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## Politics chokes rural health care

### 11,159 community clinics kept unused for 3 years allegedly for their construction during AL rule

NAIMUL HAQ

Over 85 percent of 11,159 community clinics (CCs) built to provide essential health and family planning services to rural people remained unused for the last three years allegedly for being constructed during the Awami League (AL) rule.

When the CCs, built at a cost of Tk

279 crore, were falling into ruin, the health ministry in a 'sheer display of public money waste' launched an alternative project at a cost of Tk 280 crore.

Forty new structures have already been constructed under the new scheme, Strengthening of Existing Union Health and Family Welfare Centres, which plans to set

up 738 buildings. The government had a target of constructing 13,500 CCs, but work on the project stalled after the change of government in October 2001 ballot on the ground that the design of the structures was faulty.

Each CC was designed to serve about 6,000 people in a union and replace traditional home visits by

family planning workers and weekly satellite clinics.

As most CCs sat idle, primary healthcare services to most villages remain completely absent, forcing patients to seek treatment elsewhere.

Besides, door-to-door visit by family planning workers stands

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## Hartal fizzles out in record security

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

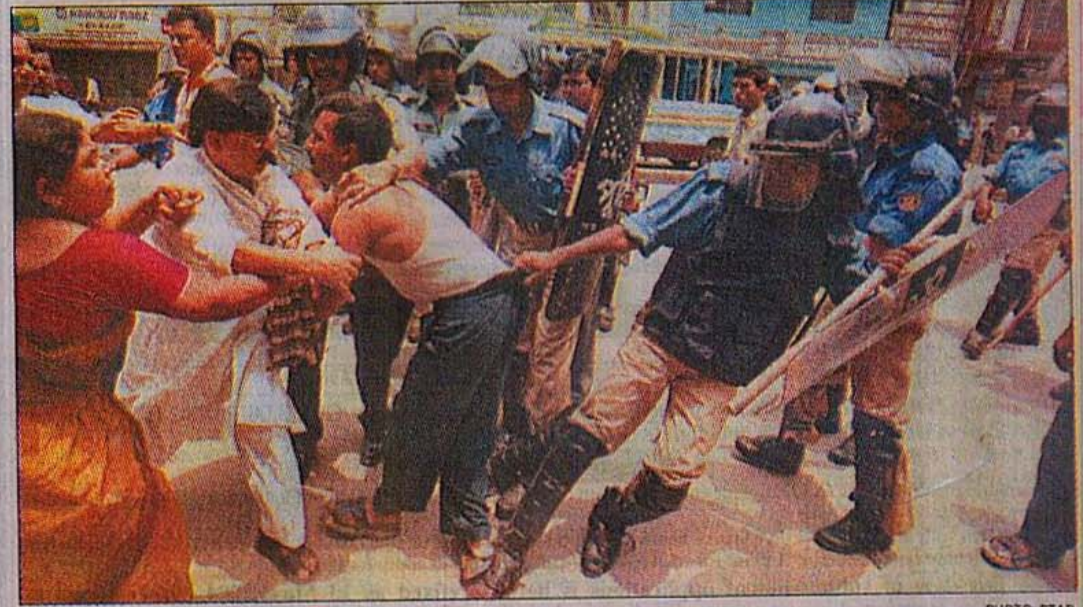
Sporadic violence in the capital, Comilla and Sylhet marked an otherwise peaceful hartal yesterday, the first day of the Awami League's (AL's) two-day general strike.

In Dhaka, police foiled the AL's bid to hold rallies and bring out processions at Motijheel.

Police also dispersed a procession of the Jaiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Inu), which called a hartal coinciding with the AL's.

Some home-made bombs were exploded simultaneously at around 12:30pm in front of the residence of the Chief Justice and Bangladesh Television Bhaban, at Paltan and

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Awami League activists scuffle with police in a bid to save a fellow picket from being arrested at Dainik Bangla crossing during yesterday's hartal.

PHOTO: STAR

## Shattered dreams

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

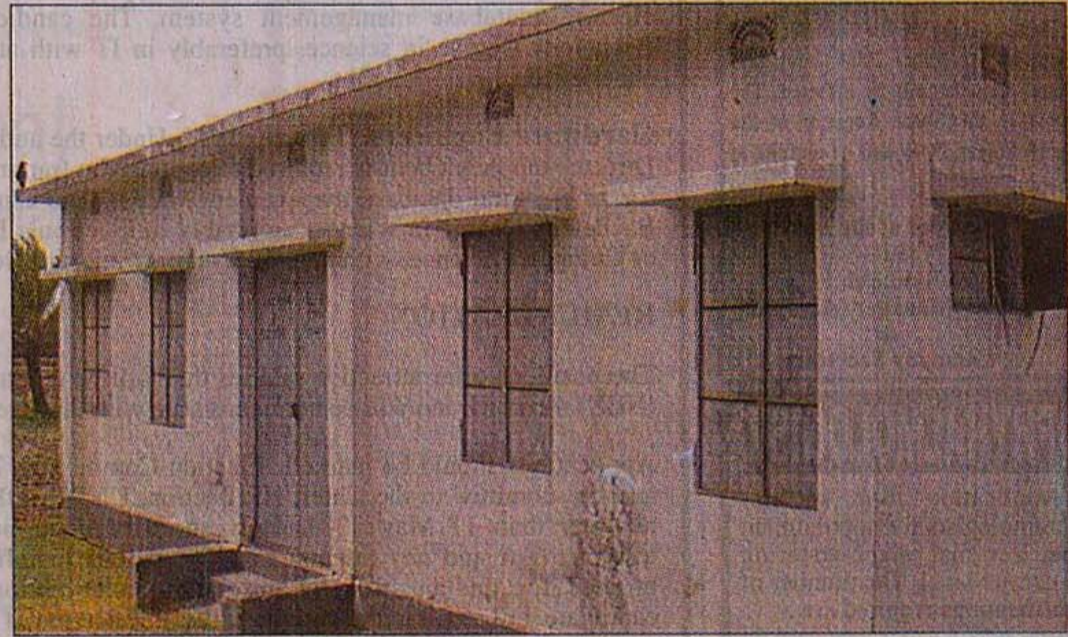
It is only a few years back when a flicker of hope lit the faces of the people of Dighirchala in Gazipur as some affluent neighbours came along with a piece of land to construct a community clinic on it.

They believed their misery with medicare services was going to end.

Since then years went by but the readily available health services that the people of Dighirchala longed for never came. After months of sluggish construction works, Itahata Community Clinic (CC) at the centre of Bhasan union got ready to roll in late 2000. But it remains idle for the last four years.

"It was never put to use and it is an embarrassment for us," said Akter Ali, health inspector of Gazipur Sadar Thana Health

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The Itahata Community Clinic at Dighirchala in Gazipur has remained inoperative for long for lack of medicine and other logistical problems.

PHOTO: STAR

## Govt plans to submit AL's plot link to HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will submit evidence to the High Court that the main opposition Awami League was conspiring to unconstitutionally topple the government by April 30.

The decision came from the 32nd meeting of the inter-ministerial committee on law and order held at the local government, rural development and co-operatives ministry yesterday with Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in the chair.

The High Court on a writ petition from rights activists on Tuesday asked the government to explain in three weeks why Section 86 of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Ordinance should not be declared contrary to the constitution.

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## Jalil now to play 'trump card' when time is ripe

UNB, Dhaka

Main opposition Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday said he would play his political 'trump card' only when the time is ripe for fall of the government for midterm polls.

Jalil, apparently hinting at a change in own strategy, said it may take some more time to play the 'trump card' and force the government to give snap elections under a neutral caretaker administration.

Earlier, Jalil set April 30 as the deadline for overthrow of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's coalition government to make way for midterm elections.

"The prime objective of our

current movement is to unseat the failed government for midterm polls and I'm waiting for the high time to show my card," he said in an exclusive interview with the news agency at his Gulshan house.

On the reason for the delay in playing the card, Jalil said: "There have been some lapses in the strategy, which of course is obvious in a democratic movement and we are to take a little more time."

On his failure to mobilise people on the street as he expected, the AL leader said his party did not want to take any violent course and preferred peaceful democratic means. But the government being "so scared and shaky" let loose police against his party workers and

resorted to unprecedented mass arrests and repression, he added.

"People are there...had they been allowed to come to the street for an hour only, they would have staged an upsurge. But the government virtually declared war against our party workers and innocent people," he said.

On a question, he said the way the government is out to foil the movement, it would have been damaging for the country if the AL had gone on a 'counteroffensive'.

He, however, claimed the AL achieved 'initial victory' in the anti-government agitation on two counts. First, the way the people have responded to the April 30

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## 112 killed in Thai clashes

### Islamic militants battle police in troubled south

AGENCIES, Pattani, Thailand

Police gunned down scores of machete-wielding militants who stormed more than a dozen security outposts yesterday, the bloodiest day yet in Thailand's troubled Muslim-dominated south.

The death toll stood at least 112: five security force personnel were among the dead and the rest were insurgents.

The attackers were young, barely out of their teens, and poorly armed with mostly machetes and only a few weapons. By all accounts, they were mown down by well-prepared police backed up by army reinforcements.

Bodies lay on the road in pools of blood, armoured personnel carriers patrolled the streets and one of the country's most revered mosques

was left bullet-scarred and smoking. The eight hours of mayhem ended when police fired tear gas and bullets into a mosque, killing 34 militants who were holed up inside.

A plume of smoke billowed from the small red-brick building and automatic gunfire crackled overhead before heavily armed Thai forces stormed the mosque and shot dead everyone inside.

"We heard lots of shooting and some rocket-propelled grenades," witness Saroni Duereh told AFP at the scene.

"We don't know who was inside but we know that they are all Muslims and all Muslims are brothers," said another man who identified himself only as Mohammed.

About 600 onlookers wandered in and around the battle-scarred

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## BDR, BSF open talks in Dhaka today

UNB, Dhaka

The directors general of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) open wide-ranging talks in Dhaka today on longstanding issues like cross-border crimes, smuggling, killing and border tensions.

BSF Director General Ajay Raj Sharma, who arrived here yesterday afternoon, will lead a 17-member Indian delegation to the five-day talks while BDR Director General Major General M Jahangir Alam lead a 19-member home side.

Talking to reporters at Zia International Airport, Sharma said the talks will focus on bilateral border issues, which are pretty old and cannot be solved overnight.

"There are certain points of difference of views on some issues, but we're trying to narrow down those differences," he told a questioner.

Asked about the insurgents' camps operating against Bangladesh, the list of which was handed to the Indian side at the last border talks, Sharma said they had

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## Finance ministry sits on farm subsidy

### Economists prescribe long-term composite assistance, investment plan

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

While the agriculture ministry keeps on ringing alarm bells in accompaniment to its demand for at least a Tk 1,000-crore subsidy in the next fiscal year to bring down the agriculture production cost, the finance ministry is sitting nonchalant on the issue.

Presently, the government pumps in only 0.4 to 0.5 percent of the agriculture production a year as domestic support to the agriculture sector. But, economists believe it should provide at least 3 percent of that to help the sector grow at the pace of the population growth.

"Bangladesh's agriculture production cost is the highest in the region," says a report of the agriculture ministry. "It is mainly because, excepting for purchasing urea fertiliser, our farmers have to purchase all agriculture inputs at market price. These prices are much lower in other countries, because their governments significantly subsidise

agriculture inputs."

The government has been subsidising the agriculture sector on ad-hoc basis only, economists said. Whereas, in view of the numerous challenges faced by the sector, it needs a long-term composite subsidy and investment plan, they underscored.

The finance minister and the agriculture minister, who are at loggerheads over the subsidy issue, held a meeting in the first week of this month. The agriculture ministry proposed a Tk 1,000-crore farm subsidy, which met with partial agreement from the finance ministry. It was then decided that a committee would be formed in a week to chalk out what benefits the sector would get and how.

But until yesterday, this committee has not been formed.

And none of the officials of the ministries could say whether the committee would be formed at

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## Biman's domestic flights suspended for 5 hours

### Pilots refuse to fly protesting 'derogatory remarks'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman's domestic flights were suspended for five hours yesterday as pilots refused to fly in protest at a derogatory remark by a Biman official.

Sources said all flights to Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore and Rajshahi between 12:00pm and 5:00pm had to be rescheduled due to the boycott, which was however called off at 6:00pm following assurance of departmental action against the said official.

"This Biman official used indecent, objectionable words in an interview with Dainik Khoborpotro," said an official of Bangladesh Airlines Pilot Association (BAPA) while referring to the interview of Zahurul Haq, Biman's deputy general manager of public relations division.

During his interview with the Bangla daily, Haq criticised pilots

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## Money made on arrestees' woes

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Central Jail staff takes large amounts of money in bribes from the relatives of 'mass arrests' victims for their release despite bail by courts.

Relatives of the prisoners, who paid the police after the mass arrests for good treatment in lock-up, said they were finding it difficult to pay for the second time in a week.

A few hundred people waiting at the central jail gate yesterday for the release of their relatives said despite bail on April 26 they were yet to be released.

Only people, who are bribing

the jail staff, are getting their relatives released, they alleged.

"I gave Tk 1,500 in bribes to a jail staff for the release of five of my relatives who got bail on April 26, but only two of them were freed," a man from Fultala in Khulna said, requesting anonymity.

"If you disclose my name, they may not release my other relatives," he said.

"The jail authorities are releasing two to three prisoners every two to three hours after taking bribes through police and junior staff," alleged Nurul Islam.

Nurul came all the way from Atgharia upazila in Pabna on April

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## Proshika official retracts judicial statement

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A deputy director of Proshika yesterday retracted a statement minutes after he told a magistrate that the Proshika chairman threw his weight behind the Awami League (AL) in its agitation beginning April 21 to unseat the government.

Abdur Rob had said in the statement recorded by a metropolitan magistrate that non-governmental organisation (NGO) Proshika Manabik Unnyan Kendro's Chairman Qazi Faruque Ahmed called his officials and employees in Dhaka to join the anti-government agitation.

Rob, however, submitted a petition for retraction barely 20 minutes after recording the judicial statement. He told the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) that he was physically tortured to give statements naming Faruque and some other officials and employees.

He was not allowed to meet his wife and other family members

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## Planetarium set to open soon



Dhaka Novotheatre, a state-of-the-art planetarium, is set for inauguration by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in two months.

PHOTO: STAR

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The first state-owned planetarium is going to be opened at long last in the capital within a couple of months.

"Installation of equipment at the planetarium is almost complete. We're now waiting for the prime minister's appointment to inaugurate it in June," said an official of the Ministry of Science and Information Communications Technology.

Dhaka Novotheatre will introduce a modern tilted-domed planetarium combined with a large-format motion picture system known as space theatre with most modern state-of-the-art audio system, he added.

The distinctive feature of a modern space theatre is its large projection dome, which is tilted 25 to 30 degrees with its front widely exposed to the spectators.

"As the universe is simulated, the spectators don't need to look up as in a conventional planetarium. Instead, they get the feel of being in outer space," the official said.

The planetarium comes into

reality after suffering several set-backs. The BNP-led government suspended the project after 80 percent of the construction, terming it 'unproductive' and directed the ministry of works to postpone the Tk 133-crore project in November 2001.

The Novotheatre was originally conceived by the BNP government in 1995 with an estimated cost of Tk 52 crore.

When the Awami League came to power in 1996, the theatre was renamed Bangabandhu Novo Theatre. The Public Works Department (PWD) began its structural work near Bijoy Sarani with an enhanced budget of Tk 133 crore.

Japanese Goto Optical Manufacturing Company provided equipment at a cost of Tk 43.19 crore and the theatre was scheduled for opening in October 1998.

Shortly after this, an American team installed a US-made Tk 5-crore aluminium dome. The BNP government deemed the project to be too expensive and unproductive.

The alliance government finally

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