

## Donors warned not to interfere

Says PM in JS, denies Islamist militancy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in parliament yesterday warned the donor agencies and foreign nations against interfering in the country's domestic affairs.

"I want to tell them firmly that we won't put up with such interference," she said amid loud desk thumping by treasury bench deputies, and denied existence of any Islamist militancy or religious extremism in the country.

"We don't care for anyone's browbeating and dictation," the

prime minister said. "We'll build the nation with the help of 28 crore hands of its 14 crore people."

"I want to tell the foreigners categorically that Bangladesh will not be run by any dictats or orders of any foreign force," Khaleda told the house discussing on a thanksgiving motion on the president's speech to parliament amid a boycott by Awami League (AL) lawmakers.

"We've parliament and laws to govern the country, and there's no necessity of any one dictating us," she said. "We've won our independence through a bloody war and

sacrificed lives for our mother tongue, and these sacrifices won't move at any body's frown or dictates."

The leader of the house accused the main opposition AL of conspiring with foreign agencies to oust her government and of projecting Bangladesh as a failed state. She urged the opposition to desist from such activities.

Khaleda said sensing defeat in the next parliamentary elections AL has launched an anti-state campaign at home and abroad. She

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## CARETAKER SYSTEM Govt rejects reforms demand

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday snuffed at the opposition's demand for reform of the caretaker government system, asking it to table its suggestions for ensuring free and fair elections in parliament rather than at roundtables.

"The demand is irrational," Prime Minister Khaleda Zia told the house while speaking on a thanksgiving motion on president's speech to parliament.

"Nothing worthwhile will come of roundtables or street agitation on the issue," she said. "The caretaker government system exists and will be the same in the constitution. And the next parliamentary elections will be held under the caretaker government."

Opposition parties led by Awami League (AL) at a roundtable in the city Monday demanded that the chief of caretaker government should be appointed by a consensus of all. The opposition leaders there put forward a number of proposals to ensure credible elections and strengthen the election commission (EC).

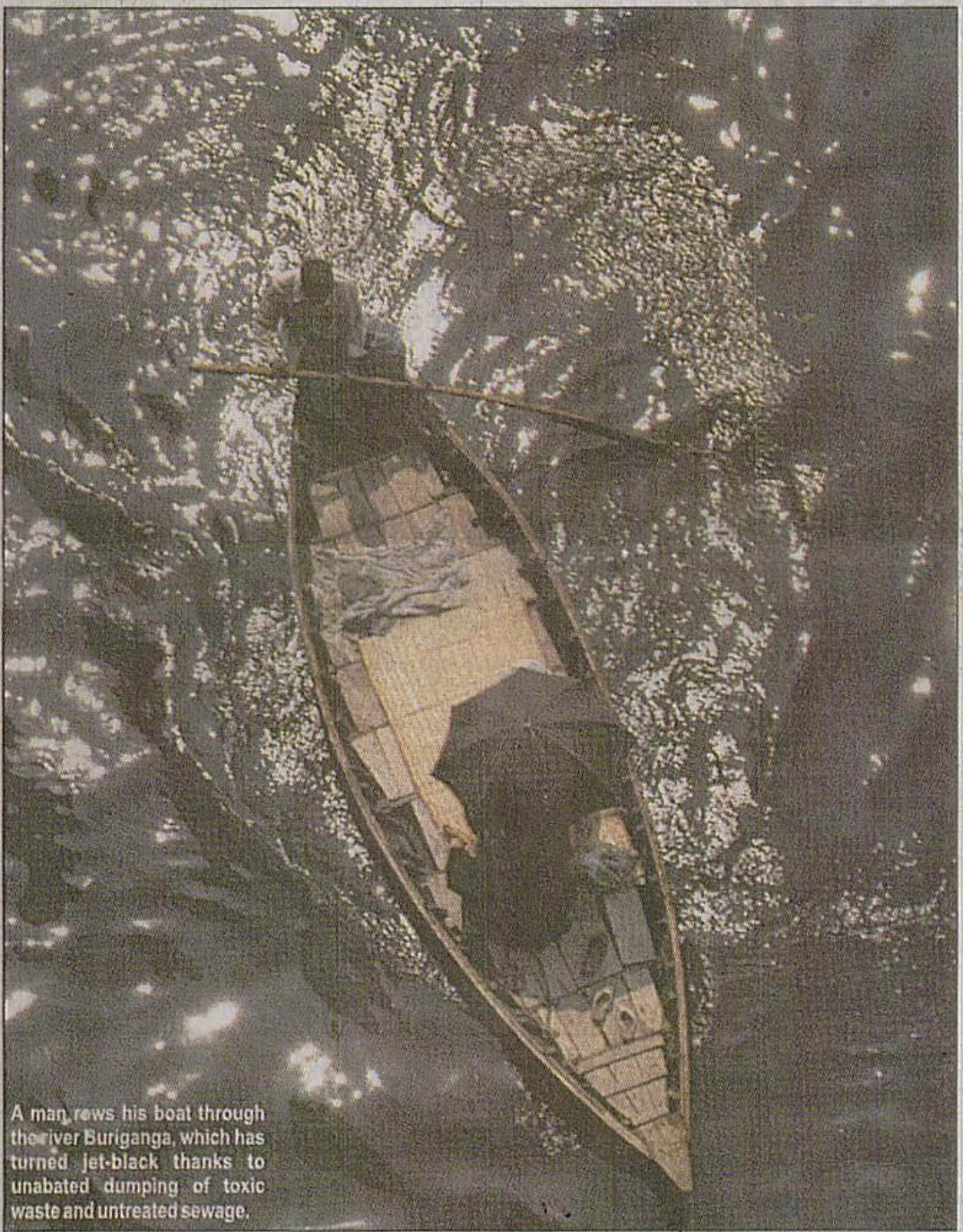
The leader of the house said, "The main opposition is raising the demand, as it has no valid issues at hand and knows for sure that it won't be able to win out the four-party alliance in the next general election."

Regretting that they (AL) are now opposing the same caretaker system they once called the 'world's best', Khaleda said her government is

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Police intercept an Awami Jubo League procession on Green Road demanding uninterrupted water supply to city households yesterday.



A man rows his boat through the river Buriganga, which has turned jet-black thanks to unabated dumping of toxic waste and untreated sewage.

## Buriganga turns into a toxic dump

MORSHED ALI KHAN and RAFIQ HASAN

Severe pollution has reduced the river Buriganga into a 'dumping drain' of toxic refuse, threatening millions of people living on its banks with serious health hazards and a loss of their livelihoods.

That the river is dying is clearly evident from its stench. The highly toxic waters release a 'gas' that starts irritating the nostrils and throat as soon as humans breathe it. Its foul odors can be smelled from as far away as half a kilometre.

"Sometimes we are unable to sit in our office due to the unbearable stench from the river water," said an official at the Sadarghat river port. As the day rolls into the afternoon the heat of the sun turns the stench even fouler, making the 'pitch black' Buriganga water intolerable, he said.

Soon after the floodwater receded and the river wore its lean period look, the pollution instantly increased due to a lack of dispersion. Millions of cubic metres of toxic waste from the Hazaribagh tanneries and thousands of other industries, topped with a huge volume of untreated sewage from the city, now remain almost stagnant within the river water. The situation is set to continue until a new flow of water rushes in from the upstream, beginning in perhaps another two months.

In the meantime, people living along the river are the worst victims of the pollution, which they say is worse than anything they've seen in previous years. Thousands of water transport workers, working on the passenger and cargo vessels in

Sadraghat, are forced to bring water from the river Meghna and Dhaleswari for washing. Unable to take a bath or wash clothes for days, many of them have even begun to suffer from various diseases.

"We can not use the water of the Buriganga for bathing, washing or cooking," said Mohammad Uzzal, an employee of a launch. "For cooking, we use the water collected from faraway places in our water tank," said Mohammad Jalil, a launch cook.

Farid, a ticket collector of MV Mashiron Khan-1, said that even for washing the floor of the vessels they have to bring water from relatively less polluted rivers such as the Meghna near Chandpur.

"Sometimes, when we require more water while anchored at the terminal, we are forced to buy tap water at a high price," said a launch operator. "If we wash the vessel with this water passengers complain of a bad smell," he said.

At least two private companies supply 'pure water' to the launches in the Sadarghat, charging about Tk 150 for filling a 400-liter capacity water reservoir.

The scenario is even bleaker in the villages along the river, in the upstream of the Buriganga. Hundreds of thousands of families living in Zinzira, Kholamora, Kamrangirchar, Jhaochar, Modhyerchar, Wasspur, Basila and Looterchar face a severe water crisis for at least six months a year. Dependent on the river for generations, this population has been cut off from using the river water for over ten years. Although almost every household has a tube-well,

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## Deadline setting goes against constitution Says Huda on judiciary separation

UNB, Dhaka

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda yesterday said the direction issued to the government to separate the judiciary was in violation of the constitution.

"It's against the constitution to order the government to separate the judicial system within a particular time on the basis of a writ petition," he said taking part in the discussion on the thanksgiving motion on president's address to parliament.

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## JUDICIARY SEPARATION HC grants govt one more month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday granted one more month to the government to separate the judiciary from the executive in line with its 12-point directive.

The full bench of the Appellate Division headed by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassir Husain granted the 20th extension of deadline, upon a government petition filed in August last year.

The court however turned down

a petition of nine government officials, facing contempt charges for distorting the court directive, seeking exemption from appearing in the court in person. Advocate TH Khan pleaded for their exemption.

The court, earlier, asked the government to submit by yesterday the final draft rules on separation of the judiciary which had been sent to the president for approval. But the state side did not submit it.

Attorney General (AG) AF Hassan

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## Saifur's wrong statistics STAR REPORT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman has lately been spreading misinformation and citing incorrect figures in support of his censures of the media.

For instance, at a seminar in the city last Saturday, he claimed the price of rice has risen by only Tk 3 per kilo from 1982 to 2005, which in reality grew by Tk 10 to 11 over that period.

Lambasting the media for running false news, the finance minister said rice, which sells at Tk 15 a kg now, used to be sold at Tk 12 back in 1982, posing the question, "Has not the price of rice gone up only by Tk 3 in two decades?" He then remarked that media does not want the farmers to get just price for their produce.

But, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) data, the lowest price of coarse rice in 1982

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## TALKS AT AGARTALA BDR firmly opposes border fencing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) yesterday firmly opposed construction of barbed wire fences by Indian Border Security Force (BSF) within 150 yards of the no man's land on the first day of the high-level BDR-BSF meeting at Agartala in India's Tripurastate.

The BDR delegation at the talks brushed aside BSF's claim that construction of barbed wire fences is 'not a defence measure' and said BSF training manuals also termed this a 'defence measure'.

Sources at the BDR headquarters said the Bangladesh side also

pointed out that Indo-Bangladesh Boundary Accord, 1974, commonly known as Mujib-Indira treaty, said no country would carry out any defence measure within 150 yards of the zero point. And construction of barbed wire fences within the area is a breach of the treaty, it told the Indianside.

While the Agartala meeting to ease border tension was in progress, BSF continued to reinforce its strength opposite Ramgarh border in Khagrachhari district, creating panic among people of the area, BDR sources said.

The BDR team also opposed

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## Women's reserved seats a blow to democracy

Says Dr M Zahir

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Dr M Zahir yesterday said the 14th amendment to the constitution that introduced the provision for 45 reserved seats of women in parliament is a big blow to the concept of democracy.

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## Clarification

Ruling BNP lawmaker Abdul Mannan in a clarification said that the prefix 'heated debate' used in a report headlined 'Reining in BNP MPs' run by The Daily Star on March 13 was incorrect. Mannan said there was 'most cordial and friendly' discussion between him and the lawminister.

## Gas supply likely to improve this month

2 new fields to add gas to national grid

SHARIER KHAN

Gas supply is likely to improve from this month as two new fields—Moulavibazar and Haripur—will supply gas to the national grid, and the off-shore Sangu field will increase its supply.

Sources said the three sources will raise daily gas production by around 100 million cubic feet per day (mmcf), enough to cover the supply shortfall this year. The demand for gas now is around 1,400 to 1,450 mmcf.

Sangu gas production by British company Cairn that had declined to 110 mmcf is expected to go up to 130 mmcf within a week from today.

A year ago, Sangu used to produce around 150 mmcf but the field's depletion of reserve reduced production in recent times.

Moulavibazar gas field, discovered and developed by Unocal, will start production on March 20 and is expected to add 60 to 70 mmcf gas by the end of the month.

Haripur field, once known as a

nonviable oil field, was recently developed by Sylhet Gas Field Company. Petrobangla expects the field will add 15 mmcf within a week.

But Petrobangla still needs a new gas pipeline from Sylhet to Ashuganj to transmit additional gas. It is now negotiating with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) over financing construction of this pipeline.

Supply shortfall in the recent months lowered gas pressure across

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## Kolkata Test starts today

REUTERS, Kolkata

India are undecided over whether to include off-spinner Harbhajan Singh for the second Test against Pakistan starting today because of a green Eden Gardens pitch.

India, under pressure to take a 1-0 lead in the three-Test series after Pakistan fought back to draw the opener in Mohali, are likely to retain leg-spinner Anil Kumble as their specialist slow bowler.

"There is a little bit of grass, similar to Mohali," India captain Sourav Ganguly told reporters on Tuesday. "There is a very bright chance of playing three pacemen plus one spinner."

"There is an option of Harbhajan playing, but we will also have to look at the wicket tomorrow."

It would be a brave decision, however, to sideline Harbhajan at his favourite Eden Gardens, where

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