

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 nothing 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 Mosarrath 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, Selina Rahman, Ziaul Haq Zia, Commerce Ministry Adviser Barkatullah Bhulai and BNP leaders Goyesshar Chandra Roy, Abdus Salam, legislator Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anny and Jatiyatobadi Chhata Dal President Shahabuddin Laltu, among others.

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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.

The finance minister decided to increase the number of talent pool stipendaries from the existing 4,000 to 20,000. He also ordered to raise the talent pool stipend amount from the present Tk 165 a month to Tk 175.

The meeting also agreed to increase the number of general stipend holders from 14,000 to 25,000 in next year and their monthly per head stipend from Tk 100 to Tk 150.

The salary of interns at public hospitals will rise by Tk 500 a month, e.g. from the present Tk 5,000 to Tk 5,500, from coming July.

CPB for parallel agitation to oust govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fire gutted a jewellery shop in Gulshan and 150 shanties in Kafur, reportedly damaging around Tk 4.5 crore yesterday.

Amin Jewellers of Dhaka City Corporation Market in Gulshan caught fire at 6:40am. Tejaon unit fire-fighters doused the flame, believed to have originated from an electric short-circuit, at 7:45am, sources said.

Firefighters said the damage was worth around Tk 2 lakh. However, in a general diary filed with Gulshan Police Station, proprietor of the shop Kazi Ariful Islam claimed he lost gold and other precious stones worth around Tk 4 crore 25 lakh.

In another incident, fire spread over thatches and part of a mosque near North Kafur slum at around 11:15am. Fire-fighters from Mirpur and Kurmitola units tamed it at 1:05pm, sources said.

The flame that might have originated from an earthen oven reportedly damaged valuables worth Tk 20 lakh, fire-fighters 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 Bholia. 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, Sreebordi, Patharkata and Nakla.

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

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 Janatal, apprehended by government militiamen in the village Sumagdang 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 crimi-

nals and taking bribes to get shady

deals through.

Former president and architect

of alternative political stream ACM

Badruddoza Chowdhury, Gano

Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain

and many other political leaders

have also been voicing a similar

demand.

Student wings of the BNP and AL

yesterday brought out processions

and held rallies on the Dhaka

University campus over the planned

siege.

BNP's student wing, the Jatiyatobadi Chhata Dal (JCD),

demanded closure of Sudha Sadan,

while Bangladesh Chhata League

(BCL), student wing of the AL, asked

for shutdown of Hawa Bhaban.

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, KHLUNA

Customs authorities are still unde-

cided about what to do with the three

American M-16 rifles, one air-gu-

nine magazines and 169 rounds of

ammunition seized from Bangladeshi

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 legali-

ty of the arms.

The arms and ammunition were

seized because the ship's captain

could not produce any legal docu-

ments for carrying them. Customs

officials allege that the unlicensed

weapons were not declared either.

The owner of the ship still insists