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Cops seal off Hawa Bhaban area, AL HQ

Agitators fight pitched battle with police, 200 picked

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday sealed off Gulistan, Bangabandhu Avenue and Banani areas off to traffic and opposition activists to scuttle their high-profile move to besiege Hawa Bhaban and clubbed scores of anti-government demonstrators wherever they gathered, leaving at least 40 wounded.

Law-enforcers clubbed and tear-gassed opposition activists who gathered at Paltan Maidan -- the

rescheduled venue for assembly of the the opposition activists after Bangabandhu Avenue was sealed off -- in their abortive bid to lay siege to Hawa Bhaban, office of ruling BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and allegedly the alternative power centre, in Banani.

Front organisations of the Awami League (AL) enforced the programme for what they said was to put a stop to Hawa Bhaban, which 'is the centre of unbridled corrup-

tion and ill practices'.

Police clamped down a virtual curfew in the one square kilometres area around Hawa Bhaban and prevented leaders and activists of main opposition AL and its front organisations from laying the siege. They also barred workers of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) from marching towards the Prime Minister's Office, scheduled for yesterday afternoon.

People's movement was also

restricted on Bangabandhu Avenue, at Zero Point in Gulistan and in Banani from early morning, confining residents indoors and grinding business operations in the area to a halt, much to the inconvenience of the office- and school-goers.

As the leaders and workers of the AL and its front organisations started converging on Paltan Maidan, riot and plainclothes police charged batons and fired tear-gas

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Tarique, brother play cricket to play down siege plan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As Awami League activists were held off by a strict police vigilance, BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman, his younger brother Arafat Rahman and other young Turks of the party had their day out playing cricket in a field close to Hawa Bhaban.

"I played cricket and my team won. So I'm happy today," said

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

AL calls 3-day no-confidence demonstration from Apr 24

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The main opposition Awami League (AL) and its left leaning ally Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu) yesterday simultaneously announced fresh agitation programmes including 'demonstrating no confidence' to the government from April 24 through 26 in the city.

Declaring the fresh programme, the AL urged people

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

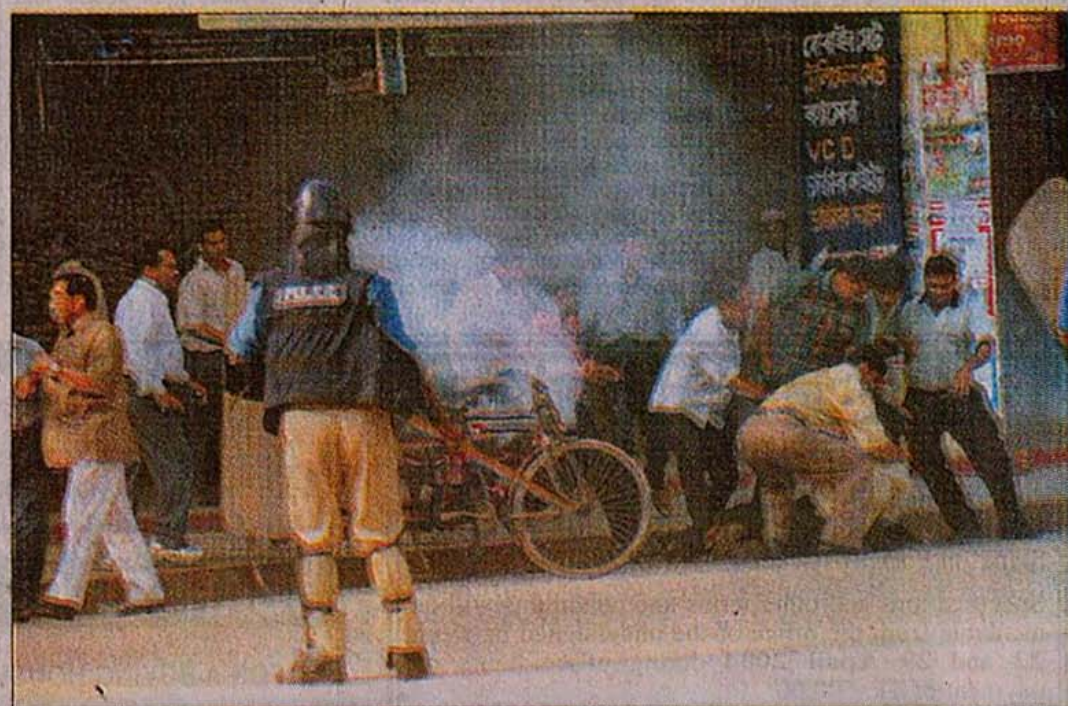
Cop raid on AL leaders' houses for weapons proves blank

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police carried out pre-dawn raids on the houses of senior Awami League (AL) leaders in the city's Gulshan-Banani area from 1:00am to 4:00am ahead of the opposition's programme to besiege Hawa Bhaban yesterday.

A contingent of uniformed and plainclothes police searched the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1



Awami League lawmaker Mirza Azam falls onto the ground as police lobbed teargas shells at a gathering of the main opposition party activists at Paltan in Dhaka yesterday.



POLITICAL CRICKET: Arafat Rahman shows his eldest brother and BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman batting techniques as men at Hawa Bhaban take a break for a cricket match in a nearby field to play down Awami League's siege to the 'alternative powerhouse of the government' yesterday.



Shahidur to file writ petition against removal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Protesting his innocence, Syed Shahidur Rahman will file a writ petition in two weeks to challenge his removal from the High Court as additional judge under a presidential order.

"The Supreme Judicial Council violated the constitution and the rule of law," he told newsmen at his house yesterday, a day after receiving his dismissal order for misconduct, stemming from a council report.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Don't create artificial crisis of essentials

PM asks traders

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday urged the traders to refrain from creating artificial crisis of essential commodities through illegal hoarding.

"It is very sad that some traders create artificial crisis of essentials at times to raise the prices despite adequate supply of the commodities. They should not adopt such a means that goes against national interest and brings sufferings to the people," she told a delegation of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI).

A 20-member DCCI delegation led by its President Fazle RM Hassan called on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at International Conference Centre (ICC) at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday afternoon.

The prime minister sought cooperation of all to stop smuggling and reduce the country's dependence on import by increasing production of essentials.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

the government for uninterrupted development and high national growth.

The DCCI delegation appreciated the leadership of the four-party alliance government for its success in attaining a remarkable progress in economic development.

The business delegation, however, observed that the government's achievement in economic sector could be much more if the country had the political stability.

Political stability, the practice of democracy, making parliament the focal point of all activities and avoidance of confrontation on the street are a must for development, they said adding that the country would not be able to face the 21st century challenges in absence of those.

Referring to some recent political activities, the DCCI leaders lauded the prime minister for withdrawal of her party's student front's programme to lay siege to 'Sudhasadan' to counter a similar programme of the opposition. It proved her political tolerance,

AL workers barred for not having permission to assemble: Babar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Home Lutfazzaman Babar referring to the main opposition Awami League's (AL) programme yesterday told the BBC Bangla Service last night laying siege to the office of a political party cannot be a political programme.

On the tight security enforced by the government yesterday, Babar said the government took 'reasonable' security measures across the city yesterday to avert untoward incidents and ensure the public safety.

Bashing the opposition's programme he mentioned the directive from the prime minister following which Jatiyatabadi Chatra Dal, the student wing of the ruling party cancelled its programme of laying siege to the Sudha Sadan, the residence of the opposition leader Sheikh Hasina.

"We cancelled the programme to maintain peace in the city," he said adding while AL is trying to create anarchy in the country.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



People remove a dead body from the site of an explosion in the southern Iraqi city of Basra yesterday. Sixty-eight people were killed in almost simultaneous attacks on three police stations.

Suicide bombers kill 68 in Basra

Dominican Republic to pull out from Iraq; S Korean sends more troops; Thai senate votes for keeping soldiers there

AGENCIES, Basra

Suicide bombers killed at least 68 people, some of them children, in co-ordinated strikes on four police stations that inflicted bloody chaos on Iraq's southern city of Basra yesterday, officials said.

Basra mayor Wael Abdul-Hafeez

accused Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network of being behind the morning rush-hour blasts, Reuters reports.

Near-simultaneous explosions hit three police stations in Basra and one in the town of Zubair, 25 kilometres south of the mainly Shia city, the British military said.

"All four attacks seem to have been carried out by suicide bombers," said a British Defence Ministry spokeswoman in Basra.

Hafeez told a news conference 68 people, not including the bombers, had been killed and 99 wounded. Among the dead were children going to school in a minibus that

was incinerated in one of the car bombings.

Iraq's Coalition Provisional Authority, which in Basra is British-led, vowed to pursue those behind "these despicable attacks" and urged Iraqis to "isolate those who use violence to try to disrupt the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

BB seeks law ministry help as money loan court fails

4,800 default loan cases in limbo

REJAU KARIM BYRON

The Bangladesh Bank (BB) has forwarded 4,800 cases to the law ministry for action, as money loan courts failed to resolve them within a timeframe of four months.

The central bank also requested the ministry to investigate why the courts could not resolve the cases by the deadline, as stated by Article 17 of the Money Loan Court Act.

The act was amended in 2003 to speed up the process of resolving cases and recover money from defaulters.

Frustrated at the logjam of cases, the BB sat with commercial banks recently to find out why default loan cases tend to remain unresolved even after the amendment. As the

banks passed the buck on to the courts, the BB turned to the law ministry for advice.

"We have just received the cases from the central bank," said a law ministry official. "We will now scrutinise them before deciding on the solution."

Although the unsolved cases involve 17 different banks, three nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) -- Sonali, Janata and Agrani alone -- have 4,400 cases.

"A heap of disputed loan cases is lying with the courts," said an NCB high official. "That is why judges cannot give required time to resolve the cases."

He also observed the number of cases at the money loan courts

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

INDIAN POLLS Battle for heartland states heats up as exit polls show BJP lead

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's top politicians hit the campaign trail in key northern heartland states yesterday after the first exit polls conducted by leading television news channels projected the ruling BJP-led NDA ahead of main opposition Congress and its regional allies.

The updated figure put out by the Election Commission says an estimated 50 to 55 percent of the 175 million voters turned out in the first phase of polling, compared to 60 percent in 1999.

"By and large, polling was peaceful and things were under control," Deputy Election Commissioner AN Jhasaid.

Prime Minister Atal Behari

Vajpayee was chairing a "review" meeting of his BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in New Delhi a day after more than 100 million people turned out to elect 140 MPs to the 545-member lower house of parliament.

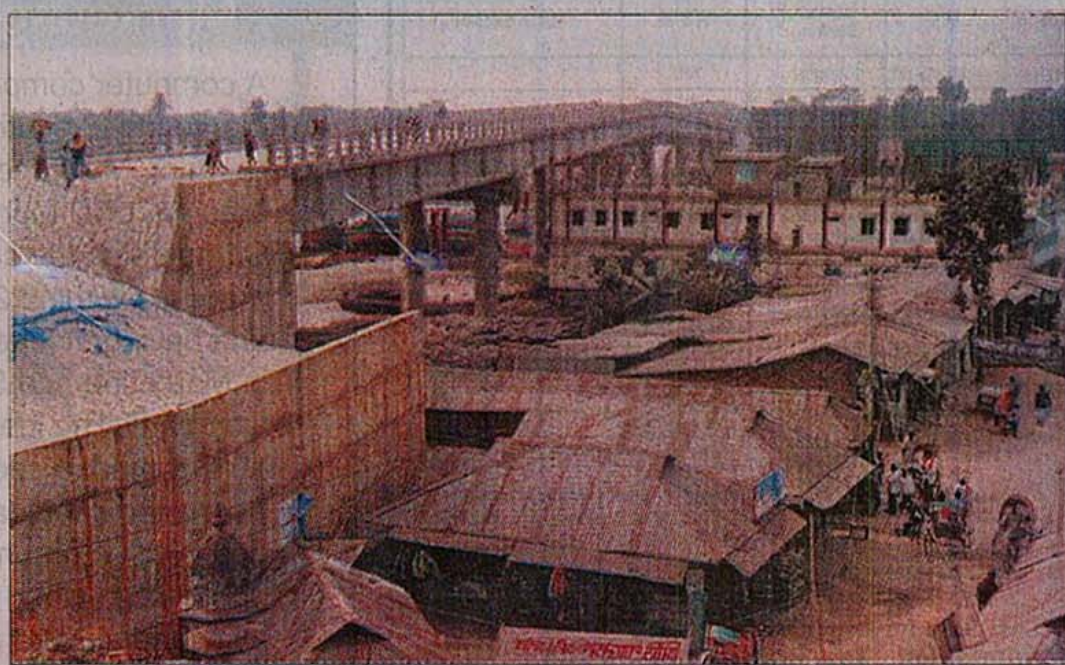
Fighting to save the fortunes of her party, Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born head of the Congress, addressed public rallies in searing heat in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, which holds the key to power nationally, Reuters reports.

Gandhi said the BJP, which her party says is biased against the nation's 120 million Muslims, remained a threat to the country's secular traditions and must be kept away from power, the news agency adds.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Bridge built 5yrs ago, not the road

A scene of funds waste at Chandpur



The Tk 20 crore bridge over the Dakatia river in Chandpur remains useless as approach roads were not built on either side in the last five years.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bridge built way back in 1999 on the river Dakatia at Chowdhury Ghat in Chandpur at a cost of Tk 20 crore is yet to be opened to traffic due to lack of approach roads.

Locals said despite their demand for proper site selection, authorities built the bridge without acquiring the land necessary to build approach roads on both sides.

Communication ministry officials admitted to the mistake saying construction of the roads would entail demolition of some old buildings of Chandpur district administration.

They said the situation is mainly due to lack of coordination among ministries of communications, works, land and local government. A survey team from the communications ministry recently visited the spot and recommended demolition of structures that are standing in the way of the approach roads.

The proposal is now under consideration of the chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Department (RHD). A high official of

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6