

## Sylhet mayor escapes car bomb attack

25 AL activists hurt

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet**

Sylhet Mayor Badaruddin Ahmed Kamran narrowly escaped a car bomb explosion last night that injured at least 25 opposition activists, 47 hours after twin cinema blasts killed a street boy, sending shock waves across Bangladesh.

The blast turned the jeep in which the bomb was planted into a pile of blackened, twisted metal and partly damaged another jeep, five minutes after the mayor went past the porch of Gulshan Hotel, the scene of the blast.

"The car bomb might have killed me, had I not left the hotel in a hurry to join another programme," Badaruddin, also president of Sylhet city Awami League (AL) told reporters. "I'm sure I was the prime target of the attackers."

The mayor attended a workers' meeting of the AL in Gulshan Centre, a conference room of the

hotel in Taltala heart of the north-eastern city, 15 metres off the scene.

His car was parked in the porch. The explosion rocked the area 10 minutes after the meeting ended at 7:40pm.

The condition of seven of the injured, all participants of the meeting, was critical. Three of 22, admitted to MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, were being operated upon when reports last came in.

"A few injured people were groaning in a pool of blood. The vehicle in which the bomb exploded was burning. A broken umbrella, a few pairs of shoes and sandals were strewn on the scene. It was a gory spectacle," a witness said immediately after the blast.

Police cordoned off the area after fire-fighters doused the blaze, he said, adding the law-enforcers picked up the driver of the partly damaged jeep for interrogation.

"We are looking for the owner of the vehicle in which, we believe, the bomb was planted," a top police officer said. "We'll leave no stone unturned in the probe."

**TWIN CINEMA BLASTS**

A team of explosives experts of the army from Dhaka earlier on the day exploded the bomb retrieved from Abokash Cinema on Thursday night at the Police Firing Range near Luckatooah Golf Club.

A top police officer said the bomb, perhaps made locally, matched with the pair that exploded in as many cinemas on Thursday night, killing the street boy and injuring seven.

A team of officials from the Joint Interrogation Cell reached Sylhet on Friday night to interrogate people arrested in connection with the cinema blasts.

Meanwhile, local police began sifting through the evidence and suspects for clues to the crime.



**POLITICS IN RELIEF:** In hope of receiving relief, a flood-hit woman at Kamalapur stadium relief centre displays a card that sports a picture of Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas and paddy sheaf, the election symbol of the ruling BNP, yesterday. The relief cards are supposed to be given under the government's Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme.

## Illegal structures on canals, rivers to be demolished

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

An inter-ministerial committee yesterday decided to demolish illegal structures from 26 canals and rivers in and around the capital for smooth functioning of the drainage system.

The committee in its meeting on formulation of policies and regulations on drainage system of Dhaka City also decided to form an expert committee to prepare plans to recover the encroached waterbodies. A cabinet committee will be formed to implement the plan.

The meeting chaired by LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan viewed that the reasons behind waterlogging in the capital are unplanned urbanisation and illegal encroachments of canals and rivers.

The meeting said encroachers with the help of administration have gobbled up about 70 to 75 percent of canals running through the city. Illegal structures have been set up on both sides of four rivers -- Buriganga, Turag, Balu and Shitalakhyia.

The meeting emphasised acquiring 100 acres of land near the city to



Residents walk on a raised foot-board on Ulon Road in west Rampura yesterday after receding floodwaters bared the damaged, gravelled road.

## IMF sets fresh conditions for NCB reforms

**REJAUL KARIM BYRON**

The IMF has set new time-bound conditions for the government to reform the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) for releasing the next tranche of loan under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility, scheduled for December.

As part of the ongoing reforms to the NCBs, bank-by-bank strategies were finalised in consultation with the IMF and the World Bank last month, which the government has adopted, according to a second review report on the three-year PRGF loan.

Under the strategies, three NCBs -- Rupali, Agrani and Janata which together account for 25 percent of the market share -- would be brought to the point of divestment in full or in part in phases from 2004 to 2006.

Restrictions on foreign ownership would be eased as part of the plan for divestment of the banks. The government intends to allow qualified foreign investors to own shares in a privatised bank in excess of the statutory ceiling of 10 percent on a case by case basis to encourage participation in the competitive bidding process.

The reforms to Rupali Bank, including appointment of a financial adviser to the bank and bringing it to the point of divestment recommended by the adviser, have to be complete by this year.

Agani and Janata banks are to be corporatised by 2005 and 2006 and brought to the point of divestment where they can attract strategic partners to bid for substantial shareholding with full management control.

## Santosh Gupta cremated

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Esteemed journalist, writer and columnist Santosh Gupta was cremated with state honour yesterday.

Hundreds of people from all walks of life and different political, social and cultural organisations paid the last tribute to late Santosh Gupta.

A guard of honour was given to Santosh at the Central Shaheed Minar while his body was draped in the national flag.

Santosh Gupta, senior assistant editor of the Dainik Sangbad, passed away at the Ibrahim Memorial Hospital (BIRDEM) at 2:30am last Friday at the age of 79. He suffered brain haemorrhage.

The coffin carrying Santosh was taken to the Dainik Sangbad office at 10:30am where his colleagues paid homage to the veteran newsmen. Then it was taken to the National Press Club.

The members of the National Press Club and journalists stood in silent tribute to Santosh. They laid wreaths at his coffin.

At 12 noon the body was taken to the Central Shaheed Minar, where Leader of the Opposition in

## Army nets two UPDF men for link with troop killing

**OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rangamati**

Armed forces in Khagrachhari Operational Area on Friday netted two operatives of anti-peace accord United Peoples Democratic Front (UPDF) for suspected links with the Monday's killing of a soldier in Baghaichhari, army sources said.

They also recovered a number of arms and ammunition and various other things.

Sources said Protulmoy Chakma, 20, son of Basanta Chakma has been suspected of being involved in killing the army soldier in Baghaichhari. He hailed from Bongtoli in Baghaichhari upazila under Rangamati district. The other one identified as Binoy Tripura, son

## SEPARATION OF JUDICIARY

# SC asks govt to specify time to fully implement its directives

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The Supreme Court (SC) yesterday ordered the government to specify in 10 days the time it needs to fully implement the court directives given way back in 1999 for separation of the judiciary from the executive.

The government appealed for an additional four months' time, its 19th appeal for deadline extension, prompting a full bench of the

Appellate Division to adjourn the hearing on the petition till August 17. The bench said it would pass its order on that day after considering the government reply on the demand for a specific timeframe.

The SC in a groundbreaking 12-point directive in December 1999 asked the government to separate the judiciary.

Attorney General AF Hassan Arif submitted the prayer for a four-month extension before the

full bench. "Some steps among the 12 SC directives have already been taken and summaries of two rules have been sent to the president for approval," the attorney general told the court.

Upon approval of the draft of two rules governing services of judges and magistrates of the subordinate courts, the process to fully implement all 12 directives of the SC for the separation of judiciary would be

# Extra \$45m needed to address health care

## Diseases overnight afflict nearly 13,000 in deluge-hit areas

**BSS, Dhaka**

Despite intensified efforts to reach medical aid to victims, nearly 13,000 people overnight contacted diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases with further recession of water on flood-hit areas.

Health experts said waterborne diseases would continue to ravage the affected areas for at least the next three months while UN officials here, on condition anonymity, told BSS that Bangladesh would need more than \$43 million to tackle the health crisis alone.

According to the disaster management ministry, the death toll in the current spate of flood reached 691 while the government's central health control room yesterday reported 20 more deaths -- ten in drowning, five in pneumonia, five in snakebites and two in diarrhoea.

Flood Warning Center yesterday reported further fall in water level of major rivers at most points though out of its 86 monitoring points. Rivers at nine points, including Balu at Demra, Turag at Mirpur and Shitalakya, were still flowing above danger marks.

Disaster management ministry said 1.61 million people were still living in officially recorded makeshift shelters as many have lost their homesteads in river erosion.

Food scarcity, loss of work opportunity and fears of losing food and medical aids discouraged many to return home, reports said.

UN officials quoting Disaster Emergency Response Group (DERG) said loss of job and ailments would require the government and aid agencies to provide food aid for the next six months.

## BUS ARSON

# Confessors retract statements, allege police torture

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

Two accused of the June 4 arson attack on a BRTC double-decker, who in their confessional statements had implicated four leaders of Awami League and its front organisations in the crime, retracted the statements yesterday, saying police had forced them to confess.

One of the two, Shafiqul Islam Kalu, a CNG-run three-wheeler driver, was in the custody of Ramna police on the day of bus arson at Sheraton Hotel crossing in the capital that left 10 people killed and at least 20 others injured.

Sub-Inspector (SI) Shamsul Haq who had arrested Kalu on June 2 told The Daily Star yesterday over telephone that the man was at the police station when the attack was made.

Appearing before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Dhaka yesterday, vagonbond Masum and Kalu submitted separate petitions to withdraw their confessional statements, alleging they furnished the statements as police threatened to kill them if they do not obey.

"Police arrested me in Gulistan on July 27, took me to the DB office

## DHAKA-10 BY-POLL

# RO to submit document to HC "manipulating poll officials' reports"

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

The returning officer (RO) of controversial Dhaka-10 parliamentary by-election has prepared a document manipulating the reports of 32 presiding officers on deployment of army for submission to the High Court, the presiding officers alleged.

The polling officers said the RO rejected their reports as they said they did not see any army deployment in their centres during the July 1 ballot in a violation of the High Court order and asked to come up with fresh reports mentioning army presence.

The RO earlier submitted 70 of 103 presiding officers' reports to the High Court in which they

directly skirted the question of army deployment in their centres, but many said they saw army men patrol nearby.

"I don't want to be involved in a problem, so I've submitted a fresh report saying I saw army personnel outside my polling centre," a presiding officer told The Daily Star, requesting anonymity.

Bikalpa Dhara candidate Abdul Mannan filed a contempt of court case against four top government officials accusing them of violating court order on army deployment at each polling centre.

The High Court during the hearing of the case asked RO Mia Mostak



Toxic, untreated tannery wastes of Hazaribagh tannery units are pumped out into the highly-polluted Buriganga, the capital's lifeline, yesterday, putting the river's ecosystem in peril.