

# Municipal polls to be an issue of movement now, says Hasina

UNB, Maowa

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she would not allow creation of any vacuum in parliament, nor allow any vested group to derive benefit from any vacation of her party's parliamentary seats.

"I asked all my party lawmakers to join parliament and sign the attendance book anytime they like before expiry of the 90-day limit of absence," she said, replying a query of journalists on board Maowa ferry at noon on her way back to Dhaka from Tungipara.

Hasina avoided a direct reply to a question whether there were any lapses by the party's central leaders during the last month's agitation aimed at forcing the alliance government to quit by April 30 deadline set by Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil MP.

The opposition leader said the movement against the government did not fail although the April 30 deadline had passed. "In 1987, the momentum of movement was high, but the autocratic Ershad regime did not fall. Will you now say that movement has failed? In fact, the movement has moved another step forward and it will intensify."

She added: "Our leaders suffered large-scale torture while participating in the anti-government agitation as the alliance government became nervous and resorted to mass arrest... it is now clear the people do not want this government, and are shocked at seeing them still in power."

About the upcoming pourasabha

(municipal) polls, she said: "I've doubts if the polls will be free and fair, as the coalition government let loose police and party cadres against the AL leaders and workers in their bid to win the polls at any cost."

She added: "We will take the pourasava polls as an issue of our ongoing movement protesting the BNP-Jamaat bid to snatch the polls result."

Hasina mentioned the recent incidents violence in Naogaon, Jamalpur, Mathabaria, Comanpanganj, Banaripara, Kalihati and Narail ahead of the municipal polls.

To foil the AL's movement ahead of the municipal polls, she said she heard that BNP's first Joint Secretary General Tarique Rahman had a meeting with "notorious criminals Kala Jahangir and Subrata Bain" in the month of April.

Recently, a microbus full of arms was caught in Feni, but released following a phone call from a family member of the prime minister, the AL president alleged.

"They are trying to tighten their grip on power by hook or crook," she said. "The alliance government no longer trust the incumbent president. Perhaps, the president will also have to face the same consequence like former president Badruddoza Chowdhury. And we are awaiting to see that farce."

In the morning, Hasina attended a meeting of the party workers at Gopalganj district AL office.

## Ginger beyond easy reach

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The price of ginger that recently shot up to the highest level ever was still selling up to Tk 95 a kg in Dhaka markets yesterday.

In the kitchen markets at Mohammadpur, Mirpur-1 and Karwan Bazar, ginger sold at Tk 85-95 a kg yesterday as against Tk 70-75 three weeks ago.

Prices of some other essentials including egg, sugar, fish and atta also remained high.

Fish prices have risen by Tk 15-20 a kg compared to that recently. Medium size hilsha was selling at Tk 120-250 a kg yesterday, local ruhi at Tk 130-150, Indian and Myanmar ruhi at Tk 100-120, small and medium size rupchanda at Tk 150-250 and padma Tk 300-350 a kg.

Sugar was selling at Tk 35 a kg yesterday, up from Tk 33 about three weeks ago, soybean at Tk 56 a litre and two-kg packet of atta at Tk 35.

On April 10, the government permitted import of one lakh tonnes of sugar but it is still to have any positive effect on the price.

Eggs have become dearer, selling at Tk 54 a dozen yesterday against Tk 48 a week ago.

Traders blamed the unusual price of ginger on poor local production and lack of adequate import to meet the requirement. Its price is unlikely to come down shortly, they thought.

"There will be no local harvest of ginger by the end of this year and there is no Indian ginger in the market now," said Nuruddin, a trader at Karwan Bazar market.

Fish traders said supply shortage has led to the price hike of fish.

"Fish is now beyond my purchasing capacity," said Azizul Hoque, a fixed income buyer at Moahammadpur kitchen market.

## Road blockade programme in Khagrachhari

UNB, Khagrachhari

The first day of 72-hour road blockade programme called by hill refugees passed off with stray incidents yesterday.

At least 10 people were injured in separate incidents in the town and at Madhyabalkhali of Dighinala upazila.

Of them, Purna Bikash Chakma, 23, was sent to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in a critical condition.

On the eve of the BDF, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) is organising a dialogue today to project the civil society perspectives on the Forum. The objective of this dialogue is to discuss the emerging trends in Bangladesh economy including foreign aid flow, and the challenges facing the country in the current context.

CPD Executive Director Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said: "There is a wider scope for accountability as the BDF is being held close to the grassroots in Dhaka, and not in Paris. But the ownership of the process would have increased further, if the papers for the meeting were prepared through a consultation process. The government would have only benefited from a detailed discussion in the Cabinet as well as with parliamentarians, leading politicians, private sector representatives and development practitioners."

On the issue of donor-driven reforms, Dr Bhattacharya noted, both efficacy and acceptance of reforms enhance significantly when reforms are implemented through a domestically driven process, for example, as fulfillment of election pledges, and not merely as donor conditionalities. "It is expected that the government should autonomously put up a reform agenda that reflects the people's interest and contextual realities of Bangladesh, and that this be prepared through a participatory process. Otherwise objectives of even desirable reforms may be defeated," he observed.

"From the donor's perspective as well, this seems to be a more pragmatic way to deal with recipient concerns as it appears from their enthusiasm for the PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) process."

Dr Bhattacharya observed that the role of foreign aid is quite often overplayed in comparison to national sources of resource mobilisation. "For example, in comparison to foreign aid flow to Bangladesh, contribution of export earnings is four times more, remittance is more than double and the contribution of the tax payers is almost four times bigger."

"This does not mean that we don't need foreign aid to meet our investment demands. The CPD has prepared a sectoral aid intensity index. As per this index, aid dependence of sectors such as health, education, transport and energy ranges between 74 percent and 32 percent of the total development allocation for these sectors. Besides the NGOs (non-governmental organisations) brought in \$250 million of foreign grants annually and the private sector project also receives equity, loan and risk underwriting support," remarked Dr Bhattacharya.

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## AL to join JS

FROM PAGE 1

budget session will follow the current session, scheduled to end on May 17.

The AL has been boycotting the House for 62 straight days of sittings since June 25 last year, tagging a three-point demand, including apology from a state minister for his "derogatory" remarks against Hasina as preconditions for a comeback.

Some lawmakers were out of the session for up to 78 days: Mustafizur Rahman did not attend the House for 78 days, Mirza Azam for 77 days, Hasina for 70 days and Ahsanullah Master for 69 days.

The constitution says seats of lawmakers will stand vacated if they remain absent from parliament without the leave of the House for 90 consecutive sitting days.

**FRUSTRATION WITHIN**  
AL leaders and workers plunged into frustration as the anti-government deadline, set for the coalition to step down in the wake of its 'failure' to clear up crime and corruption, fizzled out.

"We need more time to regain morale. The deadline backfired and has pushed the out-government movement a year back," said a senior AL leader, who spoke only on condition that he not be identified.

But AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, who predicted the fall of the coalition by April 30, differed: "We are out in the anti-government movement and next programmes will be announced shortly."

The deadline what political analysts called a misstep triggered fresh problems within the opposition. Although the party chief said the movement did not fail and would continue in earnest, most other leaders favoured a lull in street

agitation -- at least for the time being.

Party leaders fear a major internal feud at a time when the activists have little confidence in its leaders.

The concern came to a head after Jalil drew flak from his party colleagues in the April 30 meeting of the central working committee over the deadline. Hasina, who instructed Jalil to set the deadline, came to his rescue and said the issue could be discussed later blow by blow.

At least five AL Central Working Committee (ALCWC) members sought clarification from their general secretary on the intent of the deadline and its failure.

The leaders alleged that Jalil unilaterally announced the deadline without discussion at any party forum and accused him of misleading the media with information that the ALCWC approved the ultimatum.

UNB adds:

Hasina said: "I asked all my party MPs to join parliament and sign the attendance book anytime they like before expiry of the 90-day limit of absence."

She said that after joining parliament, her party lawmakers would try to speak in the House, but would come out again if not allowed to do so. "This example was set by Khaleda Zia herself (while in opposition)," Hasina said.

On whether the AL lawmakers would resign from parliament, Hasina said: "Why will we resign? It is the prime minister who must resign. People no longer want her in power; rather, they want us. We will not allow anyone to cash in on vacation of seats."

## BDR nabs 9 while being trafficked

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) arrested nine people including three women and four children while they were being trafficked to India through Harodhda, a bordering village in Sadar upazila on Monday night.

They are Nasrin, 20, wife of Liakat Ali, Jahannara Khatun, 30, wife of Ishahaque Ali, her three sons - Zahidul, 11, Mizanur, 9 and Manirul, 3, Hariya Khatun, 20 wife of Dulal Sheikh and her one year old daughter Sumiya of village Pathamara and Yunus Sheikh, 30, son of Taher Ali and Hatem Ali, 65 of village Bara Bhadura in Morelganj upazila under Bagerhat district.

Tipped-off, BDR jawans caught them and handed them over to Sathkira police yesterday morning. While contacted, Nasrin told that she was attracted by the promise of a job and was being taken to India. Hariya, another rescued female however said they were going to India to their husbands who have been living in Delhi, the Indian capital.

The alleged traffickers -- Hasan of village Harodhda in Sadar upazila and Saffor of village Kulia in Debhata upazila -- were seen active in seeking their release.

## Nipah virus

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an AFP report, Dr Bell said, "If it would be so, how could we stay in Faridpur?"

The agency's Washington dated report said US citizens living in Bangladesh had been advised not to visit or pass through Faridpur.

Dr Bell is among more than a dozen of experts currently visiting the district to assess the causes of outbreak of the viral disease affecting pockets of the district, which had puzzled local physicians.

Health officials said only one child affected with the virus was now under treatment at Faridpur Medical College Hospital and no other patient reported to the hospital since April 22.

Civil Surgeon SM Abul Khair Mia said six teams of national and international experts are working to find out the causes of the disease, probable carriers and transmission of the virus.

The teams will also seek to find out ways to combat the disease, he added.

## Ershad Shikder

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and his petition for mercy. Ershad is also pressing jail guards not to produce him before court for hearing in any other case, sources added.

Since the president rejected his petition, there is no need to produce him before any court in other cases, the jail authorities said.

Under the jail code, he will be informed of his penalty two hours before the execution. The jail authorities will make arrangements for him to meet his first wife Khodeja, sons and daughter and only sister on the eve of execution.

## Blistering heat

FROM PAGE 1

The highest temperature recorded yesterday was 39.7 degrees Celsius in Jessore, up one degree from the day before.

The temperature recorded in the capital yesterday was 37.8 degrees Celsius. Humidity was 72 percent in the morning and 50 percent in the evening.

## Hawa Bhaban

FROM PAGE 1

There have been serious allegations of corruption by some ministers and their relatives and Hawa Bhaban, BNP chairperson's office, also known as the alternative powerhouse.

Most of the senior ministers and policymakers think 'half of the blames' that the government now faces will go if it is closed down.

The policymakers believe the party's image will greatly improve if the government downsizes the council of ministers to one of 35 to 40 members, removes ministers having corruption allegations against them and close down Hawa Bhaban.

They are also of the view that the government needs to boost its relations with the opposition parties, particularly the Awami League, make them confident of returning to the Jatiya Sangsad.

"I think bringing back the Awami League (to parliament) is not an impossible task ... It would be wise of the government to urgently initiate a dialogue for ensuring Awami League's return to parliament during the budget session," said a member of BNP standing committee and a cabinet minister, asking not to be named.

He said there are 'at least half a dozen state ministers who have no work to do' and 'it's about time they were removed'. Some ministers and state ministers, against whom there are specific corruption charges and intelligence reports, may be sacked immediately, he added.

Some ministers may have their portfolios changed and 'one or two state ministers' be promoted on their 'good performance', the minister added.

India will execute the TA, which is due for completion in September 2004, and contribute \$200,000 toward the TA's total cost of \$1 million.

## Abuse probes

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nature of the sixth investigation could not immediately be determined.

Publicly, the Defence Department blamed the commander of the 800th Military Police Brigade, Reserve Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, for a breakdown in command at Abu Ghraib, slapping her with an "admonishment" after she left Iraq earlier this year as part of a rotation of US forces.

But US officials noted that Karpinski -- who was not suspended or relieved of her command, her lawyer, Neal Puckett, said on ABC's "Good Morning America" -- oversaw 25 other detention centres in addition to Abu Ghraib.

A confidential Army report obtained Monday by NBC News found that at least some irregularities in the treatment of Iraqi prisoners extended beyond Abu Ghraib, noting that "the various detention facilities operated by the 800th MP Brigade have routinely held persons brought to them by Other Government Agencies (OGAs) without accounting for them, knowing their identities, or even the reason for their detention."

Military intelligence officers and civilian interrogators encouraged soldiers to abuse prisoners to "soften them up" for interrogation.

## Tullow yet to strike gas at Lalmai-3 well

UNB, Dhaka

Natural gas, in commercial volume, is yet to be found at Lalmai-3 exploration well in block-9 despite some encouraging results in the area earlier.

Tullow Oil plc, the Irish operator in the block, said they were yet to confirm presence of commercial quantity of natural gas there due to some technical difficulties in logging programme at the well.

Tullow has faced problems during logging programme at the well due to 'poor hole condition', the company said in an announcement.

"The wireline logs have identified potential gas-bearing sands in a number of zones between 2,200-2,800 metres. However, it has not been possible to complete logging programme due to hole conditions," it added.

Subject to co-venturers' approval, the Irish company will shortly begin testing those potential gas zones including production testing without a rig. Production test results for the well is expected in a month, it said.

The test will allow the rig to be moved to Bangora, the last site in Tullow's three-well exploration programme for the block.

On February 17, it plugged and abandoned Rasulpur-1 well, the first of the three wells on block 9 planned to be drilled following indication that there is no significant presence of moveable hydrocarbons.

With the latest mixed results, Brian O'Ceathain, general manager of Tullow's international operations, said, "While these results are encouraging, due to difficulties encountered during logging programme, we have not yet demonstrated presence of commercial gas at the location."

"It will only be confirmed by a positive result from a planned production test," he added.

## Indian polls

FROM PAGE 12

gives the NDA a slender majority with 279 seats in the 543-strong Lok Sabha. The poll gave Congress-led alliance 169-181 seats and others 88-100 seats.

With exit polls after the April 26 round of polling and the latest opinion polls broadcast late on Monday night forecasting a hung parliament, the BJP cannot afford to slip from its previous position in the 83 constituencies most of which are in the Hindi-speaking areas. The party has a commanding position there.

Under the watchful eyes of over 100,000 security personnel, an estimated 10.72 crore voters are expected to exercise franchise in the fourth phase in seven states to decide the electoral fate of 921 candidates including Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee contesting from his traditional constituency of Lucknow.

Vajpayee is being challenged in Lucknow by his former cabinet and legal luminary Ram Jethmalani, an independent candidate backed by Sonia Gandhi-led Congress party and nominees of Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party.

An opinion poll of Zee News said Monday night Vajpayee will secure an "overwhelming" victory in Lucknow and the recent killing of 22 women in a stampede during a sari giveaway function with a senior BJP leader there would not affect much BJP's prospects in the constituency.

The poll conducted among 446 voters representing a cross-section of people in Lucknow and 72 percent of them says Vajpayee will be winner while 26 percent favoured Jethmalani.

The main point of interest in the electoral battle in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh, is whether Vajpayee's winning margin will go up, remain in tact or come down in a constituency which has 23 percent Muslim voters.

Besides Vajpayee himself, all

the report said, adding, "This systematic and illegal abuse of detainees was intentionally perpetrated." It said its conclusions were supported by written confessions by some of the suspects, among other evidence.

The official said he believed that the investigations of the officers were complete and that they would not face further action or court-martial. However, the reprimands could spell the end of their careers.

Prisoners told US investigators that their military guards beat them with broom handles and chairs, threatened to rape male prisoners, and sodomised them with chemical light sticks and broom handles.

## Road accident kills 2 in Sathkira

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Two persons were killed in a road accident at Bakal on Sathkira-Munshiganj road yesterday.

The dead are Binoy Krisna Roy, 46, a village doctor, and Prashanta Kumar Gosh, 12.

Witnesses said the accident occurred at around 9:30am when a Munshiganj bound bus hit their motorbike, killing them on the spot. The driver, however, managed to flee along with the bus.

Protesting the accident, locals put up a barricade on the road, disrupting traffic for an hour. Later, police brought the situation under control.

The bodies were sent to Sathkira Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy.

## Four GIs

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mortar fire before dawn Tuesday, Bulgarian Defense Ministry spokeswoman Rumyana Strugareva said.

No casualties or damage were reported after that attack which lasted about ten minutes. Sadr's forces have battled coalition troops since the occupation authorities sought his arrest last month for the killing of a rival cleric last year.

North of Baghdad, four US soldiers of the 1st Infantry Division died from injuries sustained when their vehicle rolled over Monday night during a patrol near Khalis, some 40 miles northeast of Baghdad, the military said in a statement.

At least 759 US troops have died in Iraq since the war began in March 2003.

In Najaf, US commanders said they are holding back fire to avoid serious clashes in the city, which is home to one of the most holy Shia Muslim shrines.

"I think every soldier here understands the sensitivities of the situation," said Lt. Col. Pat White. He added that US troops would "maintain our defense posture" until someone "much, much higher than me makes a different decision."

The yesterday's shelling was light compared to Monday's sharp clashes.

White estimated that 20 militiamen were killed in the Monday battle -- based on bodies and "watching young men fall after being hit." He said there were few civilian casualties because troops were using precision fire.

# Bangladesh 5th

FROM PAGE 1

Haiti, the West Bank and Gaza, and Russia followed Bangladesh on Monday's list of worst places. Iraq with 25 journalists have died since the U.S.-led war began in March 2003 topped the list.

"Reporters routinely face threats, harassment, and often brutally violent physical attacks in retaliation for their reporting. Despite promises from government officials to apprehend those responsible for assaults, the majority of attacks on journalists go unpunished. Deep political divisions in the country and within the journalism community also contribute to the climate of fear," the report says of Bangladesh.

The CPJ has documented dozens of violent attacks against Bangladeshi journalists over the last decade, including the murders of seven journalists in the last eight years.

Journalists working outside Dhaka are particularly vulnerable. Journalist Manik Saha was killed in January in the southwestern city of Khulna when unidentified assailants threw a homemade bomb at him.

"In December 2003, a group of thugs affiliated with the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) tried to kill Shaiful Haque Mithu in the southwestern town of Pirojpur after he wrote a series of articles exposing local officials' abuse of power."

A brutal crackdown launched last year in Cuba by Fidel Castro's government has left an unprecedented 29 journalists behind bars, who served lengthy prison terms of

## Ershad holds talks for JP unity today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) holds a 'unity conference' at Mahanagar Natyamancha in Dhaka today.

At least 25 leaders from two other factions of the JP, one led by Nazir Rahman Manzur, a partner of the four-party ruling coalition, and the other led by Anwar Hossain Manju, an opposition lawmaker, are likely to join the Ershad-led JP. Sources hinted that there could be up to nine presidium members among the 25 joining from the two factions.

Former president and the JP Chairman HM Ershad will preside over the conference that begins at 3:00pm.

Talking to the Daily Star yesterday former president Ershad expressed optimism about the conference in unifying the JP factions.

"I hope the conference would bridge the existing gap among the three factions of the Jatiya Party," he said.

Former Prime Minister Kazi Zafar Ahmed who returned to Bangladesh lately from Australia after a long time is said to have initiated the reunification of the Jatiya Party.

up to 27 years.

Last year also saw the biggest blow to Zimbabwe's beleaguered press when authorities closed the country's only remaining independent daily.

"In all of these places, reporting the news is an act of courage and conviction," Cooper said. "Journalism is essential in helping all of us understand the events that shape our lives, and our need and desire for information cannot be eliminated by violence and repression."

## Proshika chief

FROM PAGE 1