "A big conspiracy is on behind this massive gunrunning."

Mohiuddin said, "The US and Pakistan want to take revenge on India for helping us in 1971." "The USA even tried to gain a footing here with the plea for introducing scanning system at Chittagong Port with an ulterior motive to help the gunrunners," the CCC mayor continued. "I also know that the arms hauled here and shown as Chinese ones were a camouflage. But those seem to have been manufactured either in Pakistan or in America."

the March bombings, which Washington says were masterminded by a Jordanian with links to the al-Qaeda network to try to spark civil war in Iraq.

Secretary of State Colin Powell said on Friday he had been surprised by the strength of the Sunni and Shia rebels, saying there were signs of tactical contact between them. "...But I still believe that most Iraqis are with us," he told Fox News.

The sound of explosions, probably mortar fire, boomed across Baghdad on Friday night but there were no reports of casualties.

At least 51 US and allied soldiers have been killed in this week's fighting. Two US soldiers and a civilian truck driver were killed on Friday, the military said. A British civilian working for a US security firm was also killed.

Since the start of the US-led war at least 455 US troops have been killed in action in Iraq, according to the Pentagon.

For some US allies, the surge in fighting and kidnapping will fuel debate on the wisdom of keeping their troops in Iraq.

Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, under fire at home for sending troops, said he had no plans to withdraw them despite the kidnapping of the three Japanese civilians.

A previously unknown Iraqi group released a video of the hostages on Thursday and vowed to "burn them alive" if Japanese troops did not leave Iraq within three days.

## Man pushed

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back to the agricultural university, where he was staying with a friend at a hall.

Reba Begum, who was a passenger of the bus, said Akram wanted to get down near the university but the driver refused to stop. He then requested the helper of the bus to let him get down but the helper pushed him out of the running bus.

"We saw the young man falling from the running bus and he was crushed under its rear wheels," said Reba.

As passengers started to scream, the driver stopped the bus and fled along with the helper.

Within minutes, several hundred students from the university came out on the street and went on the rampage, chasing drivers and helpers of three buses, setting fire to the vehicles and damaging six more. Riot police and a team from Teigaon Police Station rushed to the spot but the agitated students refused to lift the barricade.

"We have had the same problem of buses refusing to stop at this important intersection for long. We want a speed breaker and a bus stoppage here," one of them told police. The others also expressed similar views.

The students however left the spot after two hours.

Prof Fazal Karim of the university said several fatal accidents took place at the same spot as buses did not stop and conductors pushed passengers out.

"There are about 2,000 students at the university. We appeal to the authorities to set up a bus stoppage near it," he said.

Teigaon police seized the bus and sent the victim's body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for autopsy. Unless there is a specific allegation, they would treat the matter as an accident, police said.

## 6 die

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reputed that a- 12-year old boy, Shohag, was killed when he came in contact with a torn and live electric wire during the storm at Karimpur of Choumohoni poura area in the early hours of yesterday.

Hundreds of houses, including educational institutions in Sadar, Companyganj, Shenbag and Chatkhil upazilas, were also damaged.

According to our Barisal Correspondent, nor'wester lashed five districts of Barisal division Friday evening, killing three people and injuring 50 others.

The dead are Khadiza Begum, 45, Belal, 13, and Shaheen, 20, of Barisal Sadar upazila. They died in house collapse.

The affected districts are Barisal, Jhalakathi, Barguna, Patuakhali and Bhola. Power supply in most of the storm-hit areas could not be restored till the filing of this report yesterday evening.

Road communications between Barisal and Dhaka remained snapped for about an hour as the storm uprooted big trees to fall the road. Local Met office sources said the storm hit the districts at a speed of 70km per hour and lasted for 20 minutes.

In Sherpur, nor'wester hit four upazilas of the district yesterday, injuring at least 60 people. The affected upazilas are Sherpur Sadar, Sreebordi, Patharkata and Nakla.

The storm also damaged standing crops and houses and uprooted trees and electric poles.