

## Dhaka rebuffs New York Times report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka yesterday dismissed a report published in the New York Times (NYT) Magazine headlined 'The Next Islamic Revolution?' as one-sided, baseless and politically motivated.

Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations Iftakhar Ahmed Chowdhury has already sent a rejoinder to the NYT refuting the allegations in the story, saying it is 'baseless, partial and misleading'.

"We are saddened that the report is one-sided. It would not be unusual for the motive behind this report to be political," said Zahirul Haq, director general of the foreign ministry's external publicity wing.

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## CONDITIONS UNMET

# IMF defers \$70m anti-poverty loan

REJAU KARIM BYRON

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has deferred release of a \$70 million instalment of an anti-poverty loan as the government failed to fulfil some conditions including initiation of the Rupali Bank's privatisation.

The fourth instalment on the Poverty Reduction Growth Facility (PRGF) loan was supposed to be disbursed in January.

A finance ministry source said

the instalment would not be available before March even if the best effort is put from now on in fulfilling the IMF conditions. "If we can at least initiate the Rupali Bank's privatisation process by February, the IMF may send a mission late in the next month. And that should help us to get the loan in March," the source added.

Bangladesh earlier followed a reasonably steady track in meeting the IMF's conditions against the 500-million dollar PRGF loan and

received three half-yearly instalments from June 2003.

Ahead of the third instalment in July last year, Bangladesh struggled for the first time to fulfil the donor's conditions. In the end, the IMF, however, allowed the country waiver of some of the conditions. But it warned that in future it would not disburse any further instalment unless all the conditions are fulfilled.

To get the fourth instalment, the

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## Khaleda blasts opposition for anti-Rab stance

UNB, Comilla

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday reprimanded her political opponents for opposing Rab (Rapid Action Battalion) operations, saying that a party does not want the anticrime force as their "terrorists" cannot now unleash terrorism.

"Today, Hazari Bahini, Golondaz Bahini and Osman Bahini cannot stay in the field," she told a public meeting at AR High School ground at Nagarkotin Comilla.

The prime minister said the Rab has been formed through enacting law to curb crimes in the country--one of the main election commitments of her party, BNP.

The prime minister said when

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# Nationwide alert against Nipah epidemic fear

## Rapid response teams formed in districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid fear of a possible Nipah virus epidemic, rapid response teams have been formed in every district to immediately inform the authorities about any outbreak.

The epidemic alert came a day after confirmation from the Directorate General of Health Services that the deadly Nipah virus was the cause of deaths to at least five people in Tangail since January 5.

"It could take an epidemic form as the virus is transmitted from man-to-man," Professor

Mahmudur Rahman, director of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR), told newsmen in Dhaka yesterday.

"The outbreak of Nipah virus in Malaysia and Singapore did not have man-to-man transmission but in our country there was evidence of man-to-man transmission of this virus in Faridpur last year," he said.

The IEDCR director however said they were not yet in a position to say firmly whether the Tangail incidence was man-to-man transmittable.

He said it was ascertained during Nipah's spread in Faridpur last year

that the bat was the carrier of the virus and now they (IEDCR) are again looking into the possibility of bat spreading the virus.

Prof Rahman explained that during winter season people in rural areas drink date juice and bats have concentration on many date trees. Besides, people risk contracting Nipah virus if they consume fruits pecked by bats.

According to experts, bat apart, Nipah virus could be spread from pigs and horses.

But the government lacks capacity

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## Contaminated Wasa water plagues Gulshan

MORSHED ALI KHAN

Highly contaminated water supplied by Dhaka Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) has caused jaundice, typhoid, and other diseases to several hundred residents of Gulshan in the last few months, complain the locals.

In one housing complex at Road-99, House-15B, 24 people have contracted jaundice, 18 people including some expatriates had typhoid while some others complained of severe irritation in bowels, said SM Hasan, the secretary of the Ideal Home Owners Association, who himself has been suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS).

The matter came to light about two weeks ago when some residents of Ideal Home noticed foul odour in the water they use. Mrs Hasan said that almost all the family members including the maids had complained of serious stomach ache. Other residents of the building too showed the same symptoms. Against such a backdrop they decided to clean the building's water reservoir and were dismayed to find human excreta floating in the water. They immediately informed Dhaka Wasa of it and disconnected the supply pipe. Wasa has ever since

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PHOTO: STAR

After spending a long spell of Eid vacation at home, people are coming back to the capital as seen in the crowded Kamalapur Railway Station yesterday.

# Pilgrim stampede kills 300 in India

REUTERS, Mumbai

As many as 300 Hindu pilgrims, including women and children, may have been crushed or burned to death in a stampede and fire near a temple in western India Tuesday, the district's top official said.

A fire broke out in roadside stalls when more than 150,000 people were on an annual pilgrimage to the popular Mandher Dev temple, on a hilltop near Wai, about 160 miles southeast of Mumbai, witnesses said.

Scores were crushed to death on the steep and narrow hill path leading to the temple and many others were charred, they said.

Reporters saw at least 100 bodies at the site.

"We cannot confirm it, but it appears that 250 to 300 people are dead," Subbarao Patil, district collector for Satara district where the temple is located, told a correspondent for Asia News International television.

"This does not include the people who may have been charred to death in the shops that have been gutted nearby in the fire."

Dishevelled and mangled bodies were lined up and tin-roofed stalls

were smoldering near the temple and the adjoining settlement, situated on a craggy hilltop about 4,000 feet high, the ANI reporter said.

"There more than a hundred dead bodies lying around and dozens of others have already been sent down to Wai by bus," she told Reuters by phone.

"It is utter mayhem here. The sheds are still smoldering."

WETSTEPS

Witnesses said the stampede started around midday after pilgrims slipped on the temple's steep stone steps, which had become wet from coconuts broken as an offering to the local deity Kalubai.

A fire then broke out in shops nearby and gas cylinders exploded, officials said.

The 300-year-old temple is popular among lower caste Hindus who undertake the annual pilgrimage on a full-moon day in January and participate in a 24-hour-long festival that includes ritual animal sacrifices to the goddess.

In 2003, more than 32 people died at a stampede in Nasik, another town in the western Maharashtra state, during the Kumbh Mela, or Grand Pitcher festival.

## Govt to withdraw extortion charges against BNP MP Pintu

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to withdraw the extortion charges against the ruling BNP lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu.

The case had been filed against him three years back during the present government rule. And he had been arrested and given one month's detention under the Special Powers Act.

The government has been examining the documents of the case, which would be withdrawn shortly, told the lawyer of the lawmaker.

Earlier the home ministry in a letter to the District Magistrate, Dhaka on March 18 last year said the case was filed against Pintu for political harassment and so it has decided to withdraw the charges.

The ministry asked the magistrate to send the matter to the Public Prosecutor (PP) who would take necessary steps to withdraw the charges against the lawmaker with permission of the proper court. The ministry also asked the magistrate to inform it of the latest development in this matter.

After receipt of the letter, Advocate Gazi Towhidul Islam,

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## Bhomra land port paralysed for 7 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Export-import through Bhomra land port in Sadar upazila remains suspended for the last seven days as the Indian authorities stopped movement of vehicles on the 11-km-long Shojadanga-Basirhat road on the Indian side opposite to Bhomra for reconstruction of the dilapidated road.

At least 200 trucks loaded with goods have been stranded across the border causing heavy losses to traders. The stalemate in export-import might continue till tomorrow and the government will incur heavy revenue losses, Bhomra Clearing and Forwarding Agents Association (C&F) sources said.

President of the association Habibur Rahman mentioned that earlier export-import through the land port remained suspended from October 18 to 27 as Shojadanga citizen's committee enforced a strike demanding reconstruction of the road.

Shojadanga C&F Agents Association President Gopal Sander and General Secretary Dipu Banerjee said repair of the dilapidated road that began on Wednesday last will continue till tomorrow, according to reports received from across the border.

# High call money rate threatens investment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The inter-bank call money rate that started rising sharply before the Eid-ul-Azha continued to remain high after the Eid. Bankers apprehend this rising trend may cast a negative impact on investment.

Even after Bangladesh Bank injected Tk 120 crore to stabilise the call money market, the rate remained at 50 percent yesterday. Leasing companies also had to borrow money from private banks at an unusually high rate of 50 percent.

As the leasing companies are borrowing money at a high rate, their cost of fund is going up that will ultimately affect the borrowing rates, the bankers say.

Moreover, dollar was still showing strength in the currency market but most of the exporters and remitters are not getting its fruits because of lower rates offered by the nationalised commercial banks (NCBs).

Bankers say the high rate of dollar could not bring benefit for all

as a sizeable amount of remittance is channelled through the NCBs. A major portion of the exporters also deals with the NCBs offering a rate Tk 2 to Tk 3 lower than that of private and foreign banks.

The greenback was sold at the highest Tk 63 in the inter-bank foreign exchange market that has been witnessing such a high rate for the last one month. The exchange rate of dollar hovered around Tk 62 during the last few weeks.

A continuous rise in imports also contributed to the high rate of dollar. Imports grew by 25.32 percent in the first four months of the current financial year, which was 19.67 percent during the same period of last fiscal.

"Pressures for import payments rose substantially in the recent weeks," said an official at the Motijheel branch of Agrani Bank.

About the high call money rate, bankers say the rate continued to rise because of the banks' strategy to keep an average four percent Cash

Reserve Ratio (CRR) in a fortnight as per rules. They are allowed to bring the CRR down to three percent in anyway.

The bankers took the opportunity before Eid when there was huge demand for cash and now they will need to deposit the additional amount to cover the average level. It may take a couple of days to get the situation normalised, the bankers say.

"I hope the situation may improve next week when traders and shop owners would deposit money to the banks," said Khondakar Ibrahim Khaled, managing director of Pubali Bank Ltd. He said 'risky' banking has created such a situation.

The aggressive and risky banking by some private banks also contributed to the rise of call money rate. The deposit-credit ratio of some of these banks rose to 100 percent that forced them to borrow money from call money market.

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## Police deny report on Bangla Bhai attempt on UP chairman

BSS, Rajshahi

The local police administration has ruled out yesterday's media reports on the activities of police and the so-called Bangla Bhai regarding an attempt on the life of Mokbul Hossain Mridha, 45, chairman of Sreepur Union Parishad (UP) under Baghmara upazila on the night of Eid-ul-Azha.

Police in a statement here also termed the reports fabricated, imaginary, false, baseless and motivated.

It said the anti-government quarters were conspiring through publishing such reports centring the so-called Bangla Bhai with a view to destroying the image of the government as well as the police force to fish in the troubled waters for political mileage.

"The fact is that UP Chairman Mokbul Hossain Mridha, also president of Sreepur Union Awami League, along with some of his followers was returning home from his office at 8:45pm on the night," police said.

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# Defiant JMJB keeps on reign of panic

## AL postpones hartal amid security fears; another JMJB leader held

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Awami League postponed its half-day hartal in Bagmara upazila yesterday amid a reign of panic as Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB) remained unruffled and buried its three lynched operatives boasting them as Muslim martyrs.

Police arrested JMJB Bagmara chief Abdus Sattar Master yesterday taking the number of arrestees for involvement in Sunday's attack on law enforcers during a JMJB protest against the lynching to 65.

Followers of dreaded JMJB operations leader Bangla Bhai were keeping a round-the-clock vigil in the fright-stricken area, as were their opponents -- Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and police.

Abdur Rahim, a JMJB leader, told the press their leaders have declared the lynched men martyrs, as "they were killed while on a religious mission and so deserved a martyr's

burial."

Mob lynched Abdur Rahman, Ibrahim Hossain and Abdul Baki Murad at Khoira village Saturday night immediately after they and other JMJB men had bombed to death AL leader Mahub Hossain

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## Do or die for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will go into the third one-day international against Zimbabwe in Chittagong today for a win to keep the five-match series alive.

The home side is already 2-0 down after defeats in Dhaka by 22 runs followed by a 31-run submission in the port city either side of the Eid vacation.

The crucial match will start at 9 am at the MA Aziz Stadium with Bangladesh Television providing live

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