

INDIAN ELECTION

Would 'Third Front' be viable?

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

A motley group of Left parties and regional outfits launched a third political front at a rally in a small town of the southern state of Karnataka yesterday seeking to provide an alternative to India's two main players - Congress and BJP - in coming parliamentary elections.

But the launching of the Third Front sparked a debate in the political circles questioning how credible and stable such an effort would be.

India has twice seen non-Congress and non-BJP governments first the National Front government led by VP Singh in 1989-90 and then United Front regime headed by HD Deve Gowda and Inder Kumar Gujral in 1996-97. None of the three governments could complete their tenure.

By contrast, barring the 1998 experiment, BJP could complete its full five-year term at the head of NDA coalition from 1999 to 2004 and so did Congress leading UPA government from 2004 to 2009.

After parting ways with the Congress-led UPA alliance in 2007 on the issue of Indo-US nuclear deal, Left parties have championed the cause of Third Front projecting themselves as anti-Congress and anti-BJP.

The rally in Tumkur, where the Third Front launched, was attended by Janata Dal (S) led by Deve Gowda, CPI leader AB Bardhan, TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu and CPI(M) General Secretary Prakash Karat. Karat said, "Today we have come together because the country needs a new alternative."

The assessment among proponents of Third Front is that its constituents will have a key role in the event of a highly fragmented verdict in the coming polls.

The Third Front leaders claim Congress and BJP are ceding gradually in various states, the parties in a rainbow coalition other than the two key players could occupy the centre-stage in the post-polls scenario.

Third Front leaders say if Congress-led alliance or BJP-led combine falls well short of parliamentary majority in polls, a non-Congress and non-BJP arrangement could attract some parties, which are now aligned with the two principal political outfits.

However, if the past record of the stability of non-Congress and non-BJP alliances is any guide, they are highly vulnerable, to say the least, political analysts pointed out.

Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav had deserted the wobbly United National Progressive Alliance (UNPA) in

2007 and joined hands with Congress to bail out the government of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in a parliamentary trial of strength on the issue of Indo-US nuclear deal.

BSP chief and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati then addressed a rally of UNPA when the space was vacated by her arch political rival Mulayam Singh Yadav only to drift away a few months later.

Leaders like Jayalalitha, Mayawati and Mulayam Singh Yadav are used to extracting their pounds of flesh from a coalition government and cannot be relied on as reliable coalition partners, analysts say.

The biggest player in the Third Front is the Left Front, which had last time won 61 parliamentary seats, their highest-ever. However, this time around, the Left's tally is expected to come down in Kerala and its strongholds of West Bengal, where Congress has succeeded in entering into an alliance with Trinamool Congress. The two states together account for 62 parliamentary seats out of a total strength of 543 in Lok Sabha.

If Left parties' strength comes down in the elections, many of the Third Front partners could quickly drift and jump out to back either Congress or BJP, depending on political expediency and exigency, analysts say.



Residents comfort each other in front of the Albertville secondary school in Winnenden, southern Germany yesterday. A teenager in black combat gear went on the rampage at his former school, killing at least 16 people before fleeing and sparking a major manhunt.

US House offers strong backing to Tibet

AFP, Washington

The US Congress nearly unanimously urged China to end "repression" in Tibet, ignoring Beijing's warnings just as its foreign minister prepared to meet President Barack Obama.

The House of Representatives on Wednesday voted 422 to 1 to approve the resolution, which marks 50 years since a failed uprising in Tibet that forced the Dalai Lama into exile. Nine House members did not vote.

The resolution urges China to "cease its repression of the Tibetan people, and to lift immediately the harsh policies imposed on Tibetans."

The resolution, which does not threaten action if Beijing fails to comply, came amid heightened tensions between China and the United States after navy vessels from the two countries clashed in the South China Sea.



Tibetan women shout anti-Chinese slogans during a protest in front of the United Nations (UN) Regional Headquarters in New Delhi yesterday as they commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising.

Indians are positive about 'no vote'

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

With General Elections around the corner, it is not just politicians but Netizens, too, who are busy launching campaigns in cyberspace.

But this one isn't about voting for candidates, in fact it is calling for an option for voters to reject all candidates in a particular constituency. Negative voting is the latest buzzword on social networking sites and blogs.

"Right at the bottom of the EVM there should be an option of a button saying you don't want to vote for any of the above. That gets registered and counted. That number needs to go out to the public and tell the political class how many people are against any of the candidates," media professional and Facebook Group creator Sharif Rangekar said.

Sharif's Facebook Group called 'Vote for None of the Above' has sparked off

debates among voters of all age groups and bloggers, too, are supporting this new train of thought.

But will this concept work in India?

"Not workable and not relevant. Despite many flaws, people feel the choice they have of choosing their leader is a big thing for them and also a lot of people we think as corrupt or uncaring are actually much more rooted to their own communities," political analyst Ajay Bose said.

Versions of negative voting already exist in some countries. In Spain, France, Belgium and Switzerland voters have a blank vote option. Although, they are not in favour of any candidate, they are still counted.

Presently, under Rule 49-0 of the Election Conduct Rules in India, a voter can go to a polling booth and then declare in writing that he/she refuses to vote for any of the candidates.

Thai PM, ministers face no-confidence motion

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's opposition yesterday filed a censure motion against Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and five government ministers, accusing them of corruption.

The move by the Puea Thai party, which is allied to fugitive former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, is the second step in their bid to topple the government, following the launch of impeachment proceedings on Wednesday.

British-born Abhisit, the leader of the ruling Democrat Party is accused of incompetence and mismanagement, alongside Finance Minister Korn Chatikavanij, his deputy Pradit Patharaprasit and Foreign Minister Kasit Piromya.

Interior Minister

Chavarat Charnveerakul and his deputy Boonchong Wongtrairat are also cited in the no-confidence motion.

The measure is the latest twist in a bitter political dogfight that has divided the kingdom since Thaksin was toppled in a 2006 coup.

"There are 174 Puea Thai lawmakers who have supported the motion," Pormpong Nopparit, Puea Thai party spokesman told AFP, admitting the number would fall far short of the 234-majority needed to win a parliamentary vote.

"But we want people to know the facts and we are confident that Abhisit's government will not survive after the debate," he said.

Wednesday's impeachment proceedings, a necessary precursor to the censure debate, accused

Abhisit of offering "moral support" to royalist protesters who launched a week-long occupation of Bangkok's two airports last year.

The blockade left hundreds of thousands of visitors stranded, severely dented the kingdom's tourist-friendly image and cost the economy billions of dollars.

The siege ended in December after the constitutional court disbanded the Thaksin-supporting People Power Party -- the predecessor to Puea Thai -- which had governed since winning the post-coup elections a year earlier.

Abhisit was named prime minister in a parliamentary vote on December 15, angering Thaksin supporters who have since held a series of protests calling for snap elections.

Palin daughter splits with fiance

AFP, Los Angeles

The unmarried teen daughter of Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, whose pregnancy became a US presidential campaign issue in 2008, has reportedly split with her young fiance.

Bristol Palin, 18, gave birth to a baby boy in December but has since broken up with the child's father Levi Johnston, 19, People magazine reported.

The split happened "a few weeks ago," People said, citing a source close to the couple. "It was amutual thing," the source said.

Bristol Palin in February told Fox News that she planned to marry Johnston after the two finished high school.

Bristol Palin's pregnancy was revealed shortly after her mother was confirmed as Republican presidential candidate John McCain's running mate in August, and it quickly became a campaign talking point.

Ice Age CO2 emissions hold a modern day warning: Study

AFP, Washington

A mysterious rise in carbon dioxide in the Earth's atmosphere at the end of the Ice Age could hold clues to the climate change processes underway today, a new study suggests.

A team of scientists at Columbia University concluded that a southward shift in wind patterns 17,000 years ago as the northern hemisphere warmed led to the release of natural CO2 from the depths of the Southern Ocean near Antarctica.

"The faster the ocean turns over, the more deep water rises to the surface to release CO2," said lead author Robert Anderson, a geochemist at Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, said in the study published Thursday in Science magazine.

"It's this rate of overturning that regulates CO2 in the atmosphere," he said.

Similar shifts in wind patterns have occurred over the past 40 years in the Southern Ocean, which could intensify man-made warming, Anderson said.

Anderson acknowledged that the impact of upwelling "will be dwarfed by the accelerating rate at which humans are burning fossil fuels."

But, he said, "it could well be large enough to offset some of the mitigation strategies that are being proposed to counteract rising CO2, so it should not be neglected."

Many scientists believe the end of the Ice Age was triggered by a change in the Earth's orbit that caused the northern hemisphere to receive more sunlight and warm up.

N Korea to launch sat in early April: S Korea

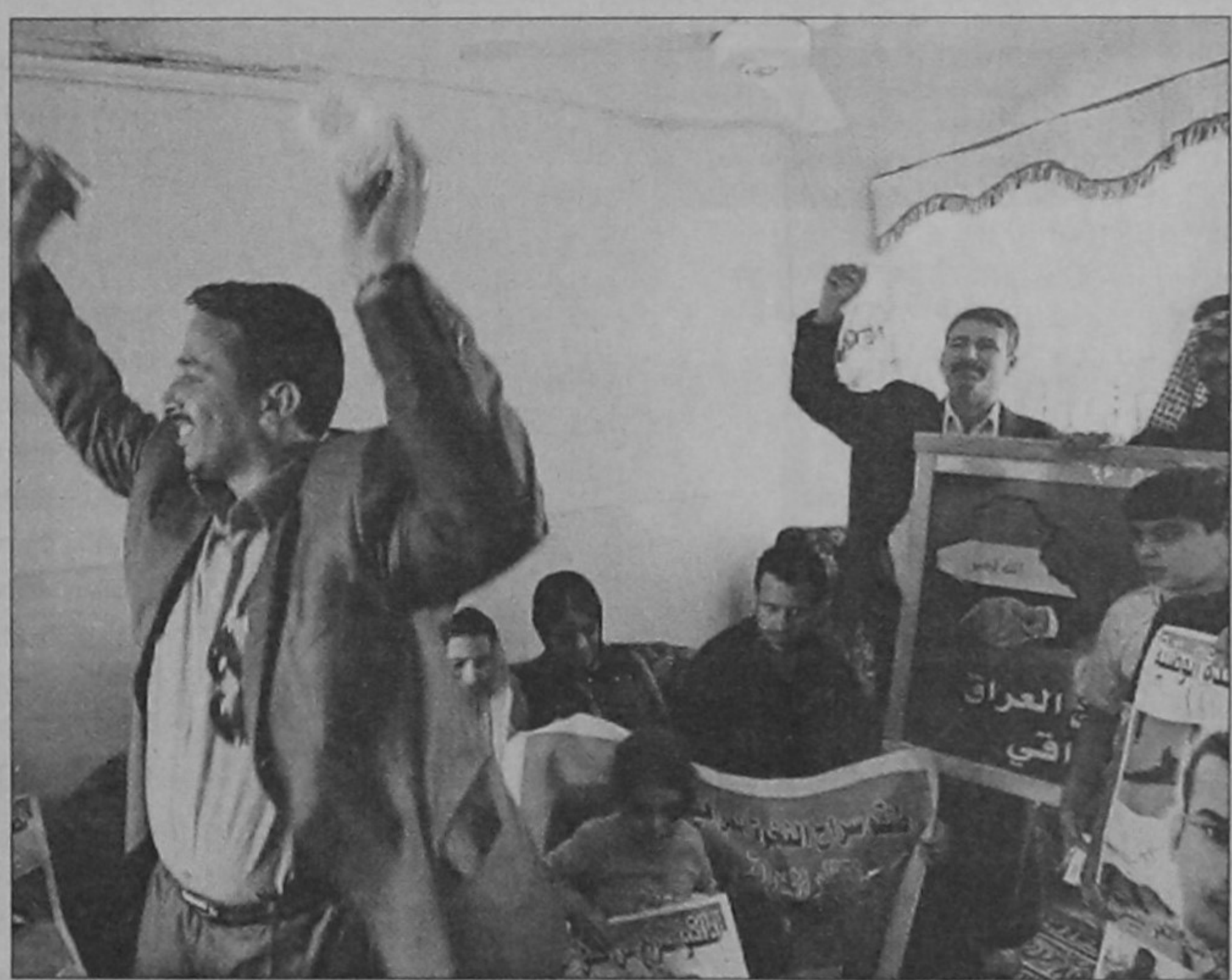
AFP, Seoul

North Korea has scheduled a satellite launch for early next month, South Korean officials said Thursday, as Washington and Seoul told Pyongyang to scrap what they see as a disguised missile test.

Pyongyang informed the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) that it will fire a rocket to launch the satellite between April 4-8, an official at Seoul's maritime affairs ministry said.

Citing information from the IMO, the official said the North had told the UN regulatory agency of two risk areas, one in the Pacific Ocean and the other in the Sea of Japan (East Sea).

"The IMO is currently working on an official safety notice, which it will soon hand out to its member countries," the official told AFP on condition of anonymity.



Udai (L), brother of Iraqi journalist Muntazer al-Zaidi, and other relatives react after the court's ruling to jail Muntazer at their house in Baghdad yesterday. The Iraqi court jailed for three years Zaidi, who shot to fame in the Arab world for throwing his shoes at former US president George W. Bush.

EC slaps a notice on SP for giving cash to voters

CNN-IBN, New Delhi

The India Election Commission (EC) yesterday slapped a notice on Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav for alleged distribution of cash by his party workers at a Holi function.

Taking cognisance of video footage, the EC served a notice on the SP leader and sought a reply by March 14, an EC spokesman said.

Meanwhile, the EC has also sought a report from the District Magistrate on the incident.

The Samajwadi Party workers were seen distributing money to people at a Holi celebration organised for SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav at Ettawah, his constituency.

SP workers handed out Rs 100 to every person present at the celebration.

Ctg ammo haul

FROM PAGE 16 afternoon and the Court of Metropolitan Magistrate Osman Gani sent them to jail custody rejecting their bail prayers.

The former MD had the authority to allow any vessel to use the jetty of the Key Point Installation (KPI). During the questioning both the former MD and the former GM (Admin) claimed the engine boats that carried the arms did not obtain permission for berthing at the jetty and the offloading of the arms and ammunition was beyond their knowledge," said CID Chittagong Divisional Superintendent Mohammad Muslim.

"During a face-to-face interrogation former assistant security officer Mobin Hossain Khan claimed to have informed the MD and other high officials of the offloading instantly," said Muslim, who is entrusted with supervising and monitoring of the case.

"The former MD later admitted that the then assistant security officer informed him of the offloading. He said he had

suggested the security officer to inform the police of the matter," he added.

"Both the MD and the GM (Admin) continued claiming themselves as innocent while refraining from saying what they had done on their part to check the offloading at the restricted jetty of such a Key Point Installation," Muslim told The Daily Star.

"The two officials may be interrogated in remand," he commented.

"We would also interrogate others mentioned in the confessional statement [by principal accused Hafizur Rahman] and in the interrogation," he said.

"But first of all we would try to know how the deadly consignment could be offloaded at CUFL jetty," he added.

Investigation Officer (IO) Muniruzzaman Chowdhury said the two former CUFL officials were arrested following face-to-face interrogation and statements made by the security officials in the questioning.

"We need to further interrogate the two former CUFL high officials," said the IO, a senior

ASP of CID, Chittagong Division.

Former CUFL GM (Marketing) Sarwar Kamal, former security officer Jaisal Abedin and former Ansar commander Havilder Abu Tayub have also been interrogated so far.

Two sergeants -- Alauddin and Helal Uddin -- and Havilder Siddiqur Rahman, who was on duty at Kolar Depot Police Camp just opposite to CUFL jetty that night, also appeared for questioning.

"We have recorded statements of the two sergeants as witnesses. We could not bring them for questioning since they are facing another case at this moment," said the IO.

Mentionable, the two sergeants were the first to challenge the consignment of deadly weapons and ammunition hauled at CUFL jetty in the early hours of April 2, 2004.

They were suspended after they got arrested with two AK47 assault rifles that went missing from the seized arms cache. After suffering detention they were later freed on bail.

Food security

FROM PAGE 1 including coordinated disaster management programme.

British minister Mike Foster said his country wants to extend more cooperation to the present government. The UK's present cooperation will continue and the fields of cooperation would be expanded, he added.

Foster also assured Bangladesh of cooperation in constructing silos and modern godowns for building up safe food stocks. He urged the authorities to prepare coordinated development projects for coastal areas and agricultural research aimed at increasing local variety of crops for food safety.

Secretary of the food and disaster management ministry Md Moklesur Rahman and DFID chief Chris Austin were present at the meeting.

BSS adds: A letter of understanding regarding the WFP assistance was signed yesterday between the government and the WFP at the Economic Relations Division (ERD). ERD Secretary M Musharraf Hossain and WFP Country Representative John Ayliff

signed the letter, an ERD press release said.

The WFP assistance will be used to finance the programme titled "Emergency Safety Net for Vulnerable Groups Affected by High Food Prices and Natural Disasters in Bangladesh". An estimated 50 lakh people would be benefited from the activities under the programme, the release said.

The government had requested the WFP for emergency food support to Bangladesh affected seriously by food price hikes caused by higher international prices and two successive natural disasters and cyclone Sidr.

The activities under the programme include relief to vulnerable groups, family rations for malnourished children, homestead gardening in collaboration with FAO, school snacks in urban slums and in remote rural areas. Home ration through targeted urban schools, rural routine road repair, emergency repair of embankment, drain and irrigation system are also major activities to be carried out under the programme.

RU restricts politics

FROM PAGE 1 campus and at residential halls to prevent entry of outsiders.

Meanwhile, Rajshahi city unit Awami League (AL) at a press conference demanded removal of six police officers, what they said, for siding with Shibir cadres during their vandalism.

They also demanded removal of Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) Commissioner Mahub Mohsin, Additional Commissioner Hafizur Rahman, Assistant Commissioner (Boalia zone) Humayan, Officer-in-charge (OC) of Rajpara police station Anisur Rahman and Rafiqul Islam of Moutbar police station.

Prof Zakaria, proctor of the university told newsmen that university authorities imposed restrictions taking into consideration the prevailing volatile situation on the university campus. The

restriction will continue till further notice, he added.

Earlier, on Wednesday, at least 20 BCL men including its RU unit president and general secretary were injured in a clash between BCL and Shibir on the campus.

Meanwhile, different student organizations including BCL, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), Chhatra League (JSD), Bangladesh Chhatra Union (BCU), Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF), Progressive Student Alliance yesterday came down heavily on authorities for imposing restriction on political activities.

They termed the restriction an undemocratic and illogical decision by the university authorities. They demanded immediate withdrawal of the restriction.

BCL and Shibir of RU yesterday morning staged separate showdown with the participation of a good number of outsiders on the campus creating panic among the

general students.

A group of BCL activists put Sher-e-Bangla hall provost office under lock and key as, they said, the provost patronised Shibir cadres.

BCL president Ibrahim Hossain Moon said police recovered three sharp weapons from different ICs-controlled rooms of the dormitory but the provost and university proctor did not take any legal steps against them.

Shibir activists set up check posts at main entry points of all boys' dorms creating panic among general students.

University authorities yesterday postponed all the scheduled examination.

BCL RU unit yesterday held a press conference at around 2:30pm on the campus and demanded exemplary punishment of Shibir cadres.

Huge contingents of police were deployed at different strategic points on the campus to avert any further clash.