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JS SEAT ROW Speaker meets both chief whips today

Speaker Abdul Hamid has invited the chief whips of both treasury bench and the opposition to have talks at his office today to settle the row over seating arrangement in parliament.

"We shall meet the speaker tomorrow to discuss the issue of seating arrangement,"

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Muhith vows stern action against loan defaulters

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday said the government would take stern action against loan defaulters.

"I do not like the loan defaulters at all. In the early '80s, I (Muhith was then finance minister of Ershad

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Huji active in Bangladesh

Hasan Mahmud tells CNN-IBN

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh has for the first time admitted that its territory and porous borders may have been used by terrorist groups to target India and says it is committed to acting against them.

The Harkat-ul-Jihad (Huji), the anti-Indian militant group, continues to function in Bangladesh though it has been banned, admitted Hasan Mahmud, state minister for foreign affairs.

Mahmud, in an exclusive interview to CNN-IBN, said Huji "definitely" exists in Bangladesh despite a ban on it. "They are banned, but they are in hideouts now," he said.

Asked whether the Bangladesh Government was

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CHT PROBLEMS Hasina for political solution

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said problems of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) will have to be resolved politically as these are all political issues.

She made the remark when a five-member delegation of the International Commission on Chittagong Hill Tracts led

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Bhutan offers electricity

Trade deal likely by May

UNB, Dhaka

Bhutan has offered Bangladesh an opportunity of importing surplus electricity from the Himalayan kingdom to feed its power-hungry national grid.

As the Bhutanese ambassador in Dhaka made the offer yesterday, Commerce Minister Faruk Khan said Bangladesh will sign trade agreement with Bhutan within May.

"Bhutan expressed its interest in the trade agreement and decided to sign the deal in April or May," the

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Prayer Timing

February 19		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-20	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-03	6-07
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Gun-running rampant along SW borders

Demand of Indian guns high for low price

AMANUR AMAN, back from border areas

Smuggling of various kinds of firearms has picked up alarmingly in the country's southwestern region.

According to law enforcement agency sources, arms traffickers are particularly active in at least 29 points in six border districts. The districts are Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore and Satkhira.

The smugglers have forged close ties with their Indian counterparts who are the gun-runners. They are well-organised and also have 'good relations' with security forces of both countries in the borders.

Police said the weapons are being supplied to other parts of the country

according to demand of the buyers. A good number of the firearms are also falling into the hands of outlawed party cadres and gangs.

The illegal firearms are mostly made in China, USA, Czech Republic and India. They include eight-shooter gun, sawn-off rifle, sub-machine gun, light machine guns, pistols and Indian made arms like pipe guns, one-shooter gun, Muscat rifle and revolver etc.

Sources said the demand for Indian-made firearms is particularly high due to its price and availability.

During a recent visit to different border points in Meherpur, Chuadanga and Kushtia,

The Daily Star correspondent managed to get an idea about the rate of these

firearms smuggled into Bangladesh. A sub-machine gun can sell for Tk 1 lakh to Tk 2 lakh, the price of a light machine gun starts at Tk 80,000 and can go up to Tk 1.5 lakh and a foreign-made pistol can cost Tk 50,000 to Tk 1 lakh.

Besides, various Indian-made arms can range between Tk 5,000 and Tk 25,000.

The smugglers often use at least four points in Kushtia border, five in Jhenidah, four in Chuadanga, three in Meherpur, six in Satkhira and seven in Jessore.

To conceal the weapons, the gangs usually use consignments of fruits, eggs, rice, vegetables and other items. It is alleged that the border security forces of India and Bangladesh often ignore

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PAC, 10 more JS bodies formed

BNP's MK Anwar, Joynal Abedin to head two committees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The House yesterday constituted the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and 10 more standing committees, completing formation of 32 out of 48 committees so far.

BNP lawmakers MK Anwar and Joynal Abedin were appointed chiefs of the standing committee on the environment and forest and the fisheries and livestock ministries respectively.

Two more chairs of the standing committees are likely to be given to the opposition lawmakers. Another opposition lawmaker, chief of Liberal Democratic Party, Oli Ahmed, was appointed chief of the standing committee on the planning ministry on Tuesday.

With their appointments, the main opposition lawmakers were made chairman of the standing committees for the first time since restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991.

Opposition Chief Whip Joynal Abedin Faruk yesterday strongly criticised the treasury bench for incorporating the names of two BNP lawmakers in the standing committees without discussing the matter with them.

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Entire admin politicised

PM accuses BNP-led coalition at JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday launched a blistering attack on past BNP-Jamaat-led alliance government accusing it of politicising the entire administration and said her government is facing problems for the "politicised" administration.

"They politicised everywhere ranging from the civil administration and armed forces to the judiciary. Efficient officials were removed for the politicisation," Hasina told the House during a question-answer session.

She said the new government is facing problems as inefficiency and reluctance of

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Two traffic constables take a break from work and rest in seized rickshaws on a truck in city's Shabbagh area yesterday. The rickshaws were seized during a drive against rickshaws peddling without licences in the city.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Govt to reprint 1cr textbooks

Prepares to blacklist traders behind artificial crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday decided to reprint one crore more textbooks to resolve the persisting crisis of secondary school textbooks.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said the process of reprinting 40 lakh textbooks will begin today while the government will float an urgent tender for the rest 60 lakh most important textbooks of 20 types.

The decision was made at an emergency meeting at the secretariat in the capital with education minister in the chair.

Top officials of the education ministry and National Curriculum and Textbooks Board (NCTB), members of the taskforce for textbooks and representatives of publishers and printers were present at the meeting.

"It is true that 2.62 crore textbooks are not enough for secondary level students now. For this reason, we decided to reprint one crore more textbooks to bring an end to textbooks crisis," said the education minister at a press briefing after the meeting.

He also said the ministry is preparing a black list of those publishers who hoarded textbooks and made an artificial crisis to make some quick bucks at the cost of students' education.

"We will form a national expert committee comprising officials of education ministry, former and present NCTB officials, members of law enforcers and experienced academicians to prevent recurrence of textbook crisis next year," said Nahid.

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12pc Social Safety Net benefit lost on bribe, flaws

BSS, Dhaka

An estimated 11-12 percent fund of the Social Safety Net (SSN) programme is drained out due to various flaws, said a study report of Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).

One percent of the benefit is leaked out as bribe, seven percent lost for mal-targeting and three to four percent for receiving less than prescribed amounts.

'Social connection' with local representatives and bribe appeared to be the most important criterion to get benefit of the SSN, making frustrated its main objective to reduce poverty through direct transfer of resources to the poor.

Social connection means the target household having some relative of friend to approach UP chairman or member. About one-third of the current beneficiaries reported to have such social connection.

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Govt made JS ineffective

Says Delwar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday blamed the treasury bench for making parliament non-functional within only 15 workdays.

Delwar, at a press briefing at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office, accused the ruling alliance of campaigning against the opposition in parliament.

He said BNP would return to the parliament right now if the government resolved the seating arrangement crisis.

"Neither we want to see parliament ineffective nor the country nonfunctional but it is

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KHMER ROUGE WAR CRIME Tribunal needs final list of witnesses

AP, Phnom Penh

A long-delayed Khmer Rouge genocide tribunal wrapped up its opening session yesterday with judges saying they still need to finalise a list of witnesses before announcing when a full trial of the former head of the regime's notorious torture centre will begin.

Kaing Guek Eav -- better known as Duch -- is charged with crimes against humanity. He is the first of five defendants from the close-knit, ultra-communist regime that ruled Cambodia in the 1970s and turned it into a vast slave labor camp in which an estimated 1.7 million people perished.

Three decades after the fall of the Khmer Rouge, the U.N.-assisted tribunal began a

procedural session Tuesday to lay the groundwork for a full trial expected in March. The precise date has not been set and details still need to be ironed out, including who will testify.

Judge Silvia Cartwright, a former New Zealand High Court judge, told the court that the tribunal's five judges met Wednesday in private to pare down the lists of proposed witnesses to "consider whether the testimony would be redundant or repetitious."

She said judges had agreed on about 30 of the witnesses proposed by lawyers for the prosecution, defense and civil parties. They dropped a handful of witnesses and postponed a decision on about 20 others. She did not say

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Make sure ACC not weakened

UN official urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting United Nations Assistant Secretary General Ajay Chhibber yesterday urged the government to bring changes in government institutions to make those less politicised, more transparent and well functioning.

"Our emphasis has been very much to exhort the government to ensure that all the changes that are made do not weaken any of the government institutions like Anti-Corruption Commission but strengthen them further,"

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Hillary seeks to better US image

Gets warm reception in Indonesia

AP, AFP, Jakarta

US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton moved yesterday to boost US ties with the world's most populous Muslim nation and its neighbours, pledging a new American willingness to work with and listen to Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia.

Her message was received warmly by officials in Jakarta, the childhood home of President Barack Obama, although small and scattered protests were held in several cities, with some Islamic hard-liners setting tires on fire and others throwing shoes at caricatures of Hillary.

She said her choice of Asia for her first overseas trip as Obama's top diplomat was "no accident" and a sign of the new administration's desire for broader and deeper relations with the continent on regional and global issues.

Hillary, who arrived from a stop in Japan and will head today

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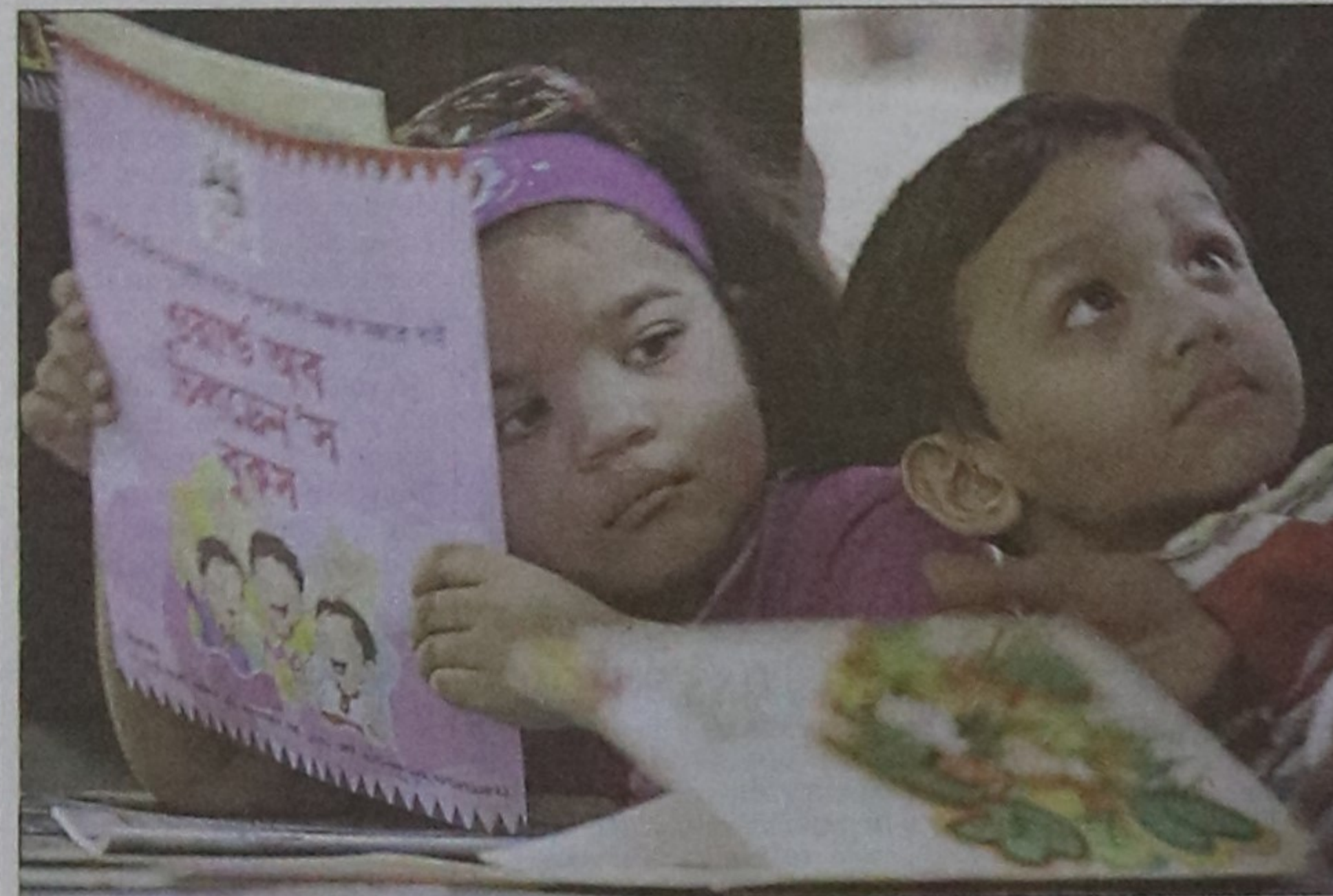
KIBRIA MURDER Cops asked to place suppl charge sheet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry asked the police department to submit the supplementary charge sheet of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria assassination case at the meeting of ministry's monitoring cell in March.

The directive came at a meeting of the monitoring cell, which is scrutinising the sensational cases, held at the home ministry. With Home Minister Sahara Khatun in the chair, State Minister for Home Affairs Tanjim Ahmed Sobel Taj was also present in the meeting.

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Two young children listen to their parent (not in picture) as they go through books at a stall of Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday.

Manna Dey in spotlight

AMENA KHATUN

The presence of living legend of Bangla song Manna Dey overwhelmed the crowd at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela yesterday. The visit of such renowned personality tinted glamour to the book fair.

He unveiled covers of two books by Lipi Manwar titled Dushtu Cheler Dol from Mizzi publications and a poetry collection titled Shapnabilashi Mon from Alpana prokashana amid a brief ceremony at the fair premises.

During the unveiling ceremony, he said the huge crowd at the fair reflects the love of

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