

Bogra bigots ready

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At least 20,000 supporters of International Khatme Nabuwat Movement (IKNMB) will join in the 'peaceful programme', said Maulana Abdul Hoque Azad, president of the anti-Ahmadiyya outfit's Bogra district chapter.

Organisers of the 'besiege programme' will try to avoid untoward incidents, Azad added.

Superintendent of Police (SP) Kazi Mortaj said that additional police forces have already been deployed to maintain law and order in the area.

Sources at the district administration, however, said the measures taken by the police so far are not enough. If supporters of the IKNMB do not co-operate, it would be hard for them [police] to avert disorder, added the sources.

ASK'S CONCERN
Fearing deterioration of law and order during the programme, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) yesterday asked the government to take steps to ensure security of the Ahmadiyyas.

Expressing concern over 'attacks,

threats and tortures' on Ahmadiyyas across the country, ASK stressed the importance of prompt actions by the authorities to avoid bloody confrontations.

CONFERENCE IN DHAKA
International Majlish-e Tahaffuz-e Khatme Nobuwat Bangladesh (IMTKNB) holds a conference today at Paltan Maidan to demand the government declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims.

Leaders of the organisation said they have completed the preparations, and hope that people in thousands from across the country would attend the conference after Juma prayers.

Processions were brought out in the capital and other parts of the country yesterday to drum up support for the programme.

Addressing a preparatory meeting in Dhaka yesterday, IMTKNB President and Khatib of Baitul Mukarram National Mosque Obaidul Haque said that it would be tough to save Islam, if people do not join in forcing the government to declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslims.

Donors for electoral

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present at the meet.

Wallich said poor governance is holding back Bangladesh. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) is a vehicle that lists the government's priorities, she said, and termed the 7 percent GDP growth targeted by the PRSP ambitious, which she said will not be materialised [due to lack of good governance].

On the other hand, she also felt that the present 5 percent economic growth is not enough for Bangladesh and that ongoing reforms in health, education and other areas should be made deeper.

The governance in the country is not considered as satisfactory, Bourguignon said, adding, "It's a problem for Bangladesh, though it has achieved significant progress in meeting the targets towards millennium development goals."

He said governance is a very difficult area and is an issue that belongs to Bangladesh government

and the society. He was of the opinion that [with proper governance] Bangladesh could do much better, as well as its neighbours.

The WB chief economist said, like many countries, aid and its management is also a big problem for Bangladesh, where there are severe inefficiencies in health, education and other areas.

"We are insisting on further liberalisation that would help improve competitiveness in the garments sector, where Bangladesh is doing very well," Bourguignon said.

He was also of the opinion that import is a cumbersome procedure in Bangladesh and ban on yarn import through land ports is making the knitwear sector less competitive, which again is a governance problem.

Taking part in the discussion, Debrajan said the ultra-poor, who do not have access to education and other basic requirements, are still a problem for Bangladesh.

Nepal frees 8 leaders

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an official of the Nepal Communist Party-United Marxist and Leninist, toldAFP:

Others freed included student leaders and former lawmakers.

But two former prime ministers Girija Prasad Koirala, Nepal's first elected prime minister, and Sher Bahadur Deuba, who was fired by the king when he seized power, remained under house arrest.

King Gyanendra seized control of Nepal on February 1, firing the government, imposing emergency rule and vowing to tackle an increasingly bloody Maoist revolt that has claimed 11,000 lives since 1996.

He has given himself three years to restore peace and democracy.

Rights groups say over 400 activists are in detention or under house arrest.

But Nepal's royal-appointed foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey said in New Delhi that "very few people are in detention."

Word of the release of the eight came after the World Bank said late Wednesday it was freezing release of more aid to Nepal, while it assessed events on the ground including protection of human rights.

Nepal relies on international donor aid and loans for more than half its development budget to prop up an economy devastated by the Maoist insurgency.

India Wednesday called the situation in Nepal 'disturbing' and said it was in touch with other nations to develop a coordinated response to King Gyanendra's power seizure in the Himalayan nation.

"India is concerned a further deterioration of the situation in Nepal will result in spillover effects across the open border particularly in neighbouring (Indian) states," junior External Affairs Minister E. Ahamed told parliament.

Ahamed's statements reported by the Press Trust of India followed a three-day visit by Nepal's foreign minister Ramesh Nath Pandey to New Delhi that wound up Wednesday.

During Pandey's trip, Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh urged King Gyanendra to mend fences with Nepal's political parties to stem a rapidly "deteriorating" economic and security situation in the kingdom.

Galib sent

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A police contingent picked up handcuffed Galib on a prison van from jail gate at 3:45am under tight security. Galib was then handed over to Dhaka Cantonment police station.

Meanwhile, a nine-day remand by Gopalganj police is still awaiting Galib, said police.

Galib had been brought in Gaibandha shown arrested in two bomb blast incidents, one on an open stage drama at Takier bazar under Palashbari upazila on December 26 and another on Mohimaganj Brac office on February 12.

Lawyers of Galib moved a bail petition yesterday upon which the magistrate court fixed March 12 for its hearing.

Earlier, police filed two cases under the Explosives Act. Gaibandha police in a rapid drive on February 23 arrested 15 persons suspecting involved in the bomb attack on the Brac office.

During interrogation arrested Habibur Rahman alias Jubayer and Raju Sardar confessed their involvement in the incident and links with activists of Jamaat-ul-Mujaheddin outfit. They also mentioned Dr Galib as their central leader.

Violence epidemic

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defeated forces of 1971 had not been brought under trial," said Dr Reza Kibria, son of slain Kibria.

Reza called upon general people of the country to take stand against all types of killing and grenade attack for the interest of the future generation.

Presided over by Dhaka University Teachers' Association President AAMS Arefin Siddique, the meeting was also addressed by former justice KM Sobhan, advocate Gazilul Haque and economist Atiur Rahman.

BDNEWS adds that thousands of people from all walks of life participated in a silent procession yesterday afternoon to protest killings in grenade and bomb attacks and terrorism across the country. The procession at the call of Asma Kibria, wife of the slain AL leader Shah AMS Kibria, started from the Teacher Student Centre (TSC) of Dhaka University and ended at the

Central Shaheed Minar.

At the end of the procession, eminent lawyer Barrister Amirul Islam, Asma Kibria and her daughter Nazli Kibria along with others released pigeons, the emblem of peace.

In a brief rally there, Asma Kibria said people do not want to see any act of terrorism, killing and violence.

"We do not want to see any killing like that of Kibria," Asma Kibria said adding, "Until and unless such heinous killings are stopped, our movement will continue."

Among others Dr Reza Kibria, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) leader Hasanul Haque Inu, Awami League (AL) leader Obaidul Qader, Advocate Rahmat Ali, MP Jahangir Kabir Nanak eminent cultural personality Ramendu Majumder and Tarana Halim were present.

Bush's policy

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the swing vote which we need to win in order to defeat terrorism," he added, insisting it was "time to raise the bar" on international standards of human rights protection.

Roth meanwhile admitted there were some people who would always seek to sow terror but said attempts should be focused on winning the hearts and minds of those who were not so minded.

"There are certain people, epitomised perhaps by Osama Bin Laden, who you will never convince to give up terrorism," Roth said.

Fellow panel participants couched their language in more diplomatic terms, befitting their status as former frontline politicians.

"It is time to step up to the plate and find a definition for terrorism," said Panyarachun.

The United Nations has been working on producing a new convention on combating terrorism which UN Secretary General Kofi Annan was to expound upon in a keynote address to the conference later Thursday with an overarching actual definition of the issue in the UN's sights.

Tough actions

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Dhaka, five in Barisal, three in Chittagong, and one each in Comilla and Sylhet Board. Five examinees were expelled at different examination centres under Barisal Education Board. Of all the districts, Kurigram under Rajshahi Board had the highest 35 students disqualified.

Our Correspondent from Jessore adds: Only three examinees all from Jhenidah district, were expelled in Jessore Education Board.

Our Correspondent from Dinajpur adds: Four examinees were expelled on the first day of SSC examinations while 15,669 candidates appeared at 23 centres of the district.

State Minister for Education ANM Ehsanul Hoque Milon in surprise visits inspected different centres in Narsingdi, Comilla and Chandpur districts.

The state minister flew on a helicopter to these centres, but could not find any instances of cheating, one press release said.

The minister, however, found an abandoned OMR (optical mark reader) on a window panel at a centre in Chandpur. He quizzed on duty teachers regarding this and asked to submit a report to the ministry, the statement added.

Dhaka jailer

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lapse in security and discipline in the country's largest prison.

After his suspension, Jail Superintendent Harun-Ur-Rashid was attached to the Directorate of Prisons.

Meanwhile, jailer Kamrul Huda was suspended after his transfer to Netrokona District Jail.

Assistant Inspector General (Prisons) Abdul Mannan has been given the additional duty of jail superintendent, while Netrokona Jailor Arifur Rahman has been appointed as jailer of the DCJ. Sources said the step was taken after accomplices of Idul, a notorious criminal and the prime accused in the killing of two policemen in Motijheel, nearly snatched him from the custody of two jail guards when he was taken without proper security measures to Shyamoli for diagnosis on February 8. A Daily Star investigation discovered that certain jail officials were involved in the snatching plan.

Adding to the unruly atmosphere at DCJ, a number of prisoners mercilessly beat a detainee, Abdus Sattar Shikder alias Kana Sattar, who has been accused of murder and possession of firearms, inside the DCJ in the early hours of February 27. When he reported the matter to the jailer later in the day, Subedar Fazlul beat him again, breaking several of his bones. Sattar described the whole incident before the court on March 1 and a non-government jail inspection team found proof to substantiate his claim.

Opposition

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General Secretary Abdul Jalil said they call hartals to create pressure on the government.

"We do not want to call hartals but the government forces us to do so," said the AL general secretary adding that the police obstruct peaceful programmes like rally and procession and often charge baton on the activists participating in such programmes.

He also said that the government is arresting leaders and workers of the AL from across the country, which is prompting the party to go for hartal.

Asked about dialogue to resolve political crisis, Jalil said the AL has no problem to pursue dialogue with the government if there is a conducive atmosphere.

"How can we sit for dialogue at a time when our leaders and workers are being killed?" Jalil said.

Giving his reaction regarding the UNDP report, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon also admitted that hartal harms the country's economy.

Menon also pointed out the unfriendly behaviour of the police adding, "Calling hartal and strike is a democratic right of the citizens. So, it is their discretion when they will apply it. The UNDP is not authorised to give advice on this issue."

Hartals damage the country's economy and that is why the BNP is trying to build up public opinion against hartals, said the BBC Bangla Service quoting the BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

Hartal eats up 3-4pc

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hartals were called to oppose language restrictions."

"If Bangladesh could save the economic and social losses due to hartals, the nation could aspire to match the outstanding progress being made by other countries in Asia," he noted.

Not everyone agreed with the findings of the report. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairperson of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), who was also present at the programme to release the report, pointed out that it is not scientific to calculate GDP losses by depending on the number of hartal days alone.

"I am not saying that hartal is not damaging our economy... it obviously affected the economic growth," he said, adding, "What I want to point out is that more and extensive analysis is necessary to calculate the loss due to strikes."

"We have witnessed the highest growth during the late 1980s when the number of hartals was also highest," he said, adding that does not mean that the more hartals, the more growth.

Asked about the actual figure of GDP loss due to hartals, he replied, "I can't say as I didn't study the matter."

He continued, "It's a useful work of the UNDP. But its usefulness will depend on the people for whom it has been made," he said, pointing to the politicians.

Professor Nasreen Khundker of Dhaka University, who estimated the figure of GDP loss, defended her calculations at the programme.

"This figure should still be taken as a rough estimate. Nevertheless it does provide an idea of the severe economic and development impact of hartals."

"A qualitative analysis of the impact of hartals focusing on a few sectors, including the garment, transport, retail, small business and public sectors, is provided," she said, adding, "Focus group discussions with these groups allowed us to gauge the different impacts on workers in these sectors, and to identify the coping strategies used to recoup losses."

IMPACT ON EDUCATION:
The UNDP study says hartals adversely affect students, teachers and parents as well as the institutions and their authorities, resulting in missed classes and disrupted examinations, as well as a considerable level of stress over security concerns, career prospects and financial situations.

According to the report, many are now calling today's students the 'delayed-generation' as their wait to graduate and enter the workforce becomes longer and longer, causing financial strain on their families.

SURVEY SHOWS NO TO HARTAL:
According to the report, 95 per cent of the more than 3000 people polled believe that hartals damage the economy and society through hampered business activities, lack of access to health and education facilities, damage to property and loss of income.

About 70 per cent said there are alternatives to hartals, including public rallies, discussions in parliament, road marches and sit-in demonstrations.

ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO RAISE CONCERNS:
Both the major political parties have equally used national strikes as a means of protest, the report said, suggesting that all parties co-operate to remove disputes and make the Parliament a place open to all debates.

"Hartal should be use as a last resort to protest and the parties should use alternative ways to raise concerns including forming human chain, signature campaigns, mock parliaments and sit-in programmes, says the report prepared by ten Bangladeshi authors.

The report has also suggested a number of long-term alternatives, including replacing the existing plurality method of election with proportionate representation for a more consensual political system, and reducing the tenure of parliament from five to four years to allow opposition parties more frequent opportunities to consult with the electorate.

The report also recommended that the government establish basic watchdog agencies such as the Ombudsman, a human rights commission, and an effective anti-corruption commission.

Speaking at yesterday's conference, the UNDP representative maintained that the report is neither an aid for the ruling BNP, which is now voicing its concern against the negative impact of hartals, nor a critique of the main opposition Awami League, which is presently calling hartals.

He later displayed photographs of world leaders shaking hands, including the prime ministers of India and Pakistan, and Israel and Palestine. Holding up a photograph of prime minister Khaleda Zia and opposition leader Sheikh Hasina, he urged them to sit together, saying, "It's time for us to catch up."

BNP not wary

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Besides, efforts are on to avert an anti-government alliance by Ershad-led JP, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh of former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury and some rightwing parties. BNP policymakers have also chalked out some political programmes to face the situation if Ershad-led JP joins hands with the AL, BNP sources mentioned.

"JP might face a major split in case it joins hands with AL ahead of the next general election. But a section of BNP leaders do not trust Ershad and advised the party high command to keep vigil on his political moves," one source said.

BNP leaders believe that none of the two factions of the IOJ would desert the ruling coalition because they are aware of its consequences for them.

The government knows that leader of one faction of the IOJ Fazlul Haq Aminul MP had 'secret meetings' with some quarters, and it might be linked to financial matters, a BNP leader said without giving details.

He also said BNP might go for a bigger alliance with most of the rightwing parties before the next general election.

Only FBI probe

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been being influenced in different ways, we will not accept its findings even if made public," she said. "We demand to see the chronological records in the case diary."

Much of the evidence in the killing has been damaged deliberately or otherwise since the day of occurrence, she said.

Dr Nazli Kibria, daughter of SAMS Kibria, said referring to her talks with the US State Department that the US is prepared to send the FBI team to investigate the killing but its terms of reference is yet to be accepted by Bangladesh.

"They say that Bangladesh does not agree to their demand for working independently," said Nazli.

She also said that the investigation should have transparency and accountability in the whole process beginning from the grenade attack on Kibria in Habiganj to his death in Dhaka.

"We demand fully independent participation of the FBI in the investi-

gation," said Kibria's son Dr Reza Kibria, "but we do not have trust in government's 'sincere will' in this regard."

Dr Reza had recently been to Australia to organise his colleagues at the Griffith University and his father's former colleagues there to mobilise public opinion for fair investigation and trial of his father's killing.

Apart from serving as the UN under secretary and finance minister of Bangladesh, SAMS Kibria had also been the High Commissioner to Australia during 1973 to 1976.

Asma Kibria said that her family is going to form a peaceful human chain along the Manik Mia Avenue on March 31 displaying thousands of signatures collected from across the country on long pieces of cloths in protest against Kibria's killing.

Both Nazli and Reza Kibria have been working to mobilise a movement in North America and Australia for a fair trial of their father's killing.

4 BNP men shown

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the January 27 Boiddier Bazar grenade attack.

The three other arrestees are Laskarpur Union BNP President Jamir Ali, Laskarpur Union Zia Smrity and Gobeshana Parishad President Joyanal Abedin Momin and driver Tajul Islam of Bhadoi village.

A local magistrate court ordered to show them arrested in the cases on Wednesday, 41 days into the savage attack, and granted the investigation officers concerned to take the arrestees on a weeklong remand.

The cases were filed by Habiganj District Awami League Organising Secretary Abdul Majid Khan in connection with the attack that killed five people including Awami League lawmaker and former finance minister SAMS Kibria and injured many others.

One of the cases is under Penal Code 302 and the other under the clause 3 of Explosives Act. Assistant Superintendent of Police of Criminal Investigation Department Munshi Atiqur Rahman and Officer-in-Charge of Habiganj Sadar Police Station Mohammad Shafuazzaman are the investigation officers of the cases.

A five-member probe committee was also formed into the attack on January 28 led by Sylhet Deputy Inspector General AKM Mahfuzul Haque.

Shopping malls

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Several owners of retail stores here expressed utter surprise at the government decision, saying there is no justification in restricting power supply to the shopping malls.

They said the government may hold this place to be a leisure spot, but shopping malls have been built to provide all kinds of goods to the customers.

"There are many other provisions to restrict the use of power. The government could have banned street billboards, limited streetlights and checked the use of air coolers round the clock," said Habibur Rahman, owner of a retail shop at ARA Centre in Dhanmondi.

The leaders of the retail shop owners association in a press release yesterday protested the government move.

Terming the decision 'unjustified', they raised the question as to why the general public and business community would suffer for the government's failure to ensure adequate power supply.

"It's a threat to us as the government should ensure electricity supply to all business houses. An alternative method should be worked out instead of keeping the businesses closed," the news release said.

The state minister for power could not be contacted for his comments last night.

Govt to seek

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Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), CID, and Attorney General's Office.

The force will have expertise to investigate money laundering cases and it will use the BB as a source of information, data and expertise. Members of the force will be carefully selected and they will be paid higher salary to prevent corruption among them.

The government last year took these decisions and later assigned the law ministry to suggest the structure of the strike force and the BB to recommend how the FIU will be formed.

"We have drafted a report on the proposed FIU suggesting that the central bank's Anti-Money Laundering Department can be converted into the FIU," said a BB high official. "When approved by the governor, we will send the report to the finance ministry."

Officials from the ACC and home and law ministries may be deputed to the FIU to run it, he said.

Meanwhile, the law ministry suggested to the finance ministry an amendment to the AMLA to create legal provisions for the striking force. Accordingly, the BB is now drafting an amendment and will finalise it soon, BB officials said.

These issues came up in the wake of various recommendations of the US government's Financial Sector Assessment Team that visited Dhaka in 2002 as part of the American drive to stop fund flow to international terrorist groups. The government in April last year in principle decided to form the FIU and the strike force.

3 of a family

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As Ataur denied giving them the money, the culprits threw acid on the family, they added.

Police arrested seven people. BSEHR Secretary General Sigma Huda and Executive Director Elina Khan in a joint statement yesterday said acid and domestic violence is increasing in alarming rate.

They added that death toll in acidburns has increased much in the villages and towns.

"Women are still being treated with medieval brutality in the 21st century, while acid violence is occurring frequently despite the Acid Violation Prevention Act," the statement said.

They demanded immediate trial and stern punishment of acid-throwers and urged all to build a civil society.

Tendulkar

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Nearly 30,000 spectators skipped a heartbeat when Tendulkar drove seamer Navedul Hasan upplishly to Asim Kamal, who held a brilliant low catch at gully to deny the master batsman a world mark.

The new ball did the trick as Navedul struck with his fourth delivery, inducing a false stroke from Tendulkar who had been battling with extreme caution during his 202-ball knock containing 11 fours.

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Venkatsai Laxman (33) and Irfan Pathan (one) were at the crease when bad light stopped play six overs before the scheduled close.

Tendulkar also fell 27 short of becoming only the fifth batsman to complete 10,000 Test runs after Australians Allan Border and Steve Waugh, compatriot Sunil Gavaskar and West Indian Brian Lara.

India were indebted to Virender Sehwag, who was overnight 95, for posting a big total as the opener was involved in three big partnerships.

Sehwag, who hammered a robust 173 for his ninth Test hundred, put on 113 for the opening wicket with Gautam Gambhir on Wednesday, 103 for the next with Rahul Dravid (50) and 118 for the third with Tendulkar.

He dominated an inexperienced Pakistani attack with a wide range of strokes as he smashed two sixes and 19 fours in his 244-ball knock.

Indian captain Sourav Ganguly, however, failed to impress during a score of 21.

11 Bangladeshis perish

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two brokers – Reazul Islam Raju and Mostak Ahmed – of Dohar Travel Agency housed at Basundhara in the city's Baridhara area for the trip, said. Syed Mozakker Hossain who has lost two brothers to the tragedy.

Mosaddeq Hossain and Shamsuzzaman Himel were his two siblings who perished, along with nine others, in their desperate effort to migrate by any means to a more affluent economy.

Mozakker Hossain said he met broker Raju of Mollah Bari, Dohar twice before paying him for his brothers' trip.

"The agency flew them to Dubai and from there took them to Mali," Mozakker told The Daily Star. "I had a talk with them over telephone for a minute when they were at Mali."

Their condition there was really bad, Mozakker said, adding, "They again called us after reaching Morocco by road, saying there the condition became even worse."

"They said they were not given adequate food during the 11 days it took them to reach Morocco from Mali. They were utterly dejected," he said, quoting one of his brothers as saying, "We would not have come here if we knew how much suffering was awaiting us."

Moroccan police arrested the group as they were travelling without proper documents and sent them to Algeria, Mozakker said. "The brokers again smuggled them back to Morocco," he added.

In Morocco the brokers put them on board a boat for a supposedly four-and-a-half-hour trip to Spain, said Mozakker.

But the captain of the boat lost his direction and headed for another

way, resulting in their scanty supply of food, water and fuel running out soon.

After a aimless floating about on the Mediterranean for nine days without any food and water, the aspirant migrants started to drop dead one after another.

Of the brothers, Mosaddek was the first to go on February 23. His body was thrown into the sea. His brother Himel followed him the next day.

The death toll would have passed beyond the 11 if the Algerian Navy did not rescue the surviving passengers of the boat.

One of Mozakker's relatives residing in Spain noticed the rescue news aired on the national TV channel. He inquired about the dead and relayed the sad news to Mozakker, who later talked with one of the survivors named Mintu at the hospital. Mintu provided him with the details of the ordeal.

The identities of the rest of the team could not be known.

MINISTER SAYS
When contacted yesterday evening, Expatriate's Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Mohammad Quamrul Islam admitted to the accident and said, "I've always discouraged people to go abroad illegally." He told The Daily Star to contact the foreign ministry for details.

On whether his ministry would take any action against the travel agency accused of sending the people abroad illegally, Islam said the travel agencies are not under his jurisdiction and told The Daily Star to contact the civil aviation and tourism ministry.

BDR, BSF declare

FROM PAGE 1
point in both the areas, violating Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Accord, 1974, commonly known as the Mujib-Indira treaty.

Two Bangladeshis nationals were bullet-hit in the fight at Lalmonirhat.

Our correspondents and sources in the BDR headquarters said inhabitants of the areas were still panicky over the incident.

BDR personnel have been put on high alert and they have stepped up patrol along the border.

LALMONIRHAT SITUATION
At yesterday's flag meeting, BDR team led by Lt Col Monjur Ahad Helal, commanding officer of Lalmonirhat 19 Rifle Battalion, agreed to the proposal of ceasefire on condition that BSF would not resume construction of fences on the no-man's land.

Commander of Kuchbihar 6 BSF Battalion KS Gunjial led the Indian side.

Col Lutfar Rahman and Brigadier AK Bhanot are likely to meet at a sector-commander-level flag meeting in the next two days to discuss and resolve the outstanding border issues, reports BSS.

INDIAN SPY HELD
BDR personnel held a highly trained Indian spy with a self-loaded rifle (SLR) and 12 bullets, sent to Singrimari border by the commander of 6 BSF Battalion yesterday morning.

During interrogation, the spy, Constable Shyam Shakhur, admitted to his espionage activities along the border since the gunfight erupted on Wednesday, BSS reported quoting official sources and frontier people.

He was later handed over to BSF authorities through a battalion commander-level flag meeting along Bamunpara border in Sapahar upazila of Naogaon.

Clinton

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more surgery on his chest.

Clinton, 58, was scheduled to check himself into New York-Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia University Medical Center early Thursday for a low-risk operation to remove fluid and scar tissue that developed in his left lung after his quadruple heart bypass six months ago.

Doctors were expected to perform the new procedure sometime in the morning. It is done through a small incision or with a video-assisted thoracoscope inserted between the ribs.

Chinese PM's visit

FROM PAGE 1
Khaleda Zia's visit to China in early 2003.

"Chinese diplomats have met some government high officials and told them there had been no economic gains from the past visits [of the premiers to each other's countries]," said a diplomatic source. "They told the officials, if Bangladesh shows no positive signal, China will have to think again about the premier's visit."

The sources said China expects Bangladesh to give two projects – one in telecoms and the other of a power plant installation – final go-aheads within this month.

Of the two, the Executive Committee on National Economic Council (Ecenc) on February 27 approved the digital telecoms project under which five lakh phones will be installed at district headquarters with \$400 million supplier's credit. China will charge a very low interest rate, 2.5 percent, against the loan.

The project is now awaiting the prime minister's approval.

The telecoms project was initially awarded to a Chinese company at a cost of \$500 million during the lag end of the Awami League government. After the BNP-led coalition had come to power, it suspended the project and brought allegations of corruption against it in its much-publicised White Paper on Awami League government's corruption. But the project has been revived again when former Chinese prime minister Zhu Rongji visited Bangladesh in January 2002.

The other is the 210-megawatt Khulna thermal power plant initialised in 2000. Following an international tender, in which 19 companies participated, only one Chinese company named CMEC submitted a turnkey proposal under supplier's credit.

When the BNP took over the office it stalled this project too, after asking China if it would agree to change the loan into 'soft' from supplier's credit, to which China said no.

In early 2003, during Khaleda Zia's China visit, the government

revived this project through signing a MoU. After that, the power ministry asked China to submit a brand new proposal. Although China was reluctant to rework the proposal, it submitted one in February 2004. Ever since, the government has not responded to China on the revised proposal.

According to the proposal, the power plant will be set up within 36 months of agreement at a cost of \$129 million. Sources said the Power Development Board (PDB) has reviewed the proposal and found it much cheaper than other projects of similar sizes. "If it was awarded in due time, it would have had gone into operation by now," quipped a source.

If the government okays both the power and the telecoms projects, China will agree to a Bangladesh proposal to provide a low-interest state credit to set up a water treatment plant and another for a sewerage system in Dhaka, sources said.

Both these projects – the North Dhaka (East) Sewerage Treatment Plant and the Pagla Water Treatment Plant – had been okayed by the AL government under supplier's credit and suspended by the BNP government. But the coalition government signed MoUs for them again in 2003.

The sewerage plant outlines a high cost of \$95 million and the Pagla plant outlines an exorbitant cost of \$230 million. Bangladesh has told China that these projects are 'non-profitable' and therefore China should consider low-interest state credit.

"China is a good friend of Bangladesh," said Foreign Ministry Additional Secretary MD Khairuzzaman. "Our problems with China have been resolved. No project is suspended."

On Khulna power project, he said, "It takes time to work on a power project. We are making progress there."

He also said that the foreign ministry is now working on the agendas for the Chinese premier's visit.