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APPEAL AGAINST HC STAY ON DHAKA-10 BY-POLLS

Mystery deepens over case ownership

CEC, RO deny filing petition; records show RO's name; attorney general's office gives different versions

Court bans journos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Special Bench of the Appellate Division yesterday banned newspaper reporters from the next hearing of the Election Commission (EC) secretary's petition against the High Court order that stayed all proceedings of the by-election to Dhaka-10 constituency till June 12.

The presiding judge of the three-member bench, Justice M Ruhul Amin, on completion of yesterday's hearing on the petition made the court out of bounds to outsiders at the next hearing scheduled for a 10.30am start tomorrow.

Adherents of the Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh of which the petitioner, Abdul Mannan, is the secretary-general, EC officials, the returning

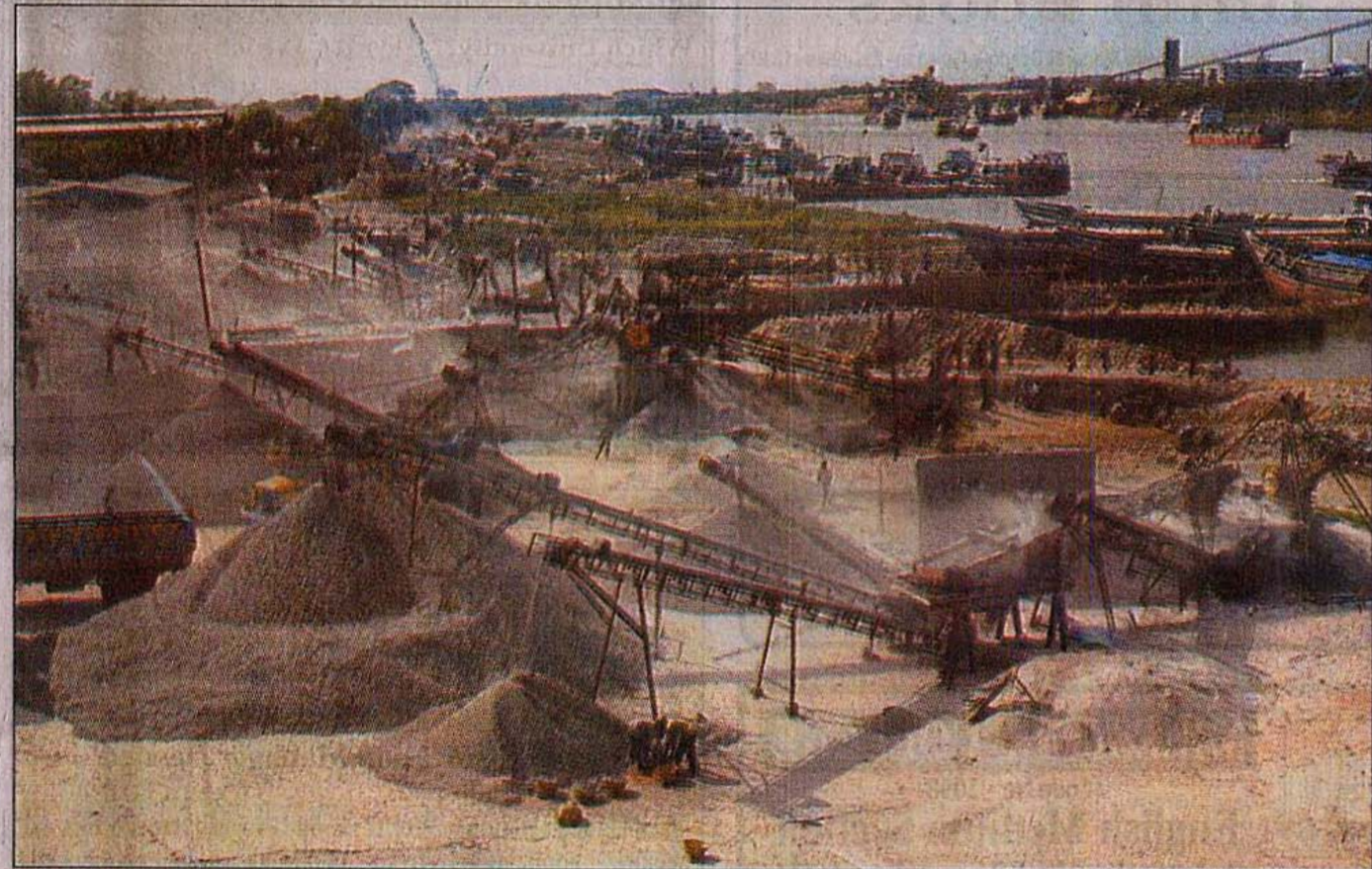
SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

ZAYADUL AHSAN AND SHAKHAWAT LITON

ency until June 12.

The appeal came after the High Court on Wednesday issued the stay order as Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate for Dhaka-10 Abdul Mannan filed a writ petition, being denied the election symbol.

It has become a dark mystery as to who filed the appeal petition against the High Court verdict that stayed all proceedings of the parliamentary by-election to Dhaka-10 constitu-



A number of quarry firms have long thrived on the Sitalakya, illegally capturing large chunks of the river bed and bank near Kanchpur bridge on the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. But authorities appear indifferent to the encroachment.

PHOTO: STAR

Rab yet to get into top gear

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The much-talked-about Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) is yet to start its formal activities with one and half months passed since the elite anti-crime force swung into action.

Around 200 Rab members in uniform - black shirt and trousers with black scarf tied to their head - started their operation in the capital on the eve of Bangla New Year, Pabela Baishakh (April 14).

The elite force may take another four months to start full-fledged operation once its 5,000 personnel completes a three-week basic

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

3 more pvt operators to get fixed phone licence

Another two initially qualified

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Telecoms watchdog the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has decided to award fixed phone licence to three more private operators to increase phone access, which is the lowest among South Asian nations.

Westec Limited, QC Telecom Limited and Jalalabad Telecom Limited (JTL) have qualified for the PSTN (Public Switched Telephone

Network) licence, a top BTRC official told The Daily Star yesterday quoting the BTRC meeting decision.

Bangla Phone Limited and Ranks Telecom Limited have also qualified preliminarily but are required to fulfil certain criteria, the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, added.

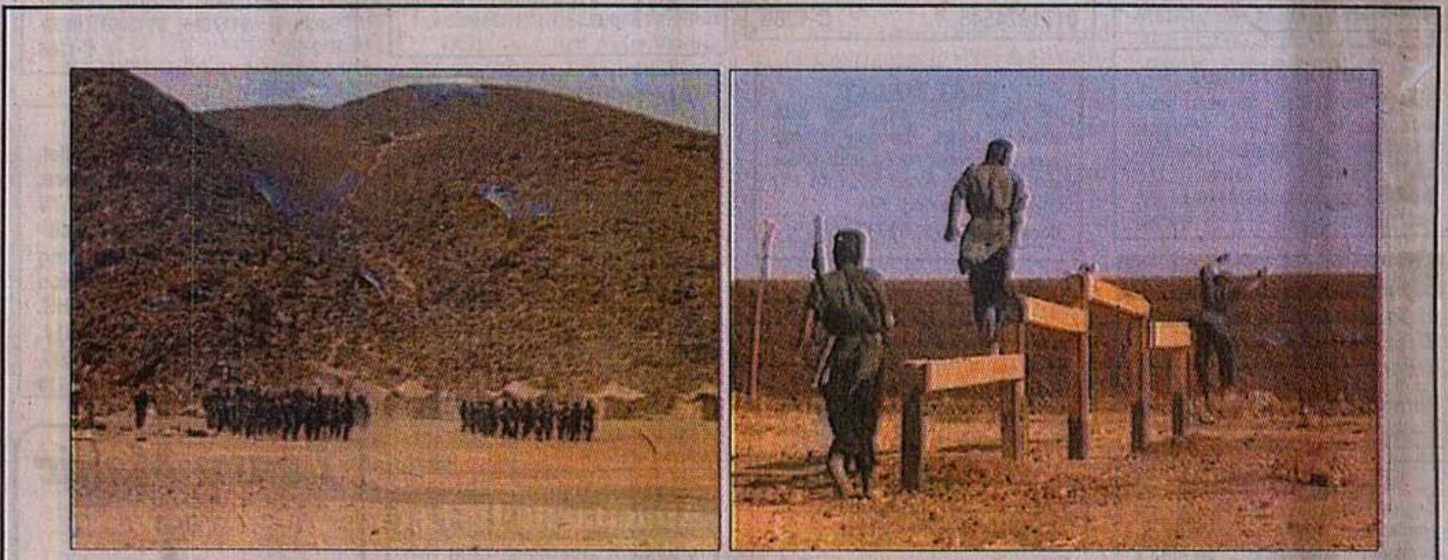
The BTRC on May 13 awarded Bashundhara Communication & Network Limited (BCNL) first licence to run fixed-line phone

services in the private sector in four zones.

Westec Limited and QC Telecom Limited will launch service in the South-East Zone comprising Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur, Lakshimpur, Noakhali, Feni, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Khagrachhari, Rangamati and Bandarban.

The JTL will operate in the North-East Zone that includes Sunamganj,

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



A video grab shows al-Qaeda operatives training in warfare in Afghanistan. The video obtained by The Daily Star was screened for Bangla Bhai recruits at a camp in Rajshahi.

Bangla Bhai's int'l link

Taliban training video CD used for JMJB men's training; leaders say 20 of them working with the outfit

STAR REPORT

A section of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh leaders and activists, blamed for killing at least eight outlaws in the northwest since April 1, has worked with al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, leaders of the Islamist outfit said.

Some put their number as high as 20.

Local people and senior police officials say the activities of JMJB operations commander Bangla

Bhai bear strong resemblance to those by al-Qaeda.

Video discs that the JMJB recruits were given for training contain recorded speeches of Laden and footage on warfare training at al Farooque camp in Afghanistan. The Daily Star obtained a disc titled "The Solution, The Preparation" -- recorded in the once Taliban-ruled southwestern Asian country.

Our correspondents in Bogra and Rajshahi report 44 Bangladeshis once served Laden in

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Dreaded boss was arrested in 2002

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police arrested Bangla Bhai, dreaded operations commander of Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh, in a village in Bagerhat in 2002.

The lynchpin of the Islamist outfit was charged with making an attempt on the lives of local Awami League leader Tapan Poddar and his daughter in an armed attack that left the two injured.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

No new anti-Dhaka river policy

Says Indian minister; Morshed talks with Natwar

OUR CORRESPONDENTS, from New Delhi, Kolkata

The Indian government will not implement any new water distribution policy that may affect water supply to Bangladesh. Water

Resources Minister Priyaranjan Dasmunshi said yesterday.

"We have always had cordial relations with Bangladesh. River-linking and distribution of water resources will be carried out in a manner that is beneficial to both

countries," Dasmunshi told the media while outlining the policy of the Congress-led coalition.

He also said it was the responsibility of both countries to prevent waste and pollution of the rivers.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

UK team again probes Sylhet blast scene

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The five-member team of detectives from the Scotland Yard yesterday again probed the May 21 grenade blast scene at Hajrat Shahjalal Shrine in Sylhet.

The detectives yesterday met Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of police, Sylhet Range, Ali Imam Chowdhury and discussed the status of the probe run by different agencies, the DIG told newsmen.

Director (Investigation) of Rapid Action Battalion Sadequr Rahman and officials of National Security Intelligence, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and Criminal Investigation Department were also present.

The team led by Gurdip Singh, detective inspector of the Anti Terrorist Branch, Metropolitan Police, London, also includes two new members. The new members are ND Weep and David Watson. Earlier, Singh also led a three-men team to the northeastern city on Monday on a two-day preliminary investigation.

Allan Shaw, head of the political section in the British High Commission in Dhaka, took the team to Sylhet.

The British detectives handed over to the DIG a scientific kit to aid the probe and went to the scene of the blast at the shrine that left three killed and British High Commissioner in Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

CHT BLOCKADE 70 held on first day

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati

Security forces yesterday arrested about 70 leaders and activists of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) in Khagrachhari during a dawn-to-dusk road and waterway blockade enforced by the pro-peace treaty organisation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

The arrestees include Victor Chakma, chief of PCJSS Khagrachhari district unit, and Brozo Kishore Tripura, former president of Paharee Chhatra Parishad, the student wing of PCJSS.

The PCJSS enforced the indefinite dawn-to-dusk blockade in the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Student released, another abducted

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Abductors yesterday released a USTC student allegedly after extracting Tk 15 lakh in ransom and another student was kidnapped from Bibirhat in the city Tuesday night.

The abductors left Nurul Azim Shikder, 23, an MBBS final-year student of the University of Science and Technology, Chittagong (USTC), at Bahodderhat bus terminal, some four km off his house, at around 9:00am.

Sources said Azim's family paid

his captors over Tk 15 lakh for his release, a claim Azim's family denied. The victim's family would not talk about the incident with either the press or police.

Azim told reporters at his house that an armed gang took him away to an unspecified place in a private car from the rail-crossing inside Forest Research Institute at around 8:00am Sunday. The kidnappers confined him to a dark room and asked his family for Tk 20 lakh on his mobilephone.

A Raazan-based criminal group

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

Test starts today

RABEED IMAM from St Lucia

Left-hander Faisal Hossain and right-arm pacer Tareq Aziz Khan are set to make their debuts when the first of the two-match Test series against the West Indies gets under-

way at the Beausejour Stadium here on Friday.

The team management decided to opt for 26-year-old Faisal over left-arm spinner Manjural Islam as the wicket looked hard and bouncy

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Officials ponder end to salvage of sunken launch

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Strong currents and sand buildup in the sunken launch MV Digonto continued to hobble attempts to salvage the vessel from the swift-flowing Meghna and authorities ponder calling off the operation.

Villagers and rescue workers retrieved six decomposed bodies near Chandpur and relatives of the missing passengers staged demonstration in Torik and Chandpur alleging the authorities' neglect in salvage operation.

Forty people were still missing after the launch, bound for Narayananj from Torik in Gournadi, went down near Jahajmar Char, about 25km northwest of Chandpur, with about 70

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

Taka tumbles further

STAR REPORT

The taka lost its turf to dollar once more yesterday with each greenback trading at a record high of Tk 62.

This shows a 0.75 percent rise in dollar price over last week when it was traded at Tk 61.25.

Bankers attributed this surge in greenback price to sudden import activities ahead of the budget. There also had been several payments in foreign exchange for oil and power.

Market players said the Nationalised Commercial Banks (NCBs), which used to have a bulk of the foreign exchange, also faced liquidity crisis and they could no longer play the market stabilising role they used to.

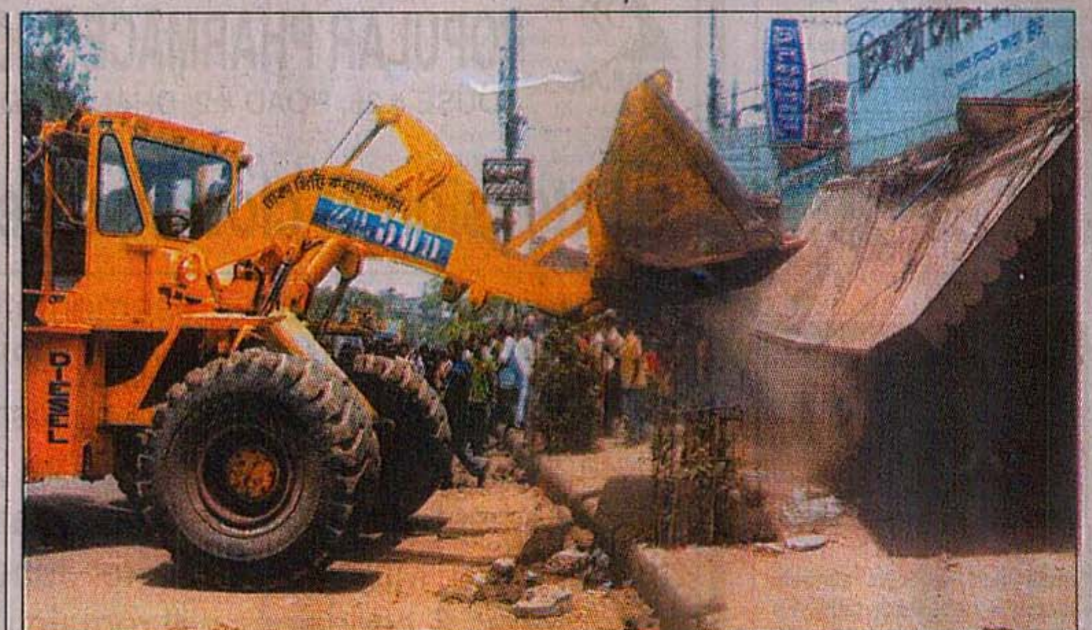
With anticipation of taka losing more of its value, exporters are reported to be hanging on to their foreign exchange retention quota. On a wide category, they can retain

between 10 and 20 percent of their earnings.

With the taka losing its ground, the exporters and wage earners will stand to gain.

"We expect this devaluation of taka to last for an interim period," said a currency dealer of a foreign bank. "Once the NCBs can stock up their tills, dollar price will ease down."

Market was experiencing severe dearth of dollar as the usual sellers held off the supply to meet their own large import payment requirements," said the weekly market update of Citibank. "The inter-bank call money rates remained stable all through the week. Most of the deals traded around 4-4.50 percent."



A bulldozer pulls down an illegal structure at Dholaikhal in Dhaka yesterday as part of a Dhaka City Corporation drive to clear roads and footpaths of such structures.

PHOTO: STAR

Standard Chartered
We believe
seeing is believing
Standard Chartered Operation Theatre & Children's Ward at Ismailia Eye Hospital