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Opposition asks ex-CJ not to head next caretaker govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition politicians and legal experts at a roundtable yesterday urged the immediate past chief justice to refrain from assuming office of the chief adviser of the next caretaker government to keep the post above controversy.

They said the immediate past chief justice should not take over as the chief of the interim government as political parties have questioned his neutrality for his previous involvement with the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

The discussants apprehend that Justice KM Hasan's takeover of the non-party caretaker government may lead to a grave crisis during the national election.

Justice Hasan will head the next caretaker government for holding the parliament election but the main opposition Awami League (AL) has already raised the allegation that Justice Hasan is not a non-partisan person as he once was a BNP leader.

The roundtable organised by the 11-Party Alliance suggested selecting a non-partisan and neutral person, who is acceptable to all, to head the interim government for the

sake of holding the national elections in a free, fair and neutral manner.

The discussants proposed an independent secretariat for the Election Commission (EC) and appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and other commissioners through consultation with all parties.

The roundtable titled 'Necessary Electoral reforms and the Caretaker Government System: Representation in Parliament' also called for imposing a ban on using religion as a tool of election campaign.

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Teletalk suspends mobile selling on mad rush

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state-owned Teletalk authorities yesterday suspended the distribution of subscription forms for its newly launched mobile phone due to inadequate capacity to handle the huge rush and demand of aspirant subscribers.

The Ministry of the Post and Telecommunications (MoPT) took the decision last night in the wake of disorderly distribution of subscription forms. Divisional Engineers, who were tasked with distributing the forms, attended the meeting with the post and telecommunications secretary in the chair.

"Form distribution will resume soon after a proper distribution system is developed," a source attending the meeting told The Daily Star last night. Prospective

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AL out to prevent next polls: Khaleda

UNB, Chatmohar, Pabna

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday again accused the opposition of trying to use dilly-dally practices to prevent the next general elections.

"They (AL) want to snatch your voting rights as they don't believe in democracy and don't want development of the country," Khaleda, also chairperson of the ruling BNP, told a public meeting at Chatmohar.

The opposition was threatening to resist general elections "sensing that they have no chance to win the next polls," she said.

She said they also want to halt development activities, disturb the investment climate and thwart the

democratic right of the people.

Referring to the Awami League, Khaleda said the main opposition had unleashed destructive activities in the name of hartal to discourage foreign investment and to cripple the country's economy and halt progress and advancement.

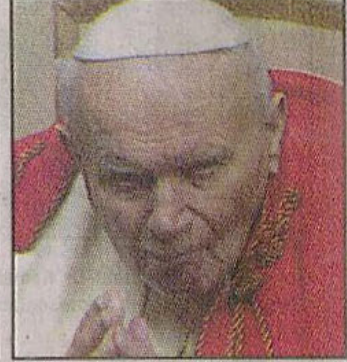
She told the audience that investors from Saudi Arabia, UK, USA, Malaysia, Japan, Italy and India are coming to Bangladesh, witnessing investment-friendly environment and availability of skilled manpower in our country.

The prime minister urged people to support the BNP-led coalition to return to power so that they can keep up the ongoing development activities and make Bangladesh a self-reliant nation.

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated the upgraded 250-bed Pabna General Hospital in the town. Tk 12.54 crore was spent to upgrade the 120-bed old hospital.

The prime minister made a number of development pledges including construction of roads and bridges and assured assistance for the tornado-hit people.

The meeting was also addressed by Health Minister Khandokar Mosharraf Hossain, Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer and Industries Minister Matur Rahman Nizami, Prime Minister's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, Abdus Sobhan MP and Selim Reza Habib MP. It was presided over by local MP KM Anwarul Islam.



Pope slips closer to death

AFP, Vatican City

Pope John Paul II is drifting in and out of consciousness but is not in a coma, the Vatican said Saturday, as millions of Catholics prayed and the world watched the agonies of the

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PHOTO: STAR

The Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board has dug the VIP road in front of the High Court to perform cable repair work, narrowing the space for the movement of vehicles.

Four bogies of inter-city train derail, 20 injured

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

At least 20 people were injured, five of them critically, as a Rajshahi-bound inter-city train, the Titumir Express, derailed yesterday near Domar Railway Station.

The train started for Rajshahi from Chilahati at 2:15pm and arrived at Domar after half an hour. As it resumed its journey, four coaches at the tail-end derailed at the southern end of the station.

The driver of the train, Fazlul

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KIBRIA KILLING

Kennedy, Kerry for impartial probe

Express 'concern over political terrorism' in letter to govt

UNB, Dhaka

Three leading federal lawmakers from Massachusetts sent letters to the US and Bangladesh governments, urging an independent, impartial and transparent inquiry into the January 27 grenade attack that killed former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria and four other

opposition political activists.

Senator Edward Kennedy, Senator John Kerry and Rep. Barney Frank took the move after Nazi Kibria, a professor at Boston University and daughter of SAMS Kibria, met Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA) recently to discuss her father's assassination.

The three American lawmakers

sent the letters to the US State Department and the Bangladesh embassy in Washington, DC, expressing their "strong concern over the recent wave of political terrorism in Bangladesh," according to a press release made available to the news agency.

"As tensions rise in the lead up to

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ROBBERY IN MIRPUR Chargesheet against Rab members

COURT CORRESPONDENT

An investigation officer (IO) yesterday pressed charges against four Rab members and their two sources for involvement in robbing Tk 7.8 lakh from a cattle trader in the city's Mirpur area on March 23.

The IO, AKM Nahidul Islam, assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Rab-1, submitted the charge sheet to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court (CMM), Dhaka.

The charge-sheeted accused are Sergeant Atiqur Rahman, Sergeant Waliullah, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Rafiqul Islam, Constable Khorshed Alam and their two sources Mofizur Rahman, alias Babul, and Masud Mridha.

Of them, ASI Rafiqul Islam and Masud Mridha are still at large while

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MEGHNAGHAT POWER PLANT

Power Cell faces pressure to award deal to lobby

SHARIEF KHAN

A politically backed business lobby is mounting pressure on the Power Cell to award a contract without any bidding to a power company to set up the third-phase Meghnaghat 450 mw power plant violating government rules and policy guidelines.

This lobby representing little known US-Irish joint venture Cadogan-Manning Group wants the Power Cell to approve the project amid guarded secrecy offering advantages that no other private power companies ever received.

Sources said the government last week fired the Power Cell director

general as he refused to bow down to pressure from different lobbies seeking to manipulate bids or contract awarding process. The Meghnaghat-3 project is one of the issues that led to his exit.

When Cadogan-Manning Group submitted its proposal last year, it drew no attention of the Power Cell as it did not follow any process and also lacked any plan. The cell said its unsolicited proposal grossly violated the Private Power Generation Policy of Bangladesh.

But the cell later recommended the project as the higher authorities chided it and asked it to process the proposal without questions.

The cell however asked the company to provide an unconditional

bid-bond of \$ 3 million as was customary for power projects of similar size. But Cadogan group agreed to provide only a conditional bid-bond, which could not be unconditionally encashed by the Power Cell.

Sources point out that there is no instance of conditional bid-bond for any power project.

As in the case of Meghnaghat-1 AES power project, Cadogan group proposed a power tariff of 2.78 cents per kilowatt hour, but without including the price of gas to be consumed by the plant for power generation. Meghnaghat-1 power tariff included gas price.

Cadogan-Manning Group is

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India go 1-0 up in style

REUTERS, Cochin

Virender Sehwag and Rahul Dravid cracked centuries and Sachin Tendulkar grabbed a five-wicket haul as India crushed Pakistan by 87 runs in their opening one-day international on Saturday.

Dravid and Sehwag shared in a 201-run stand for the third wicket as India made 281 for eight in their 50 overs. Pakistan were then bowled out for 194 in 45.2 overs.

It was the best third-wicket partnership for India against Pakistan, beating the 161 by Dravid and Mohammad Azharuddin at Toronto in 1996 and rescued the hosts after they were reeling at four for two on a flat wicket in hot, humid conditions.

Seamer Navedul Hasan got the tourist off to a dream start in the morning, having Tendulkar (4)

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GRAFT CASES AGAINST HASINA

Lawyers walk out of courtroom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of lawyers walked out of the courtroom of a High Court Division Bench yesterday alleging bias against it during hearing of quashment petitions of seven corruption cases including three against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

Some of the lawyers expressed no-confidence in the bench and left the courtroom saying that they would no more take part in hearings held by the bench.

"Too much interest of the bench in the cases makes our clients

believe that they would not get justice from the bench. So, we objected to the hearing by the bench and walked out of the courtroom," Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud, one of the lawyers moving the quashment petitions, told reporters.

The bench of Justice Sharifuddin Chaklader and Justice AFM Ali Azgar, however, fixed April 23, 24 and 25 for the next hearings.

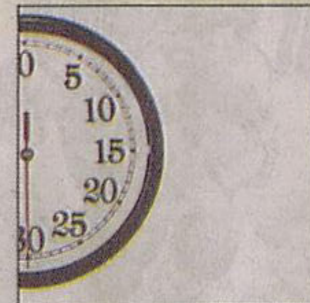
The bench started to hear petitions for quashment of three corruption cases against Sheikh Hasina regarding the purchase of Mig-29 fighter planes and frigate and the appointment of an advisor to Bepza

(Bangladesh Export Processing Zones Authority). The bench yesterday also heard the petitions for quashment of four other cases including two against former industries minister Tofail Ahmed.

About 50 lawyers including Barrister Amir-Ul Islam, Rokanuddin, Barrister Shafiq Ahmed, Advocate Mahbubey Alam, Advocate Yusuf Hossain Humayun, former Justice Shamsul Huda, former law minister Advocate Abdul Matin Khasru were present in the court on behalf of the petitioners.

Rokanuddin pleaded with the

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Introducing 30 seconds



Extending Validity



Cutting Access Fee

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