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Govt committed
to holding
credible polls
Chief adviser says

UNB, Dhaka

Chief Adviser (CA) Fakhruddin Ahmed yesterday said the present caretaker government is committed to holding a free, fair and acceptable election to give the country's democratic order a firm footing.

The CA made the remarks when outgoing Vietnamese Ambassador Ngan Van Hoa made a farewell call on him at his office.

The envoy said the caretaker government's achievements in its reform measures and contributions to the electoral process will not only help hold the next election

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Charges framed
against Dulu,
93 others for
arson, looting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The Court of Additional District Magistrate (ADM) in Natore yesterday framed charges against 94 persons including former BNP deputy minister Ruhul Kuddus Talukdar Dulu for arson and looting at three villages under Nalanda upazila in 2004.

ADM Rawnak Mahmud also fixed Monday to start trial of the case.

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ELECTORAL REFORMS

Parties can talk with EC despite politics ban

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Political parties can sit for dialogue with the Election Commission (EC) on its proposed electoral reforms despite the ban on political activities, an election commissioner said.

"Political parties will have to send their nominated representatives to hold discussion with us. We will not invite any parties to sit with the commission to discuss the proposed electoral reforms until the embargo on indoor politics is

lifted," Election Commissioner Brig Gen (retd) Sakhawat Hossain told journalists at his office.

The EC will sit with the Jatiya Party (Nlju) today as the party had earlier sought a schedule for discussion on election matters, Sakhawat said.

"I cannot say that," he replied when asked whether sending 'nominated' representatives would not be considered as political activities, and who would ensure their security.

The election commissioner's

comments came just a day after two advisers of the caretaker government said it may allow political parties to hold their council meetings if they seek permission to complete intra-party reforms despite the ban on politics.

Asked whether the views expressed by the advisers would prompt the EC to make a move for talks with political parties, Sakhawat said he cannot say anything right now. "Wait and see," he added.

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Tk 500cr duty evaded at 2 land ports

Taskforce probe finds

RABIQUE SARKER, back from Burimari, Lalmonirhat

More than Tk 500 crore customs duty on importing fruits was evaded at Hilli and Burimari land ports in the last six years.

A team of anti-corruption taskforce probed six years' records with the two ports and detected the

irregularities carried out by the clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents and importers in collaboration with some customs and bank officials.

The taskforce team comprising officials from the army, National Board of Revenue (NBR), police and the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) also found

irregularities in importing other goods, but it gave fruits import the highest priority.

According to the team's findings, the Hilli port customs realised about Tk 605 crore as fruits import duty in the last six years while actual duty was Tk 925 crore. At the Burimari land port the realised

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Javed leads fightback

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

No boos came from the stands on the third day like the first two as the resistance finally came from Bangladesh in the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC) ground yesterday.

After the first two days' humiliation, the Bangladeshi batsmen played with a purpose to bat throughout the day and silence the

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Massive hunt on for kidnapped Danida staff

STAR REPORT

In the primary investigation, the law enforcers have confirmed that at least one local villager was with the kidnappers of two Danida staff.

The law enforcers could not rescue the abducted Danida staff as of yesterday evening. They were continuing their operation in search of the two, using two choppers, report our correspondents from Bandarban and Rangamati.

Quizzing the local villagers, the joint forces came to know that one villager was involved in the kidnapping, but they declined to say anything further about their findings.

Danish International Development Agency (Danida) official Suman Sharif and his driver Mohammed Hanif were kidnapped from Kyaburapara under Thanchi

SEE PAGE 15 COL 3

Shamim Eskandar appears at ACC

Gani submits wealth statement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former prime minister Khaleda Zia's brother and ex-official of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Shamim Eskander yesterday appeared before the members of taskforces at the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) head office at Shegunbagicha to face questioning regarding his wealth statement.

Meanwhile the ACC yesterday received wealth statement of detained former chief of forest department Osman Gani through Dhaka Central Jail authorities where he showed his movable and

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Correction

In our yesterday's report headlined "Manju jailed for 5 yrs for possessing liquor" it was inadvertently mentioned that "The joint forces arrested Manju from his Dhanmondi residence on March 12 midnight..." In fact the joint forces raided his house on that night and seized 21 bottles of liquor. He was not arrested. We regret the error.

Huda, Sigma,
Alena sued
for extortion

STAR REPORT

A construction contractor of the Roads and Highways (R&H) Department filed two extortion cases against detained BNP leader and former communications minister Nazmul Huda, his wife Sigma Huda, Alena Khan and three top executives of a human rights organisation on Tuesday night.

According to the case filed with Tejgaon Police Station, Nazmul Huda called Wahidur Rahman Azad, the complainant, to BSEHR (Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights) office in February 2003 and demanded Tk 10 lakh in cash.

SEE PAGE 15 COL 6

PARTY REFORMS

BNP for quick council, AL for lifting politics ban first

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Reformist leaders of BNP are thinking of holding a party council as soon as possible to adopt their 15-point reform proposal while Awami League (AL) reformists think that it is not possible to hold the council without the ban on political activities.

According to the case filed with Tejgaon Police Station, Nazmul Huda called Wahidur Rahman Azad, the complainant, to BSEHR (Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights) office in February 2003 and demanded Tk 10 lakh in cash.

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Khan, an adviser to the BNP chairperson told The Daily Star last night.

AL President Member Tofail Ahmed however said, "Even if the government gives permission to hold the council we won't be able to hold it with the ban on political activities."

Tofail, one of the top echelon leaders of AL reformists, demanded that the ban on indoor politics be lifted to facilitate holding of political parties' councils.

But at the same time he expressed his doubts about the possibility of

that happening.

Sources in BNP said the reformist leaders of that party started communicating with prospective councillors across the country. They have also been trying to convince the prospective councillors to support their 15-point reform proposal aiming to remove Khaleda Zia from the post of the party chairperson, so that it is adopted by the council.

AL Acting General Secretary Mukul Bose however told The Daily Star that they have not yet started

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

LDP finally splits

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) officially split yesterday only eight months after its formation-as its president and executive president both claimed their supremacy having majority support from party leaders.

Declaring a new party president, LDP President Prof AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury claimed that they are the real LDP and Col (retd) Giasuddin Ahmed, Arshaduzzaman, Mohammad Abdullah, Dr Abdul Mannan, Prof Nurul Amin Bepari, Arif Mainuddin, Joynul Abedin and MA Mukit Khan.

Mahi B Chowdhury refused to accept the post of presidium member saying he is engaged with a non-party reform initiative.

Acknowledging the division in the party, Badruddoza said at the press briefing, "We are not responsible for the split...77 of the 100 national executive committee members [of the party] are with us. We are the real LDP."

Brushing aside Oli's claim that Badruddoza and his followers are not in the party any more, he said,

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Brown replaces Blair

AFP, London

Finance minister Gordon Brown took over yesterday as British prime minister from Tony Blair, vowing after a decade in Blair's shadow to lead an era of "change".

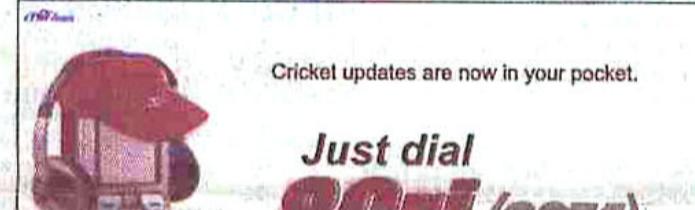
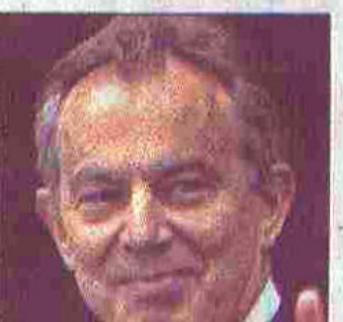
While Blair, his reputation as a reformer tainted by the Iraq war, was expected to become a Middle East peace envoy, Brown highlighted his determination to stamp his own authority after being asked by Queen Elizabeth II

to form a new government. Brown pledged in his first public comments to lead a "new government with new priorities."

He said he wanted to "build trust" in the government and reject "old politics" as he showed his determination to make a break with the Blair years. "Now let the work of change begin," he declared outside his Downing Street office.

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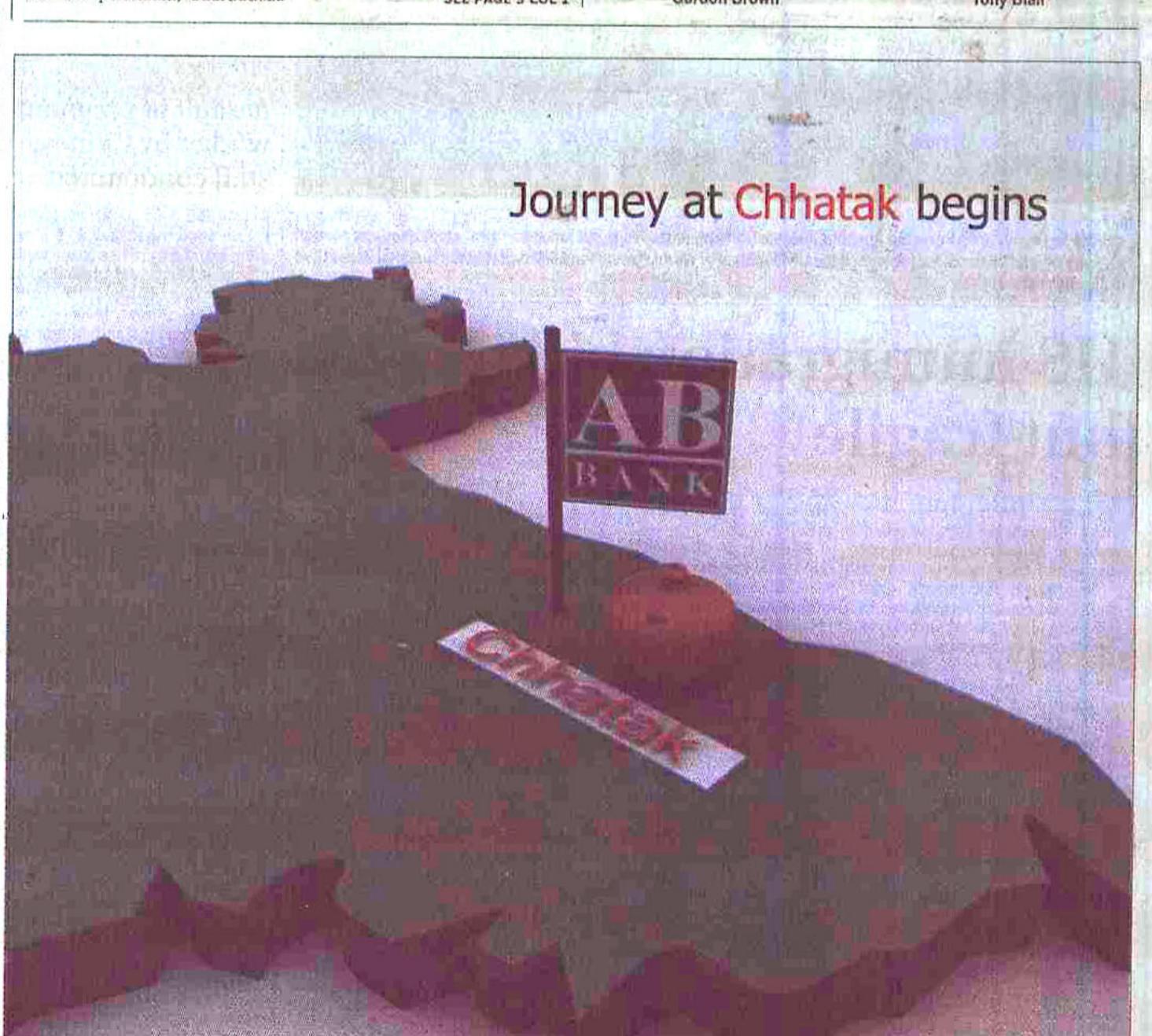
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