



Frontline Awami League leaders, left, argue with police who blocked a procession of the main opposition party from Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday. Policewomen drag an angry woman activist, right, onto a pick-up van in Dhanmondi as law enforcers mounted a sharp watch on opposition adherents in the run-up to the April 30 deadline for fall of the government.



PHOTO: STAR

THE STRENGTH WITHIN

Stitching her way to success

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

With every revolution of the spinning wheel on Josna's sewing machine beside a growing stack of outfits, her dream of sewing to designing success takes another step into the domain of reality.

Josna Khatun, in her early 20s, with a small tailoring shop of her own and filled with an industrious spirit is traversing through the vast terrain spanning from fashion, designing and strangely enough, marketing.

Josna's hard work, in turn, has also filled the racks of Paar, a small fashion outlet in the heart of southwestern Khulna City run by a cooperative of home-based women entrepreneurs.

Josna started sewing commercially in her college years. After she finished college, she recalls, "I wanted to become a professional seamstress with my own boutique, but I just didn't know any way to go about it."

These days browsing clothes markets, collecting designs, designing outfits, making rounds to the houses of her sewing-hands and researching the markets in the city constitute the large part of her daily life.

"It's hard work going through all the showrooms around town, but I am enthusiastic about this as much as I receive training from Adore, because all I want to be is to be a very good seamstress with a showroom of my own," explains Josna.

She has been receiving training from Adore, an organisation in Khulna region, since the end of 2001.



PHOTO: STAR

Paar, a small fashion outlet in the heart of southwestern Khulna City run by a cooperative of home-based women entrepreneurs, bursts with clothes up for sale.

Adore initiated the cooperative of women tailors with lower-middle class economic background and a desire of taking to tailoring as a profession.

Adore morphed its 50 active members from household tailors into entrepreneurial ones and helped them set up the outlet two years ago.

Thirty-eight women under the Adore initiative, including Josna, showcase their products at Paar, with their names proudly stamped on price tags. The women get all the profits.

Adore honed the skills of Josna and other women, who had some experience in tailoring, in better sewing techniques and designing and instilled an enhanced sense of style in them.

"But a problem remained," Josna says, "When I tried to sell clothes by myself I did not know how to market my outfits."

"When Adore conducted a market research and provided marketing strategies for our

products, we got a tool that will help us long into the future."

They also helped creating linkages with other factors of garment production, such as textiles, machinery, marketing and supplying goods on retail.

Problems still surfaced in other areas, especially in the families of some women 'still stuck in conservatism'.

A committee comprising 15 of the members was then formed to overcome the family siege and tackle price hike of materials and larger competitors.

The women also took heart from a clothing fair they staged last year that led to a fashion show of their clothes in Khulna.

Josna is now making a profit of 20 percent in a probably 100 percent improvement on what she earned before.

"The skills in style and design will lead to the path of what I always wanted to be," she says.

Two killed as BRTC buses collide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two people were killed and 12 others injured when two Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC)-run buses collided near Engineers Institute overbridge at Ramna yesterday.

The deceased are Sajjad Hossain, 22, a first year student of accountancy in Dhaka College and his cousin Wahidul Haq Farhad, 25, a staff of a computer shop at Nahar Plaza.

The accident happened when an Uttara bound BRTC bus (Dhaka Metro Ba 11-1510) lost control and crushed a road island to hit a BRTC Volvo double-decker coming from the opposite direction at about 12:15pm.

The dead were sitting right behind the driver of the Volvo double-decker who too was injured.

The officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station said the other driver managed to flee the spot. Police seized both the vehicles.

Billah Hossain, father of Sajjad, said his son with his cousin Farhad

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BJP-led coalition may not have an easy sail

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Hindu nationalist led ruling coalition could struggle to retain its majority in parliament despite earlier projections it would win this month's election easily, a new survey said yesterday.

But the Bharatiya Janata Party-led alliance was still best placed to form the government, analysts said.

The survey came ahead of the third round of voting on Monday which includes the giant heartland state of Uttar Pradesh and the disputed region of Kashmir, where separatist militants have stepped up attacks to enforce a boycott call.

Militants yesterday attacked the office of the main opposition Congress party in Kashmir's summer capital, Srinagar, wounding five people. Separatists say the election is no substitute for a resolution of conflict in the region.

New Delhi considers the election as another step toward bolstering the legitimacy of its rule in the Muslim majority territory.

The Indian Express-NDTV poll, conducted halfway through the three-week election, said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's alliance could win anything between 255 and 275 seats in the 545 member lower house of parliament.

The coalition won 306 seats in the last election in 1999, comfortably higher than the 273 required to

Pradesh.

The opposition Congress led by Sonia Gandhi, the torchbearer of the celebrated Nehru-Gandhi dynasty, picked up momentum after a listless start, but was still far behind the ruling coalition, the Indian Express-NDTV poll said.

But a BJP spokesman shrugged off the new poll and said the party's own assessment showed a comfortable victory for the ruling alliance.

Nothing to worry about "We have done our own surveys with a much more representative sampling, and we see a surge in our favour," said Prakash Javdekar. "There is nothing for me to worry (about)."

Most surveys in the run-up to the election forecast an easy victory for the BJP-led coalition campaigning on a feel-good platform of strong economic growth and peace with Pakistan.

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Vajpayee vows not to allow repeat of Gujarat riots

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said on Thursday that the riots in Gujarat should not have happened and asserted that repeat of the same would not be allowed.

"What happened in Gujarat should not have happened. Let us resolve not to allow another Gujarat anywhere else. Hindus and Muslims should not view each other with mistrust," Vajpayee told an election rally in the eastern state of Bihar.

Referring to thaw in relations between India and Pakistan, he said "if we can walk the path of peace with our neighbour, why can't we settle our problems peacefully within our country? Removal of mistrust between the two communities is most important," he added.

"My government," Vajpayee said, "never discriminated against anybody on communal lines. We have treated everybody equally and we want everybody to feel safe and secure."

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OPINION POLL

rule. Last month, opinion polls were predicting it would win more than 300 seats.

Polls have a mixed record in the world's largest democracy with voter patterns varying sharply in different constituencies. About 670 million people are eligible to vote in this election and the results will be known only on May 13.

The latest poll said Vajpayee's regional partners in the south and east had lost ground and his own BJP had failed to improve its showing in the key heartland state of Uttar

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A BRTC double-decker, left, rammed into a side rail on a footpath after collision with another bus in front of the Institute of Engineers; a police van ploughed through 10 trees after losing control and veering onto a traffic island on Shaheed Captain Mansur Ali Road in Dhaka yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

'Save Hatirjhil, other low-lying areas to avoid water-logging'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa) yesterday demanded an end to filling up of the city's low-lying areas to avoid water-logging in the rainy season.

Bapa organised a rally in the city where speakers demanded of the government to cancel its decision to fill up Hatirjhil and low-lying areas of the city's Sonargaon.

Economist Professor Muzaffar Ahmed said these areas form part of the city's sewerage disposal systems and a lot of waste matter empties into these areas through major sewerage lines. "Filling them up will have a catastrophic effect on Dhaka's residents."

He said the city's ground water level is falling every day and filling up of the low-lying areas will aggravate the situation. "We have to save these areas to ensure availability of water and to keep the city's drainage system running," Professor Ahmed observed.

He said the decision to fill up Hatirjhil is contrary to Water Body Conservation Act of 2000, and demanded immediate steps for its

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Living under the shadow of extremist terror

Businesses limp along as thugs rule the roost in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Politicians, professionals and businessmen of Khulna city have been living under constant threat from extremist outfits and are extremely frustrated about police's failure to clamp down on these underground operatives and their godfathers.

Business leaders said freestyle use of powerful explosives like hand bombs, time bombs and grenades that is all too common in targeted killings is also having a devastating effect on businesses in general.

"We are extremely afraid of the rise of the PBCP (Purbo Banglar Communist Party)'s Janajuddho faction whose armed cadres have created a reign of terror in the region, paralysing normal economic activities of the business community," said Alhaj Munir Ahmed, president of Khulna Chamber of

Commerce and Industry (KCCI).

"Our lives are on the line. Outlaws demand money from us over phone or through faxed messages and threaten to kill us if we fail to pay. They also give us death threats for filing cases," said a local shrimp exporter who asked not be named fearing reprisal.

He and two other shrimp exporters said unless they find a safe place to shift, they will close down their businesses.

A senior lawyer expressed his grave disappointment for the police's failure to bring a perceptible change in law and order, saying only a handful of extremist cadres has been netted or were killed in lynching while criminal godfathers are pulling the strings from behind the scene.

Local leaders of the two main

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Dark secrets of child sex trade

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Eleven-year-old Saleha was sliding on the rainbows of her childhood dreams when brute reality came crashing down on her and took away her innocence.

At such a tender age, when her peers rolled in the grass, chased butterflies or picked wild flowers, Saleha (not her real name) was forced into the brutal existence of a floating child sex worker.

The runaway orphan, now 12 years old, could still recall the day when her carefree childhood dreams were shattered at the hands of a sexual predator.

After fleeing her aunt's home in Bogra under torture, she came to the capital last year and was staying on the premises of Dhaka's Mirpur Mazar when she was conned and picked up by a pedophile.

"He took me home saying he would fix me a job as domestic help, but I did not suspect his bad

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Saudi forces kill 3 militants

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi security forces killed three militants, including two most wanted suspects, in Jeddah overnight as they stepped up their offensive against presumed terrorists after a car bomb devastated one of their buildings in Riyadh, a police source at the scene said early yesterday.

An interior ministry statement confirmed that three "wanted" militants were shot dead during a siege in the Red Sea city, a day after the suicide bombing in the capital claimed by a group linked to the al-Qaeda terror network.

The statement did not say if any of the three were on a 26-strong list of top terror suspects issued by

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ANTI-GOVT MOVEMENT

Rift in left parties eludes united role

ASHFAQ WARES KHAN

Sharp rifts in anti-government strategies among leftist political parties have made their unity unlikely, threatening to sideline their roles in the movement to dislodge the coalition.

Political analysts blamed the divide on the formation of four platforms such as the 11-party alliance, Left-Democratic Front, four-party left alliance and the latest National Platform for Unity.

"The left forces almost lost ground in the movement as they did not unite in a single platform," a political observer said.

The divide was thrown into sharp relief when the Gonoforum initiated the National Platform for Unity and Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) supported the move, which rankled with the two largest parties in the alliance -- the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Bangladesh Worker's Party (BWP).

The Gonoforum has distanced itself from programmes of the 11-party alliance in general and from hartals enforced by the BWP and CPB in particular that coincided with the general strike of the main opposition Awami League on March 6.

BWP General Secretary Bimal Biswas told The Daily Star that differences sharpened, as the Gonoforum did not pin hopes on the 11-party alliance for its political objectives.

On the reason the national platform was formed, Gonoforum General Secretary Saifuddin Ahmed Manik said: "People do not want a left alternative now. They want a democratic alternative."

"We thought it would be difficult to carve a broad-based democratic alternative out of the 11-party alliance as our friends there emphasised the leftist issues too much," he said.

CPB President Manzurul Ahsan Khan retorted: "The 11-party is an

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Prayer Timings		
April 24		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	4-25	5-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-45	5-00
Maghrib	6-27	6-31
Esha	8-00	8-30

Source: Islamic Foundation