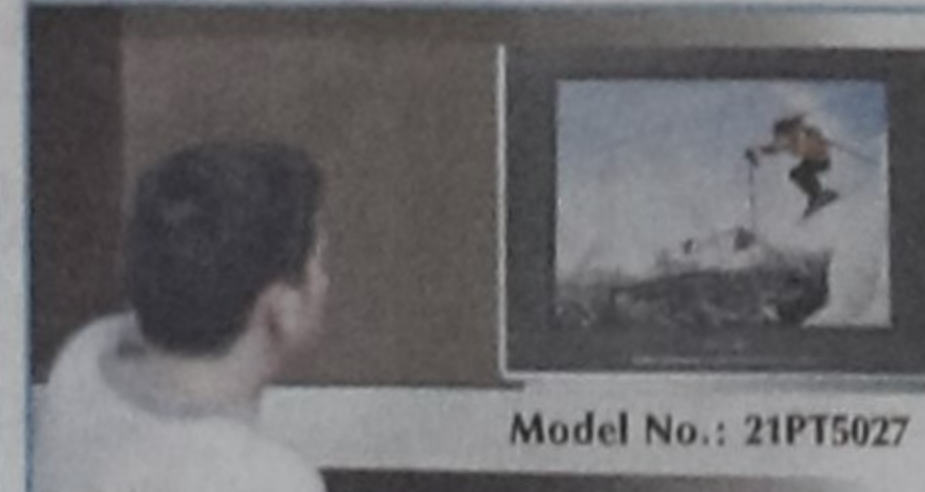




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Sharapova wins Australian Open

AFP, Melbourne

Russia's Maria Sharapova won her first Australian Open title Saturday, powering to a straight sets victory in her glamour final with Serbia's Ana Ivanovic to claim her third Grand Slam title.

The 20-year-old fifth seed ground down the fourth seeded Ivanovic 7-5, 6-3 over one hour 31 minutes, successfully completing her mission to make amends for a thrashing in last year's final at the hands of Serena Williams.

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Law adviser shrugs off Azam Chy's statement on Hasina case

UNB, Dhaka

Law Adviser AF Hassan Arif yesterday said the government has nothing to do with the extortion case against former prime minister Sheikh Hasina even after the statement by complainant Azam J Chowdhury.

Azam told the press Thursday that he did not directly file any case against the Awami League president.

"The government has nothing to do as the case is under process in court. Now the matter depends on the court," the law adviser said.

He was talking to reporters after the inauguration of a conference on Model Legal Aid in Bangladesh at Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

Replying to another question on the progress of separate secretariats for the Supreme Court and the

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23RD BCS EXAM

Fate of 70 successful candidates uncertain

SURANITH DEABNATH

Recruitment of 70 successful candidates of the 23rd Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination has been stalled for seven years due to political conflicts between two elected governments and bureaucratic tangles during the present caretaker government.

The successful candidates of the following 24th, 25th and 26th BCS examinations have meanwhile joined the civil service, while viva voce of the 27th BCS is on.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) invited applications for the 23rd BCS examination only from the offspring of freedom fighters in 2001. But the then Awami League government could not complete all procedures before its tenure ended.

PSC sources said the BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government halted the procedures during its tenure even ignoring a High Court

verdict due apparently to the pressure from Jamaat-e-Islami.

The caretaker government initiated reforming the PSC for regaining public confidence in it. The reformed PSC headed by Dr Saadat Hussain finally announced the results on July 25, 2007 and sent some recommendations to the establishment ministry for appointing the successful candidates.

Although medical tests and police verification have ended the ministry has yet to issue the gadget notification due to bureaucratic red tape.

"All the procedures of the 23rd BCS have been completed but we're facing some queries, which is the main reason for further delay. Besides, we're also waiting for the permission of the chief adviser and the president," Establishment Secretary Abdus Salam Khan told The Daily Star.

He also said they did not receive

police verification reports of all the candidates.

"It's an untold suffering. We've been victimised due to conflicts between two political governments," said Selina Akhtar, who has been selected as a medical officer.

"Can you imagine seven years have already passed for completing a recruitment process? How many time will we have to wait for receiving our appointment gadgets?" Helena asked.

The preliminary test of the 23rd BCS (special) was held in March 2001 and written examinations in June 2001 during the AL rule. The psychological test was held in June 2003 and the viva voce in July 2003 during the BNP-Jamaat government.

PSC member M Abdur Rauf said the establishment ministry is solely responsible for issuing the gadget for the successful candidates.

"The PSC has no more functions

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PHOTO: STAR

MESSY MEDICARE... Patients lie on the floor and share beds at Ward-35 of Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Authorities hardly pay any attention to the problem of the usually busy ward for women and children.

Hold credible polls, restore democracy

Politicians, professionals ask caretaker govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Calling for greater unity to restore and strengthen democracy, leaders of different political parties and professional bodies yesterday said elections should be held immediately to end the existing crises in the country.

A quick election would be better for the nation, otherwise people might lose their patience as problems are rapidly developing in

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

Justice KM Hasan says he was ready to be 'neutral' CA

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Former chief justice KM Hasan yesterday said he had himself ready to be an "impartial" chief of the caretaker government after the last four-party alliance rule.

It was the second time he spoke about the issue after his refusal to be the chief adviser (CA) in the wake of a huge controversy in October 2006.

He said, "I had some plans that could've come in handy for economic, social and political development of the country."

He made the observations in reply to queries from newsmen

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AL, BNP for freeing chiefs for fair polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a BBC discussion yesterday observed that the next election would not be free, fair and acceptable if held with Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaled Zia still in prison.

"In the interests of a credible election both the leaders will have to be allowed to take part in the polls," Forest and Environment Affairs Secretary of AL Hasan Mahmud told the dialogue at the

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PHOTO: STAR

Preparations for the Ekushey Book Fair, scheduled to open on February 1, are going on at Bangla Academy in the capital.

WAR CRIMINALS Sector commanders for probe commission with int'l jurists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Sector Commanders' Forum, a platform of sector commanders of the Liberation War, yesterday demanded the government initiate trial of war criminals immediately forming an enquiry commission, with the participation of international jurists, and a tribunal under existing laws.

"We want the government to form a tribunal under International Crimes Act 1973 and Article 47 (3) of the constitution to try war criminals," said Sector Commanders' Forum Member Secretary Dr MA Hasan.

Hasan was briefing reporters at Rajshahi Parjatan Motel with four sector commanders led by deputy chief of Liberation War Forces and Sector Commanders' Forum Chairman Air Vice-Marshal (retd) AK Khandakar.

Sector Commanders' Forum leaders went to Rajshahi on the second leg of their visit to six divi-

sions of the country to mobilise public opinion for its March 15 national convention and against war criminals. They visited Khulna on January 16.

"We also want an enquiry commission to collect complaints regarding killings, mass-killings, rape, children and women repressions, tortures and robberies during the '71 war and scrutinise those to find out the real culprits," Hasan said.

"The commission must have participation of international jurists for keeping the entire trial process above controversy," he said.

Speaking at a gathering of several thousand people, especially freedom fighters, from different northern districts at Rajshahi Zila Parishad Auditorium, the sector commanders called for forging greater unity against war criminals. They said their trial is as important as the ongoing crackdown on corruption.

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3 'criminals' to be brought from India

CID team to visit W Bengal in Feb

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of Criminal Investigation Department (CID) is likely to leave for India in the first week of next month to bring back three wanted Bangladeshi criminals arrested in West Bengal.

Earlier, the CID had sought permission over the matter from

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Polls to 4 city corporations likely by Apr

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Election Commissioner Sohul Hossain yesterday said the Election Commission is hopeful of holding city corporation polls in Rajshahi, Khulna, Sylhet and Barisal by March-April this year.

He called on all election-related officials for their full assistance so

SEE PAGE 15 COL 1

30 Tamil Tigers killed in fresh fighting

AFP, Colombo

Fighting across Sri Lanka's north has left at least 31 people dead, nearly all of them Tamil Tiger rebels, the island's military said yesterday.

The defence ministry said at least 30 Tamil Tiger rebels and one soldier were killed in the fresh wave of fighting on Friday, although the pro-rebel website Tamilnet.com said three government soldiers and two guerrillas died.

The fighting took place in Mannar in the northwest, the website said.

Since the start of this month, the Sri Lankan government has said it has killed 666 rebels for the loss of 27 of its soldiers. At least 63 civilians

had also been killed, according to defence ministry figures.

Both sides give wildly varying casualty figures which cannot be independently verified as the government bars journalists from visiting frontline areas and rebel-held territory.

The government also pulled out of a Norwegian-brokered ceasefire this month, leading to the departure of Nordic monitoring teams.

Meanwhile doctors in Anuradhapura district, 206 kilometres (130 miles) north of the capital Colombo, were expected to conduct autopsies on 16 bodies found in shallow graves on Thursday.

The victims had apparently been blindfolded, bound and shot-

- the latest casualties of an increasingly dirty war in which both sides are accused of murdering civilians.

A spokesman at Anuradhapura Hospital said the autopsies were scheduled for Saturday, with officials hoping to identify the victims and the circumstances of their deaths.

The victims were wearing civilian clothes and appeared to be aged between 25 and 40, said a senior police officer in the area, who declined to be named.

He said additional police and military personnel had been deployed in the area following the incident.

"People in the area are living in fear after the bodies were discovered and they asked for extra protection," he said.

Goods gutted in garment factory fire

UNB, N'ganj

A devastating fire broke out at a garment factory at Fatulla yesterday morning, burning down its huge readymade shirts and valuable machinery.

Fire brigade sources said the fire originated from an electric short circuit at the finishing section of the export-oriented factory, Cotton Belly Knitting, on its second floor

SEE PAGE 15 COL 5

Hillary, Obama await fate as voting starts in South Carolina

AFP, South Carolina

Democratic voters in South Carolina early yesterday began casting their votes on Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama in a presidential primary scarred by bad blood between the bitter rivals.

The "first in the south" nominating contest is the culmination of a fiercely divisive state campaign, which has at times taken the party into dangerous racial ground, and including fiery interventions by ex-president Bill Clinton.

It is also the final contested Democratic nominating clash before February 5, "Super Tuesday" when nearly two-dozen states hold contests on a night that could be decisive for this year's presidential candidates.

Polls opened at 7:00 am (1200 GMT) and were set to close 12 hours later.

Expectations are highest for Obama, who desperately needs a victory after Clinton scooped the Nevada caucuses and New Hampshire primary, despite his win in the lead-off Iowa caucuses on January 3.

As he strives to become the first black president in US history, Obama has built a powerbase among African American voters, who form about half of the Democratic electorate here, and should be enough to take him to victory.

"For Obama, a win in South Carolina is the equivalent of holding serve," said University of New

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Once upon a time, a frog shares a kiss with a princess.

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