AL won't take part in any 'staged polls'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Opposition Awami League (AL) leaders vesterday once again accused the ruling alliance of conspiring to rig the next general election.

Addressing a rally in the city they said the AL would not take part in any

The AL leaders said they would not allow to hold any election without the proposed reforms in the caretaker government and electoral system.

The rally was organised in front of the party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue to protest the criminal activities, bomb and grenade attacks and price hike of essentials during the four- years of BNP-Jamaatled coalition.

AL presidium member Abdur Razzak said the government has conspired to get a loyal person as chief advisor to next caretaker government and already appointed another loyal $person\,as\,chief\,election\,commissioner$ to snatch people's verdict in the upcoming election.

He said the people would not take part in the election until their proposals for reforms are accepted by the government.

Razzak said the prices of daily essentials have gone beyond the reach of the common people who are now living in utter insecurity due to grow-

ing criminal activities

Tofail Ahmed said people could not cast their votes in 2001 general election as it was an election of con-

He said the coalition government is responsible for all kinds of bomb and grenade attacks in the country.

Tofail said law and order situation cannot be improved as the alliance government released 70,000 criminals from different jails.

Motia Chowdhury said the prices of essential always go up whenever the BNP comes to power. She said BNP means criminal activities, price hike

and bomb and grenade attacks. She urged the countrymen to be united to oust the coalition govern-

Presiding over the rally, AL presidium member Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury demanded immediate release of all their leaders and activists arrested by the coalition government at different times.

AL Joint General Secretary Obaidul Ouader, Dhaka city unit General Secretary Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Advocate Shahara Khatun, Dr HBM Iqbal, Moqbul Hossain and Ajoy Kor Khokon, also addressed the rally.

After the rally, a procession was brought out that paraded different city

PROTEST AGAINST MONDAY'S BOMB ATTACKS

METROPOLITAN/NEWS

Lawyers demand resignation of govt, people's security

Different lawyers' organisations, including SCBA, vesterday staged demonstrations and held rallies across the country protesting Monday's bomb attacks on courts in Chandpur, Laxmipur and Chittagong

The leaders of the associations demanded immediate resignation of the government for what they said its failure to ensure people' security and to take action against the bomb attackers

The Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) urged the Chief Justice to take necessary steps to ensure the security of the judges, lawyers, legal staffs and litigants on the courts' premises with deploying adequate law enforcing

In an urgent resolution, the SCBA also demanded that the government take legal action against the ministers, lawmakers and ruling party leaders who are allegedly involved in militant activities.

"An identified vested quarters under the shelter and at the instigation of the present government is hatching a conspiracy to make the country a failed state by creating anarchy through destroying the judiciary and

US SENATORS' LETTER

FM's remark

UNB, DHAKA

tioned their integrity.

Jamaat government.

Saber criticises

The Opposition Leader's Political

Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury

yesterday said the foreign minister's

comment on the letter written by 16 US

senators and representatives ques-

"It is sad that instead of addressing

the grave and legitimate concern of

the Senators and Congressmen of high

international esteem, the foreign

minister has deemed prudent to

question their integrity," he told UNB.

Saher said shooting the messenger

instead of trying to hear and under-

stand the message appears to have

become a consistent trait of BNP-

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan

at a press briefing on Monday said that

the draft of the letter of the US

Congressmen was prepared in Dhaka

and the signatures of the US Senators

and Congressmen were collected

through their staffs by the daughter

and son-in-law of slain former finance

Theory of Music

The Silverstar Academy held the Trinity

College, London (TCL) Theory of Music

certificate presentation yesterday at

cates on music theory for the years 2004

and 2005. Showla Nazneen obtained 92

the highest mark in 2004 and Saibu

"It is a matter of regret that we do

not encourage children to learn or

listen to classical music, western or

Shaver secured full 100 marks in 2005.

Eighteen students received certifi-

minister Shah AMS Kibria

certificate

presentation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

the Russian Cultural Centre.

rule of law. The militant have made the judiciary their targets of their attack. The government is not taking action against the bomb attackers as they have connections with the powerful leaders of the ruling parties," the meeting said.

its South Hall yesterday in protest against the Monday's bomb attacks that left two people dead and 23 others, including a district judge and a police,

The SCBA organised the meeting at

SCBA Vice President Advocate Shah Md Zahurul Haque presided over the

Sammilita Ainjibi Samannay Parishad (SASP) Convener Barrister M Amir-ul Islam, Member Secretary Advocate Subrata Chowdhury, former Majumder, SCBA Secretary Advocate M Enavetur Rahim, Barrister Rafigul Islam Miah, Advocate Sirajul Haque, Advocate Sahara Khatun, Advocate KM Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocate Nazmul Ahsan Mizan, Advocate Mamtazuddin Mehedi, Advocate Ruhul Kuddus Babu, Advocate Md Salim and Advocate Rabiul Alam Bubu also spoke with

BDNEWS Chittagong correspon dent reports: Chittagong District Bar Association in an emergency general meeting strongly denounced the Monday's bomb attacks in the courts and demanded of the government to identify the perpetrators and bring them to book immediately.

Presided over by Association President Advocate Khurshed Alam Chowdhury, the meeting was addressed by General Secretary Humayoon Kabir Rasel, Advocate Rana Das Gupta and former general secretary Montosh Barua.

Later, lawyers brought out a procession on the court building premises protesting the recurrent bomb attacks n the courts.

The judges, officers, employees

lawvers and litigants in Chittagong Court Building are still reeling under the bomb phobia in the wake of repeated bomb attacks on the cour BDNEWS Raibari correspondent

adds: Raibari District Bar association held a procession and a meeting protesting Monday's bomb attacks.

Advocate Syed Rafiqus Salehin, Advocate Chitta Ranjan Guho, Advocate Shaigul Azam Mamun Advocate Mahbubur Rahman and Advocate ATM Mostafa addressed the meeting held on the judge court pre-

Draft of Bldg Construction (Amend) Act approved

BSS, Dhaka

The cabinet at its regular meeting yesterday approved the draft of the Building Construction (Amendment) Act, 2005 to ensure the use of proper materials in constructing buildings and to suit with the environment.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia presided over the meeting held in the cabinet room of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), an official handout said

The meeting also okayed the draft of the agreement signed between Bangladesh and Oatar to avoid double taxation with a view to increasing investment and economic coopera-It also discussed in detail the draft

of the Fish Feed Act, 2005, formulated to increase fish production, maintain quality of fish, raise fish export and protect environment The meeting decided to form a

dations after further scrutiny of the Cabinet members, state ministers

cabinet committee to give recommen-

in charge, cabinet secretary and concerned secretaries were present.

MAGSAYSAY AWARD Reception accorded to Matiur Rahman STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation (BPF), an organisation working for the disabled, accorded a reception to the Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman yesterday on his winning the 2005 Ramon Magsaysay Award for Journalism, Literature, and Creative Communication Arts.

Noted singer Kalim Sharafi sang a welcoming song while a group of disabled children greeted Matiur Rahman with flowers. Masuda Begum, a counsellor to the BPF, read out a $citation\ in\ honour\ of\ the\ editor.$

The students of the BPF also presented a cultural show at the

"We are proud of you as you are not only a great journalist but also a man of great heart. The reports in your daily inspire the acid victims and drug addicts to lead a normal life with renewed hopes. Various competitions such as Mathematics Olympiad and reception to the meritorious students, organised by the daily, also encourage the students to build a bright future." said Sultana Sarwat Ara Zaman, general secretary of the Foundation, in her welcome speech.

The newspaper is also giving an opportunity to women to explore and demonstrate their creativity by giving nriority to women's issues and arranging different competitions for them, she

Lauding the Prothom Alo's courageous role in revealing the truth, Prof Latifa Akand said, "Journalists are the ones who work silently but are rarely recognised. We are happy today to congratulate a journalist like Matiur Rahman.'

Executive Director of Ubinig and women's rights activists Farida Akter pointed out that the tragic reality of the disabled people is not fully reflected in

"Every family, somewhere or other, has members with some forms of disability. So, we must not ignore their

Expressing his thanks to the BPF for the reception, Matiur Rahman admitted that the media does not reflect the real situation of the disabled the way it

He announced a donation of Tk 50.000 for the Foundation and assured that from now on his daily would work together with the Foundation to raise awareness about the problems facing the disabled and create a fund for them.

BPF Chairperson Prof Naoshaba Khatun and Director Dr Shamim Ferdous also spoke Established in 1984, the BPF now has

nine branches across the country, which have more than 1000 children, both disabled and disadvantaged.

Obituary

should be



Begum, mother of politician and old age complica-

at the age of 85, says a press release. She left behind her husband, four sons and three daughters

Death anniversary



Today is the 17th death anniversary of M A Rashid former secretary of Bangladesh Government, says a press release.

Relatives friends and admir-

condition of anonymity.

Poles of fortune

Spend more on the poles than ever

In the last fiscal, the REB spent around Tk 250 crore to buy four lakhs concrete poles for construction of 16,700 km of distribution lines. The same job could have been done with half the number of wooden poles by spending around only Tk 75 crore to

different reports of REB.

ing around Tk 100 crore.

heard of using concrete poles in electrification. The purchase of concrete poles began after 1996.

These can cover 1.70 lakh km of distribution lines.

not yet been installed

The present trend shows an increasing number of concrete pole coverage, increased spending and comparatively lower power distribution coverage. This has happened because the concrete pole manufacturers have established a monopoly by influencing the REB to change its

Both the government and donors international bids as 'cash cows'.

In any international tenders floated till 2003, concrete pole manufacturers would quote their price close to that of wooden poles. In an international bid in 2003, concrete pole makers quoted 100 dollars for a particular size of concrete pole to compete with the wooden poles, which would cost around 100 dollars each. But at the same time, when REB floated a local restricted tender (which barred wooden poles), the concrete pole manufacturers quoted 300 dollars for each pole.

lation, line construction, replacement, renewability, maintainability

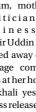
These advantages led a REB committee in 2000 to recommended that wooden poles should be installed for 60 to 71 percent of all installed poles. The committee noted that in low lying areas, concrete poles can not be installed because it is it is costly and difficult to transport or install.

one kilometre area using the wooden poles, REB needs to spend maximum Tk 4 lakh. The same job needs between Tk 7 lakh to Tk 8 lakhs if concrete poles are used", quips the

Performance-wise concrete poles tend to break down for reasons including design flaws and use of low most of the wooden poles installed in

cheated them. Investigators found fewer rods than required inside the broken poles, as well as a lower ratio of

the poles purchase According to a number of officials and



Shamsun Nahai

businessmen interviewed by The b u s i n e s s m a n Monir Uddin Babul, passed away due to tions at her house in Noakhali vesterday



"Competition is supposed to keep

arranged, you can not expect lower price," notes a REB source. "Last year, there was a misunderstanding among these companies and suddenly in one of the bids, the price of poles quoted by a bidder was half the price they usually quote. After that incident the feuding companies patched up and the prices in the next bid shot up

Again, the group was taken aback last vear when a new bidderDada Groupparticipated in a bid and quoted a price 50 percent lower than the consortium members' prices. To stop Dada Group from securing any deal, the nexus resorted to court injunction. Finally, to make sure outsiders cannot bag the REB money for the poles, they made the REB dictate a contractor's criteria stipulating at least two years experience in making and installing such poles.

The REB last month floated a tender for procuring 3500 "training poles" which was open for wooden poles suppliers also after two years. The Palli Bidyut Samities (PBSs) use training poles to train their technicians to work on distribution lines.

suspiciously low price offer of Tk 2500 for each wooden pole while the same bidder has offered Tk 15.000 per concrete pole of same specifications. The REB has not finalised the bid yet.

How it started

'In the mid-nineties, in the wake of concerns on arsenic contamination of underground water, a powerful businessman fed a news in the stateowned news agency saying that the from 1994but REB refused.

ence to clarify that the wooden poles are indeed treated with arsenic among other chemicals, but that has nothing

But under relentless pressure from the businessman, the REB formed an expert committee to see if the wooden poles indeed affects the water. "The committee found no truth in that story," says a REB high official. "However at this point, the government asked the REB to purchase some concrete poles to stop the business-

man from campaigning further." Again since there was no other concrete poles manufacturer, the businessmanin addition to his original manufacturing company-- made three more companies just to make the REB bids on concrete poles look competitive. These four companies

percent of the business in poles. An official of the REB's procurement division noted, "in technical terms, there is no bid manipulation. companies. But these companies have four distinctive boards, four separate tax identification numbers.

rated with each other, rather than competing.

Meanwhile, as high cost differences with wooden poles put the concrete poles manufacturers at a disadvantage, the business group pushed the idea of making lighter

the number of the poles per-kilometre

The BUET group suggested that instead of 16 original size concrete poles per kilometre, the REB may use 24 thinner poles. This recommendation helped bidders reduce the price of each concrete pole, but did not decrease the REB's total expenditure.

REB Chairman Helal uz Zaman

declined to speak officially on the issue, terming the matter a "sensitive one". No REB official would speak officially on the matter. All say the purchases are decided by the minis-

> are cheaper. When asked about the syndicate of

contractors, Mahmud told The Daily Star over the phone last month, "Once it used to be a monopoly of one companynow there is competition."

losses. However, a few of them make enough profit to keep the REB system looking functional. The REB's annual earnings stand at Tk 2240 crore with

likely to help 8,000 foreign students in Australia gration official was quoted as saying.

Success in visa suit

A successful suit filed by Bangladeshi student Mohammad Ahsanuddin against the Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for wrongful cancellation of his student visa is expected to help other foreign students whose visas were cancelled on the same

Ashan went to Australia on March 9, 1999 to continue his tertiary education. Having done some courses, he was enrolled in a diploma course of Hospitality Management and Commercial Cookery in Melbourne on

October 6, 2003. Ahsan's visa was cancelled after he failed to attend 50 percent of his classes and then did not attend a meeting with immigration officials. He was apparently sent a letter asking him

to attend the meeting The Federal Magistrate's Court in June decided that the letter, a standard-form notice sent to Ahsan by his school and a copy to the Department, was "defective". It did not fit migration regulations, Magistrate Stephen

Scarlett said. Ahsan's lawyers argued, and Scarlett agreed, that the letter did not fit the migration regulations, according to a report published in the Australian

papers on September 16. Under the regulations, the form should have asked that Ahsan contact any immigration officer at any office of the Department. "We were just trying to be helpful" in specifying which office was closest to Ahsan, an immiAhsan, however, claimed that he

had not received the letter. The court verdict in favour of Ahsan forced the Australian government to reverse its decision for up to 8,000

The department has since received

legal advice that the decision regarding Ahsan would apply to all ex-students whose visas were cancelled after they $received\,the\,letter\,and\,did\,not\,turn\,up.$ The Australian Government will launch a worldwide search for ex-

students whose visas were cancelled

after they received the letter and then

failed or truant foreign students.

failed to attend a meeting with an migration officer. Advertisements in the media, including foreign-language publications, would alert former students to the decision to reverse their visa

And overseas-based immigration officers would be on standby to help those students who had left Australia. the report said.

The letter was sent to foreign

cancellation.

students who had breached their visa conditions -- attending less than 80 percent of classes or failing to pass a reasonable standard.

It gave students 28 days to attend a Immigration officials conceded the department could face compensation

claims as a result of the decision. The department had spent months since the June verdict whether to appeal. But legal advice suggested the department could not win, the official

Celebration Committee at the

children also took part in the discus-

ing all-out support to establish their

rights of survival, protection and

director of Plan Bangladesh, the

function was also addressed by Zina

Over one hundred disadvantaged

They stressed the need for provid-

Chaired by Thomas Espey, country

Institution of Engineers.

sion to voice their rights.

development.

The government has taken up a fiveyear-long National Plan of Action from 2005 to 2010 for the protection of child

rights and development of children.

Moudud Ahmed while addressing as chief guest at a discussion meeting to mark the International Child Rights Week in the city yesterday.

incorporated in the action plan to

The discussion meeting was organ-

protect the rights of the working Afroj, social development adviser of children, now engaged in about 400 Plan Bangladesh. Children from Shishu Dal, CDF, odd jobs," he said. Radda, Surobhi, UCEF, DSK and FULK

were present on the occasion. The discussion was followed by a

cultural function performed by the

eastern," said Chief Guest Aly Zaker, managing director and CEO, Asiatic Marketing Communications Ltd, urging parents to guide children to appreciate classical music. Silverine de S Shrikanthan, principal The Silverstar Academy and representative TCL said that parents could

add a little flavour to their children's lives by encouraging them to get involved in some aspect of the perform-S. Prabagar, chief operating officer, Commercial Bank of Ceylon Limited (CBC), sponsor of the programme and Omer Farook, ex-director (music and

dance), Shilpakala Academy were special

Address monga crisis permanently

Speakers say at discussion

Prothom Alo Editor Matiur Rahman at a reception accorded to him in the city yesterday.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT Monga, a famine-like situation, has to be addressed permanently, rather than giving away relief through Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) programme every

Sultana Sarwat Ara Zaman, general secretary of the Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation, presents a citation to the

year, said the speakers at a discussion yesterday. They said government's goodwill is imperative to solve this problem in

northwestern part of the country. The discussion on 'Finding out permanent solution for monga' was organised by Jubo Karmasangsthan Society (Jubok), an NGO, at Biam

auditorium in the city.

cereals during this period and make best use of around 2.5 trillion cubic feet of stone found in the region to overcome They laid emphasis on developing communications infrastructure and

The speakers suggested cultivation

of banana, sweet potato and other

employment opportunities for the The speakers suggested allocation of micro-credits by government and NGOs to form co-operative societies by the

promoting tourism in the area to create

poor people to eradicate poverty there. They also called for protecting the poor farmers from the middlemen by ensuring fair price of their agriproducts.

The other steps suggested by the

speakers included setting up of indus-

tries based on local farm products, best

use of land ports and alternative food

habit to meet monga Deputy Editor of Prothom Alo Anisul Hague said an amount of Tk 300 crore was allocated last time to face monga, but most of the money was plundered by the politicians for use in the next

election. Jatiya Party Lawmaker GM Kader said many projects are taken to eradicate poverty, but most of the projectmoney is misused.

He said politicians are now less committed to people as they can win elections by their black money and muscle power. Left-leaning politician Ruhin Hossain Prince posed a question over

the role of NGOs as acute poverty still persists in the area despite their activi-Executive Chairman of Jubok Hossain Al Masum, Director of Power and Participatory Research Centre Ziauddin Ahmed and Editor of Desh

Bangla Dr Ferdous Ahmed Quraeshi also spoke at the function. Ex-chairman of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies Dr Monowar Hossain was the moderator of

the discussion. Manga starts in Bangla months of Ashwin and Kartik in eight districts of

northwestern region. As people of the area remain jobless during these two months, they don't have money in their hands to buy food and as a

Karachi-bound Biman flight delayed for 5 hours

BDNEWS, Dhaka

A Biman flight bound for Karachi from Dhaka was delayed for five hours vesterday as the aircraft got damaged by a catering vehicle of the national Biman sources said the flight (BG-

031) was scheduled to take off from Zia International Airport (ZIA) at 12 noon. But the aircraft required repairing after the catering service carrier struck its passenger door. Some 138 passengers of the flight had to suffer as the flight departed at

5:00pm, five hours after the schedule. Three more aircraft of the national flag career were grounded within a A DC-10 was grounded in New

American Centre Library hours

grounded at Chittagong.

is vet to be repaired.

York while another in Brussels due to

mechanical faults. Also, an F-28 was

The aircraft grounded in Brussels

Student Advising Center, U.S. Mission in Bangladesh will follow a new time schedule during the month of holy Ramadan. The Library and the Student Advising Center will be open to users from 10:00a.m. to 3:00p.m., Sunday through Wednesday, effective from the first day of Ramadan.

The American Centre Library and the



ers have been requested to pray for the salvation of the departed soul.

Γk 85 crore, competent sources said. Each wooden pole has double the strength of a concrete pole, according to

Only three years ago, the REB purchased two lakh polesboth wooden and concrete poles-- spend-Before 1994, the REB had not even

Till June 2005, the REB installed 192,000 km of power distribution ines, purchasing a total of 17 lakh wooden poles from 1977 till 2003.

Retween 1996-2005, the RER also bought 15 lakh concrete poles covering 75,000 km, official data shows. A part of both these types of poles have

purchase policy.

fund the REB's pole purchases. When donors fund pole purchases, via international tenders, they insist upon wider participation, which keeps the door open for wooden pole purchases. But the concrete pole manufacturers do not view such Their influence stopped the REB from floating such bids from 2003. All present bids are now locally funded. giving donors no say in these deals.

"The REB never had any requirement for concrete poles. But today its timbre department and specialists are sitting idle because REB is now buying something it never needed," an

official commented. Concrete poles vs. Wooden poles According to a REB expert, the wooden poles have 10 main advantages over both concrete and steel proof capability, highest degree of non-corrosiveness, highest strength, easiest and cheapest handling, instal-

"To install power distribution in

quality materials. On the other hand, the late seventies are still serving. In March this year, REB concluded through its own investigation of dozens of damaged concrete poles in Netrokona that the manufacturer had

How the business group controls

Daily Star, a group of 13 contractors submit bids to the REB after reaching an understanding among themselves. They share the contracts on the basis of their own powers and status. The prices quoted in these bids have little difference. As a result, the price of the concrete poles, which are supposed to be low due to competition, is never A businessman who leads this

unofficial manufacturers group, takes more than 30 percent of total poles purchase tenders. Another concrete pole manufacturing company led by a group of

ruling party leadersincluding a very powerful young politician, his close friend and a state ministerdraw a major share in the concrete pole deals, taking another 20- 25 percent of the business, a senior REB official said on

In this tender, a bidder submitted a

REB's wooden poles are treated by arsenic and this arsenic is contaminating the underground water," says a REB source. This businessman was trying to sell his concrete poles to REB After this report made headlines in 19 dailies, the REB held a press confer-

are now helping him bag around 30

Legally they are separate entities and therefore they are not manipulating

After the change of government in 2001, there was serious competition. The number of manufacturing companies reached 13. While there were some competition at the outset, these companies soon realised that far more money can be made if they collabo-

concrete polesusing lesser construction materials that cut the cost. To legitimise this move, the group made the REB undertake a study in 2003 with some BUET teachers. The BUET group recommended thinner concrete poles for REB's use, but said

would have to be increased.

What the authorities say

State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmud on the other hand says, "All of the purchases are following the Public Procurement Regulation, 2003. The concrete poles

The REB has 70 palli biddit samities (PBS), most of which run on

an outstanding bill of Tk 334 crore.

'Nat'l Action Plan taken to protect child rights' STAFF CORRESPONDENT ised by the Child Rights Week

This was stated by Law Minister "Special provisions have been

The minister said existing National Child Policy would be revised to facilitate the implementation of the action



function in the city yesterday.