

Pahela Baishakh

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Baishakh, esho, esho" (Welcome, O Baishakh, welcome).

Students of the Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University will take out a Mangal Shobhajatra (an auspicious rally) at 8:00am with the participants wearing colourful masks.

Major shopping malls and boutiques in the city have witnessed a massive presence of shoppers in the last few days, buying clothes for the New Year celebration. "People are preparing to celebrate Pahela Baishakh defying all fears and anxieties created by the recent spate of bomb blasts," said a sales assistant at a boutique.

The Pahela Baishakh celebration has its origin rooted deep in the cultural tradition of the nation.

Mughal Emperor Akbar introduced the Bangla New Year to perk up tax collection. In keeping with the tradition, traders and shopkeepers open "Halkhata", fresh accounts book, and offer sweets to the customers and visitors.

The day is a public holiday. Men, women and children of all ages clad in panjabi, pyjama and sari with red borders will throw traditional Baishakh Mela (fair), one of the major features of the celebration, and cultural functions in the capital and elsewhere.

People will be gorging themselves on Bengalee delicacies such as Paanta Bhat (rice cooled in water overnight), hilsa fry, lentil and smoked chilli at home and places of Baishakh congregations.

Kite-flying is an especial attraction at the rural fairs.

SECURITY MEASURES IN DHAKA

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) has planned a three-tier security blanket today around the Ramna Park, the prime venue of the Pahela Baishakh celebration, with deployment of 10,000 law enforcers including 3,000 Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) members, to ward off any untoward incident.

The huge number of law enforcers will be deployed at Ramna Park, Suhrawardi Udyan, Dhaka University campus and its adjoining areas. Besides, at least 22 teams of plainclothes policemen and two bomb disposal teams of the DMP will patrol the area.

The DMP will also set up 25 video cameras while the Rab will install 15 closed-circuit cameras and fire observatory towers.

At least 10 people were killed and scores injured in a deadly bomb attack on the Pahela Baishakh function at Ramna Batamul in 2001.

CULTURAL PROGRAMMES

The different social and cultural organisations have taken up elaborate programmes to celebrate the day.

The Bangla Academy arranges musical soiree to welcome the New Year at the Nazrul stage at 8:00am.

The Shilpakala Academy will hold a cultural programme at its plaza at 5:00pm.

The Libertarian War Museum organises a programme of dance recital and Baul songs at 10:00am.

The Jatiya Press Club will hold

Baishakhi breakfast at 8:00am. It will pay homage to its lifetime members at 9:00am and host a cultural programme featuring renowned artists at 10:00am.

The Nazrul Academy organises a cultural programme at the Nazrul Bhaban at Maghazar at 5:00pm.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina, Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadek Hossain Khoka and also leaders of different political parties issued separate messages yesterday wishing the countrymen a happy new year.

Our Chittagong University (CU) correspondent reports: Agami, a social and cultural organisation of Chittagong University, has chalked out daylong programmes to celebrate Pahela Baishakh on the university campus.

The programme titled "Prothom Alo-Daily Star Baishakhi Utsab-1413" will hold an exhibition of traditional folk materials, pictures and handicrafts. The programmes also include traditional rural sports, book fair and cultural functions.

Resident Editor of the daily Prothom Alo Abul Momen will inaugurate the journey of the CU shuttle train decorated with colourful paintings and murals at city's Baitali Railway Station at 8:10am.

The daily Prothom Alo and The Daily Star are jointly sponsoring the festival, the media partner of which is the local daily Azadi.

Ceasefire

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BSF increased its strength at GK Bari. BDR also increased their strength at nearby Kuchilbari camp. In the sector commander level meeting both sides agreed to withdraw additional forces from their camps, sources said.

A delegation headed by BDR commander of Rangpur Sector attended the meeting.

BANGLABANDHAGUNFIGHT
BDR sources said the gunfight at Banglabandha was prompted by BSF as they opened fire on Bangladeshi workers collecting stones from Mahananda river at about 10:00am yesterday.

The BDR members from Banglabandha camp rushed to the scene and returned fire. The gunfight continued until noon and no casualty was reported, BDR sources in Dhaka said.

BDNEWS said both BDR and BSF reinforced their troops along the Banglabandha border following the gun battle, which escalated tension in the area.

Meanwhile, BDR Jatiya company authorities sent a letter to their Indian counterpart protesting the firing by BSF and inviting them to a flag meeting. The BSF was yet to reply.

Earlier on Wednesday, 8-10 armed BSF jawans of Nabayan Jote camp walked into the Bangladesh territory of Tetulia upazila and threatened the residents.

voter list, the CEC wasted crates of taka, and he has to be accountable for this, the counsel said.

It is binding on every citizen to abide by HC directives, Rokan mentioned. And as a judge, the CEC should show more responsibility in this regard, he added.

Mahbubuddin argued that it is necessary to prepare a fresh voter list because there are 64 lakh ghost voters in the existing one. For the sake of fair election, these ghost voters should be excluded from the list.

Rahman admits

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police accompanied by the members of Rab took Rahman to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court amid tight security on expiry of his 10-day remand in the case filed for the August 17 blast near the Jatiya Press Club.

In his forwarding report, DB Inspector Shah Mohammad Moshir Rahman, also the investigation officer (IO) of the case, said that Rahman was directly involved in the countrywide bomb blasts on August 17 last year, including the one near the Jatiya Press Club.

He needs to be quizzed further to find out vital information about the bombings and the whereabouts of the other JMB leaders and members, the IO added.

After the hearing, Metropolitan Magistrate M A Salam granted the remand prayer.

Earlier, JMB military commander Ataur Rahman Sunny, operations commander of banned Harkat ul Jihad (HuJ) Bangladesh chapter Mufi Abdul Hannan and JMB Gazipur regional commander Enayet Ullah were shown arrested in the same case and placed on remand.

REMAND OF SUNNY AND AWAL
JMB military commander Sunny and its Majlis-e-Shura member Abdul Awal were placed on fresh remands yesterday.

Sunny was placed on a five-day remand while Awal on a seven-day remand in the case filed with Ramna Police Station for August 17 blast on the Supreme Court premises.

CHARGES NOT FRAMED
Another Dhaka court yesterday could not frame charges against Sunny and eight others in two cases filed with Sabujbagh Police Station on September 12 last year, as they were not produced before it.

Judge Mohammad Shamsul Alam Khan of the First Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed May 16 as the hearing date and directed the authorities concerned to produce the accused before it on that day.

Tigers stretch

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short and Australia captain Ricky Ponting survived to defy Bangladesh earn their most-coveted win in history with a thrilling three-wicket victory in the first Test of two at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The 31-year-old Aussie skipper stood tall with a stupendous unbeaten knock of 118 to not only steal the nerve-wrecking match away from the Tigers but in the process he also restored his side's pride as 'best team in the world' in a match which has already been branded as one of the best.

Despite the defeat, Habibul Bashar's men won the hearts of many as they shone with intensity in their performance, especially in the way they pushed the far superior side in the fifth and final day, riding on Mohammad Rafique's brilliant bowling.

It was definitely something new in Bangladesh's longer-version history.

It could have however all been so different, not only for the fans in the country but also for the world fraternity, had Mashrafe not missed a difficult chance in a crucial stage of the match just before the lunch break.

Paceman Shahadat Hossain banged one in short and Ponting responded with his trademark pull shot. However unlike usual the ball skied to deep backward square-leg where Mashrafe dived and missed a swirring chance with Australia still needing 24 runs to reach the target.

The fifth and final day started balanced on a knife-edge. The equation was simple. Australia needed 95 runs and Bangladesh required six wickets.

And Mohammad Rafique gave the Tigers a perfect start and raised hopes across the country when he removed first innings centurion Adam Gilchrist (12) with a beautiful delivery in his second over of the day with Australia adding only 13 runs to the overnight score of 212.

Expectations soared and nerves heightened when the ace left-arm spinner also proceeded to trap Shane Warne (5) leg before with the opponents' scoreboard reading 231 for six. However from potential disastrous situation for the visitors, Brett Lee joined his captain to steady the innings with a 36-run seventh wicket stand.

Rewarding the captain's decision to take the new ball after 96.1 overs, tearaway Mashrafe rekindled the home side's hope when he had Lee, who added valuable 29 off 74 balls, fending a thick edge to wicket-keeper Khaleed Mashud.

But Jason Gillespie, who survived 18 balls for an unbeaten 4, proved a trusted ally as he helped his skipper to guide Australia to safety and take them home within 20 minutes of the post-lunch session on a pitch which held its own for five days.

Australia, who haven't lost a Test since surrendering the Ashes, finally reached 307 for seven in 107 overs and it was because of yet another Ponting hundred, his 31st in 104 matches, which means he is now four behind India's Sachin Tendulkar.

The right-hander, who started the day on 72 runs, occupied the crease for 253-minutes to score his runs off 253 deliveries that produced 13 boundaries.

Rafique added two more wickets on the day to finish with second innings figures of 4-56 to take his match tally to nine wickets after a 5 for 62 in the first innings.

Australia vice-captain Gilchrist was adjudged man-of-the-match for his match-saving 144 runs in the first innings.

"The final outcome once again proved why we are most consistent and best team in the world," said the dressing left-hander.

The second and final Test match will start from April 16 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium.

Former top cops

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prevailing situation. Yet no initiative from the government high level is being noticed," former IGP ASM Shajahan observed.

Echoing the same view, former IGP Nurul Huda said the crisis should be handled politically. But the prevailing situation is not being handled properly, he said.

At least 20 people have been killed in sporadic flares of violence at Kansat of Shibganj upazila of Chapainawabganj since last January.

Shajahan questioned the role of the local administration in facing the agitation as a political party declared a counter programme on April 6 and yet the administration remained silent "unwisely" and patronised the programme.

Shajahan, also former adviser to the caretaker government, said the local administration should have identified the main reasons and initiate steps to resolve the crisis on time.

"In my long career, I have never seen any incident like what has been happening at Kansat for over last three months," Shajahan told The Daily Star yesterday.

Nurul Huda said, "Senior officers, including divisional inspector general and district superintendent of police, should themselves ensure right actions and prevent the excess measures by the law enforcers there."

Both the former top bosses of police suggested holding a dialogue immediately with the agitating people to resolve the crisis.

Babar

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dialogue.

"The people of Kansat do not want to sit for any dialogue, although the government is always ready to discuss," he added.

Replying to a question, he denied that police had resorted to any excess.

Dhaka, Ankara agree

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of OIC possess common views on various international issues, including Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. Both the leaders underscored the need for strengthening OIC.

He said Turkey and Bangladesh also have common views on combating international terrorism.

The official talks, which lasted over an hour, also discussed regional and international issues of common concern.

Earlier, Khaleda in her opening remarks to the press said, "The just concluded bilateral meeting led by two of us was very constructive and fruitful."

"I am very glad that during the discussion many new areas of cooperation have been identified as well as mutual cordiality has been deepened," she said.

"We have agreed to take effective steps regarding increasing the trade and commerce between the two countries," Khaleda told the newsmen.

Govt mulls special fund

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tainty about getting these credits in FY07.

The foreign aid inflow has already started to nosedive. Which is evident from the fact that the foreign aid received in the first seven months of FY06 is about 53 per cent less than that in the corresponding period of FY05.

The country's four major development partners including the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have committed about \$6 billion for a full-fledged implementation of the strategic poverty reduction programmes over the next four years. But as the government is unlikely to fulfil the reform conditions to qualify for the aid, it may miss the aid-portion for FY07.

Amid such quick succession of changes, sources said, it is very likely that both revenue growth and foreign aid inflow will slow down in the next fiscal year.

Even in the current fiscal year, about 15 per cent revenue growth can be achieved, instead of the targeted 17 per cent, the NBR sources added.

The total revenue target in the next budget is reckoned to be set at Tk 52,000 crore, which is 14 per cent higher than the Tk 45,722 crore target in the current budget.

Of the total revenue target of FY07, the task of gathering about Tk 41,000 crore may fall on the National Board of Revenue (NBR), which is now assigned to collect Tk 35,652 crore of the current year's targeted revenue.

NBR sources said the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has been pressing the government to raise its annual revenue target to over 11 per cent of the GDP. But, they said, even in a normal year it is not possible to generate revenue amounting to more than 11 per cent of the GDP, let alone in an election year like FY07.

On the other hand, in the last several years, foreign aids as development support credit and education support credit have greatly helped the government realise its budgets. But, there is now an uncer-

14-party calls hartal

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statements criticising the government for the continued violence in Kansat and demanded punishment to the culprits.

The 14-party will also observe "Kansat Day" on April 16 by staging demonstrations across the country against the killing of at least 20 people in the troubled area. It will bring out processions tomorrow to mourn the victims.

Awami League leader Tofail Ahmed announced the programmes at a rally held at the Bajitpur in Kansat yesterday. Top leaders of the opposition alliance helped the government realise its budgets. But, there is now an uncer-

The hartal will be observed a day after the opposition's planned sit-in programme around the Prime Minister's Office on April 19.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) will also enforce the 6:00am to 6:00pm hartal on April 20 and observe "Kansat Solidarity Day" on April 16.

The programmes were announced from a press conference held at the party office in the capital yesterday. CPB President Manjurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Selim were present at the press conference.

The five-party alliance also enforces countrywide hartal on April 20, says a press release.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Chhatra Union, student wing of CPB, has called a day-long student strike at Dhaka University for tomorrow protesting the killings in Kansat.

Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) and Bangladesh Chhatra Federation (BCF) have extended support to the student strike.

Protesting the Kansat killing, Dhaka University Teachers' Association (Duta) will bring out a silent procession on April 17 on the campus.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon and its General Secretary Bimal Biswas, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Haque Inu and General Secretary Syed Jafar Sazzad issued separated state-

Besides, the PM said, stress has been given on holding joint economic commission meeting as well as regular foreign ministry consultations every two years.

"I am hopeful a new horizon of cooperation between the two friendly countries would open up."

She said the two sides reached consensus on enhancing mutual cooperation between business leaders to accelerate trade and commerce.

The PM said Bangladesh is determined to work closely with Turkey to continuously expand and strengthen the prevailing atmosphere of improving bilateral relations and mutual welfare oriented cooperation.

Khaleda said she invited the Turkish prime minister to visit Bangladesh and he cordially accepted her invitation and expressed his desire to visit Bangladesh at a convenient time.

Tell us why Kansat people

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necessitated this ferocious behaviour by our police and that also under a democratic dispensation and by an elected government?"

Here are some facts about the killings in Kansat that may help to wake us up to the immorality and shocking nature of the situation. First, two people were killed on January 4 followed by killing of seven on the 23rd of the same month. Then four were killed on April 6 and another was injured, who later died on April 12. Finally, six were killed the day before yesterday. A total of 20 innocent lives lost for the 'crime' of agitating for adequate electricity supply so that they could carry on their farming property. All these deaths occurred due to police firing that can only be termed unprovoked, for there is absolutely no evidence of the villagers resorting to any sort of violent action that could have called for such brutality and response of 'final resort'.

Given the nature of the police action, one is almost compelled to ask as to whether there is an insurgency going on at Kansat. Has that area been taken over by our 'enemies'? Are those being killed so recklessly citizens of Bangladesh? Or are they some aliens occupying our land that we can kill as we please. Otherwise how could police repeatedly resort to firing when all the usual tactics of crowd management were not applied? First, what sorts of 'weapons' did the villagers carry that police needed to open fire? Second, what threat could stick-wielding villagers pose that police had to shoot to kill? Third, what measures of crowd control were taken to contain the agitators?

In the beginning they were just demonstrated. When police attacked them brutally they started throwing bricks

and carrying sticks. Later they cut down trees to block roads and in some cases even dug up road sections. In no instance were they carrying any firearms or known to have used explosives or cocktails. To date, the police themselves did not make such a claim. So where was the danger that necessitated opening fire? Not once, twice, or three, but on four separate occasions interspersed by several weeks at a time. Do the actions of the agitators of Kansat justify the reaction by the police? No, not if we believe in democracy and in the inalienable right of the people to dissent and express their dissension in a peaceful manner. The question is whether the present government believes the same. If we are to go by their actions in Kansat, we are forced to seriously doubt that.

There is absolutely no adequate explanation for treating our villagers in this manner except of an arrogant mindset that treats every dissenting voice as that of an 'enemy'. The present government has become so used to applying brute force to contain opposition rallies and demonstrations that for them every agitation is inevitably the product of opposition 'conspiracy' and as such must be dealt with the maximum force.

Till today, to the best of our knowledge, the government or the ruling party has not bothered to sit for a moment to think what is going on at Kansat. Why has this area, which had hitherto been unknown to most people of the country and never had any reputation of being a hotbed of agitation, should suddenly become so rebellious? Between January 4 and today a good four months and 10 days have elapsed, but no initiative of any sort has been taken to talk to the villagers or to engage them in some sort of a problem-solving dialogue. No

minister or ruling party leader of any consequence visited the area to find out for oneself what is happening there. Are these the characteristics of a representative government? Even the local MP, who is from the ruling party, did not sit with his own electorate (those who voted him to the office) to find a solution. In fact he has already dubbed them 'terrorists'. (See the story on Page 12).

In democratic systems elsewhere, governments have been known to fall for far less. A few unnecessary and unjustifiable deaths in the hands of government agencies wrought havoc on elected governments that truly believe in being peoples' representatives. But ours of course is a democracy with a difference. Here we do not seem to elect leaders who want to serve the people but to rule over them, and if the 'stupid' people have the insolence to misbehave (like agitating) then they need to be punished and even killed.

Here 20 people have already been killed by law enforcers and yet there is no inquiry, no talk of any minister's resignation, no explanation by the government and no sign from anybody in power that something unusual is happening in a small rural area 65km off the nearest town, Chapainawabganj. A few deaths don't seem to matter in our democracy, especially if those are of poor people of remote villages. Our leaders are far too high and mighty to small things like peoples' lives to bother them.

IAEA chief

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clarified, "ElBaradei said.

"I would like to see Iran has come to terms with the request of the international community," adding that he still remained "hopeful the time is right for political solutions, through negotiations."

ElBaradei opened his discussions with Iran's vice president and Atomic Energy Organisation chief, Gholam Reza Aghazadeh, and was also set to meet Ali Larjani, Iran's top national security official and nuclear negotiator.

The IAEA chief must give a report at the end of April on Iranian compliance with the Security Council deadline.

Representatives of the five permanent members of the Council plus Germany are to meet in Moscow next Tuesday to discuss the crisis, as the long-running stand-off looked set to enter a period of far more robust diplomacy.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has called for the 15-member Security Council to take "strong steps" and the White House said sanctions were an option.

Agitation turning

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shouted slogans against Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and local ruling party lawmaker Mohammad Shahjahan.

About 20,000 people gathered at the rally, organised by the 14-party opposition alliance against the police killings. Senior leaders of 14-party alliance from Dhaka addressed the rally and said they would spread the movement of Kansat across the country.

"Half of the demonstrators at the rally are not involved with any political party... they are ordinary people," a local schoolteacher told this correspondent near the rally adding, "Many of the rally participants are former supporters of ruling BNP."

Champa Begum, widow of Garbullah, killed on January 23 by police firing, addressed the huge gathering and demanded punishment to the culprits who killed her husband.

Manzur Hossain, father of Kajal killed on January 4 by police fire, took the microphone and alleged Rajshahi mayor and local BNP lawmaker are the main culprits behind the violence in Kansat.

Abdus Salek, 18, came to join the rally from Hazardighi village, about 10 kilometres from the rally venue and said all men of his village joined the rally. "We didn't know how to protest despite suffering for a long time. But, now we are united and determined to defeat the opponents [government]. We have no way, but to succeed," he added.

"We are not involved in politics, we are here for our rights," said Enamul, 28, of Mobarakpur village. "All the people of my maternal uncle's village, Bishwanathpur, have fled to avoid police atrocities," he said. "The movement is not only for 14-point demand for power now, we will not return home until the killers of my brothers are punished," he added.

Talking about police atrocities in the area since the deployment, a local said some BNP men along with police joined in looting villagers' houses.

Describing his plight as a Palli Bidyut consumer, shop owner Faruk said he had to pay Tk 8,500 when employees of the Palli Bidyut told him his electric meter was faulty. "My electric meter was okay and was giving correct readings but the employees of Palli Bidyut tricked me to take money from me," he said.

"The monthly service charge for electricity is Tk 105," said Sobhan Mia, a farmer of Kansat. "Why should I pay the money when I get electricity for two hours a day?" he questioned. "Moreover, the consumers have to bear monthly meter rent of Tk 50," he added. Another local farmer Abdus Samad said the consumers have to bear the replacement cost of any transformer or cable stolen in the area.

Kansat becomes

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police action: they are Anwarul Hossain, 11, son of Mairul, Shakil Ahmed Babu, 15, son of Abdul Sattar of Sonarpara, and Abdur Rahman, a teacher of Shibrnagar Government Primary School.

Thousands of villagers, regardless their age and gender, have been living in the open by the side of rivers and water bodies, in sugarcane fields, mango orchards and open fields after Wednesday's police firing, raids and looting at their houses.

During a visit to four villages in Kansat, only four inhabitants were found in Baghdurgapur village, normally a habitat of some 70 families.

A combined force of law enforcers, comprising the police, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Armed Police Battalion, were seen patrolling the areas. They took positions every 100 yards to swoop upon whoever is seen with sticks or any kind of resistance.

VILLAGE BAGHDURGAPUR
Of the four in Baghdurgapur village, Purna Das, 55, is the lone male left in the house to look after his aunt Kanaklata, 70, and the household. All of them bore injury marks from the police action.

Purna's brother Mahindranath Das, sisters Sanskriti and Krishna managed to escape during the police attack on the village.

The law enforcers, who attacked the village twice in the morning and the evening, looted Tk 50,000 and five trolleys gold ornaments from the house at gunpoint, the residents alleged.

The police also arrested Jibonkrishna Das and Kamal Das in the village.

Purna said he does not know the whereabouts of his sister-in-law Jharna Das and her university-going daughter Keya Das since they fled. Bholanath, another brother of Purna, was bullet-hit during the police action in Nabaganj village.

RAJAR BAGAN
Around 100 people were seen taking refuge at a mango orchard popularly known as Rajar Bagan, some one and a half kilometres from Baghdurgapur village.

The villagers believe the barbed wire fence around the orchard will save them from further police attacks. They said hundreds more are to come there for shelter at night while others will be in the riversbanks and fields.

BNP MEN IN POLICE GUISE

Locals alleged that some BNP activists wore police uniform as disguise and joined the law enforcers in Wednesday's attack while some others guided the police in raiding the houses and arresting villagers.

"The BNP men were in police

uniform with helmets on and participated in the raid," said a villager. They were identified as Kulu Daktar, Jewel, Azad Master, Khaleq Daktar, Suhrawardi Professor and Biswanathpur Upazila Parishad Chairman Hazrat.

PEOPLE FLEEING
Purnima, Dhananjay and Bhanu of Bikanbazar village were seen