

MUNICIPAL POLLS

Rampant violations of election rules alleged

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Fair Election Monitoring Alliance (FEMA) and Brotee, two non-government organisations (NGO) working with election monitoring, yesterday alleged that most of the candidates standing for upcoming municipality elections are violating the election rules.

gathering reliable information regarding the election. Speaking at the press conference, Chief Executive of Brotee Sharmin Murshid urged the government to disqualify the corrupt candidates who thumb their nose at the election rules.

Atiur Rahman said "The consolidation of democracy depends on how efficiently and transparently we handle our elections - from local level to the national level." Citing the example of India, Dr Atiur said "The role of EC must be strengthened in order to have a healthy democracy."



A bicycle, the election symbol of a chairman candidate, is fastened to the corner of a stage during an election rally yesterday in the run-up to the May 5 Gazipur municipal polls.

AL MP comes under attack, escapes unhurt

UNB, Jheridah

Main opposition Awami League (AL) lawmaker Abdul Hye yesterday escaped unhurt a series of bomb attack on a procession he was leading in the evening at Shaikpota. Witnesses said Hye was leading a procession taken out in support of his party's chairman candidate Ashraf Azam in the upcoming municipal corporation polls when ruling BNP cadres launched the attack with homemade bombs.

Political violence, social unrest make journalism risky

Discussants say on eve of World Press Freedom Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Different rights and media organisations yesterday held various programmes on the eve of World Press Freedom Day 2004 today and stressed the need for free flow of information, journalists' professionalism and safety and implementation of proposed right to information act in ensuring freedom of the press.

discussion at the Jatiya Press Club. Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, editor of Bangladesh Observer, said political violence and social unrest make journalism risky in Bangladesh and identified attacks on the lives of journalists as a threat to press freedom.

Outrage over Iraq photos growing

US army report says prisoners faced 'sadistic, blatant, wanton criminal abuses'

AGENCIES, Washington/ Baghdad

The US-led coalition is facing outrage amid mounting allegations of widespread abuse at its jails in Iraq and growing anger from the people it claims to have liberated. Iraqi prisoners faced numerous "sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses" by US soldiers, including sodomy and beatings, according to a US army report quoted by the New Yorker magazine.

magazine said the report had been authorised by Lieutenant General Ricardo Sanchez, the top US officer in Iraq, and was completed in February. The May 10 issue of the magazine goes on sale on Monday. The army report listed abuses such as "breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees; ... beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair; threatening male detainees with rape; allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broomstick."



(Clockwise) A British soldier urinates on an Iraqi prisoner in a vile display of abuse, a rifle is cruelly jabbed in the young man's groin, naked male detainees are stacked in a pyramid and a woman US soldier with her fingers mockingly fires at genitals of lined-up inmates.

3 hangmen visit Ershad Shikder's gallows

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Three hangmen to execute notorious criminal Ershad Shikder on May 10 visited the gallows of Khulna District Jail Saturday night. Shahjahan Mia, Haris and Hafiz have been briefed on how to bring Ershad Shikder to the gallows from the condemned cell and execute him, Jail Super Mohammad Farhad Mian said yesterday. Haris and Hafiz will help Shahjahan if Ershad refuses to walk to the gallows, jail sources said. The headsmen came here on April 27 from Dhaka Central Jail and did not visit the gallows since then.

9 GIs die in Iraq attacks

US hostage Hamill escapes

REUTERS, Baghdad

Nine US servicemen were killed in Iraq yesterday -- six of them in a mortar attack -- but U.S. commanders also announced American civilian Thomas Hamill had escaped after being held hostage for three weeks by gunmen. US Marine Major TV Johnson told reporters the mortar attack had targeted a military base two hours drive from Falluja, the flashpoint Sunni city some 30 miles west of Baghdad, but would give no further details. Two US soldiers were killed in northwest Baghdad and another died when guerrillas detonated a roadside bomb and fired assault rifles at a US base near the northern oil city of Kirkuk. After April became the bloodiest month for US troops in Iraq with 129 combat deaths, American commanders were able to report good news when Hamill, a trucker, ran into the arms of a US patrol close to Saddam Hussein's home town of Tikrit. "He had an opportunity to escape, saw some US forces and made his dash," General Richard Myers, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told Americans on breakfast television. UPSURGE IN VIOLENCE In April's upsurge in violence, soldiers from other countries in US-led forces and foreign civilians were also killed and more than two dozen foreigners were kidnapped, jeopardising transport, construction and oil projects key to US efforts to win hearts and minds in Iraq. Three Italian civilians and a US soldier remain hostages. No new kidnappings have been reported for nearly two weeks. Hamill's wife Kellie said: "I feel wonderful. It's the best feeling I've had. I am so ecstatic and I just want to thank everybody that has prayed and sent their prayers to us." Pictures of Hamill, 43, as a hostage.

Doctor couple held for torturing domestic help

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ramna police yesterday arrested a physician couple on charge of torturing their 10-year-old domestic help. Police also rescued Mostakina from the couple's Paribagh house where the girl from Nilphamari had been working for the past 10 months. Mostakina, who had numerous bruises on her body including raw facial wounds from hot electric iron, was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) for treatment. Ramna police said they picked up the couple -- Dr ABM Jamal of Mitford Hospital and his wife Dr Fatema Doza of the DMCH -- for questioning at the police station,

adding that process was underway to file a case. "Madam (Dr Fatema) used to claw me across the face or poke me with whatever she could find even for my small mistakes," said Mostakina, whose face was full of scratch marks. The torture came to light when a neighbour saw the condition of the girl as she was taking out the garbage. She immediately informed Ramna police. Mostakina said her father Bashir Mian of Birnakuni village in Jaldhaka upazila of Nilphamari, married for a second time. He brought her to Dhaka to work for the couple 10 months ago but never visited her.

5 Israelis die in Gaza shooting

AP, Gaza Strip

Palestinian militants yesterday attacked an Israeli vehicle near a Jewish settlement in the Gaza Strip, killing four children and their mother, the Israeli army said. Two attackers were killed. The attack near the entrance to the Gush Katif bloc of settlements came as the ruling Likud Party was holding a referendum on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to pull

out of Gaza. It was unclear how the attack would affect the vote. The militants opened fire -- killing the five family members and wounding a motorist in a second vehicle -- before detonating a bomb, the army spokesman said. Two soldiers were wounded by gunfire, and the attackers were killed by return fire, the army said. Police said the white Citroen station wagon spun off the road after the initial shooting, then the attackers approached the vehicle and shot the occupants at close range. The car was riddled with bullets, and the carpet inside was stained with blood. Israel Radio reported the mother had been on her way to protest against Sharon's Gaza withdrawal plan. On the car was a bumper sticker saying, "Uprooting the settlements, victory for terror." Settlers said the family lived in the Katif settlement in central Gaza.

Pakistan foreign secretary due on May 5

UNB, Dhaka

Pakistan Foreign Secretary Reaz H Khokar comes to Dhaka on May 5 to hold talks with his Bangladesh counterpart Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury on bilateral, regional and international issues. This is an annual secretary-level consultation between Dhaka and Islamabad when the two sides are expected to discuss bilateral trade and commerce, particularly free trade, on May 5. The two-way trade that amounts for USD 130 million is in favour of Pakistan whose annual exports were worth around USD 94 million while Bangladesh's about USD 36 million according to the latest figures. Dhaka and Islamabad are also engaged in negotiations aimed at striking an agreement on Free Trade Area (FTA). Among the bilateral issues, the longstanding question of repatriation of nearly 300,000 stranded Pakistanis still languishing in refugee camps remained unresolved despite repeated assurances from Pakistan. The two foreign secretaries are also likely to discuss Bangladesh's candidature for the post of OIC secretary general. Pakistan has already extended its full support to Bangladesh's candidate, Salahuddin Qader Chowdhury. Foreign Secretary Khokhar will call on Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan. He is also expected to make a courtesy call on Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on May 6. He will hold a pre-departure press conference on May 6.

Table with Prayer Timings for May 3, including Azan and Jamaat times for Fajr, Zohr, Asr, Maghrib, and Esha.

