



This picture taken on May 31 shows a family of local residents walk past Pakistani army troops during a curfew relaxation in Mingora, the capital of troubled Swat valley. Pakistan closed in on the Taliban in the Swat district, encircling a key town and thrusting into a strategic valley as residents spoke of deprivations in the conflict zone.

Security tight as Lanka prepares for victory march

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka shut schools in the capital Monday to make way for thousands of soldiers brought into the city for a victory parade to mark the defeat of Tamil Tiger rebels, officials said Monday.

President Mahinda Rajapakse will preside over the military celebrations on Wednesday, when soldiers, heavy armour, gun-boats and fighter jets will be put on display in the city, the Information Ministry said.

Schools in the city have been shut for three days with security in the tightly-guarded capital further stepped up. The *Galle Face* promenade has been declared off limits for traffic ahead of the ceremonies.

## Zardari- Sharif talks on cards to pull Pakistan out of quagmire

ANI, Islamabad

The bitter relationship between Pakistan President Asif Ali and the Pakistani Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) chief Nawaz Sharif seems to be improving, as both the leaders are expected to meet to discuss the grave issues facing the country currently.

According to sources, Sharif, who had earlier refused to meet the Zardari, has now softened his stance, and is willing to meet the President to discuss ways to pull the nation out of the prevalent crisis.

The sources said the thaw in the relationship was primarily due to the Supreme Court's verdict declaring the Sharif brother's eligible to contest elections.

They claimed that Sharif was not averse to meet Zardari, and for the greater interest of democracy and the future of Pakistan he could meet anyone, The Nation reports.

It seems that Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif is also eager to mend ways with the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), as he has not removed any of the PPP ministers from his cabinet after he was reinstated to the post.

He believes that in the current turbulent circumstances it would be impossible for any single political party to steer the country out of the prevailing crises.

"I firmly believe the issues are so grave that no single party can deal with this alone. We all have to deal with them together," Sharif said.

## Clock goes 1hr ahead

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of daylight.

It means offices and businesses will open and close an hour earlier than usual. The system is useful in that it cuts electricity need in the evening, he continued.

Like 70 other countries including the UK, US, Japan, France and Taiwan, Bangladesh is introducing the daylight saving time to save power, as it faces an acute shortage of energy in March-September.

During the period, the demand for electricity shoots up to 5,500 megawatts with average load-shedding ranging between 800 and 1,000 MW a day. Currently, the country produces around 3,800MW of electricity everyday.

Azad said the extra daylight would help the power crisis ease off, given that it would be used effectively.

Replying to a query, he said the government has yet to decide how long the DST would be in force.

At yesterday's meeting, the cabinet asked all ministers, state ministers and secretaries to implement immediately the decisions taken in the last 23 sittings.

It also decided to suspend the recovery of agricultural loans in the areas hit by Cyclone Aila. Besides, the embankments and other

infrastructure left battered by the storm will be reconstructed on an urgent basis.

The cabinet took 124 decisions till May 25. Of those, 67 have been fully executed, while work is underway to implement the rest.

During the same period, the cabinet has approved in principle 68 draft laws. Of those, 37 have been passed in parliament as 32 bills, and 11 others have been awaiting placement before the legislature. The remaining ones are going through review at ministries and divisions concerned.

At the meeting, the ministers and state ministers placed summary of their ministries' activities in the last six months.

The press secretary said the prime minister has expressed satisfaction with performance of the ministers and state ministers.

Meantime, she has assigned four ministers to supervise the relief and rehabilitation efforts in the Aila-affected areas.

Health Minister AFM Ruhul Hug has been assigned for Sathkhira, prime minister's adviser Dr Mashirul Rahman and Khulna City Corporation Mayor Talukder Abdul Khaque for Khulna, State Minister for LGRD Jahangir Kabir Nanak for Barisal and Bhola and State Minister for Religious Affairs Shahjahan Miah for Patuakhali.

## 568 children

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hospitalised -- 85 at Manikchhari upazila health complex while 55 at Laxmichhari health complex. About 40 of them are in critical condition, local officials said.

They said 428 students had been released after giving them first aid.

A five-member medical team led by District Civil Surgeon Abu Taher rushed to Laxmichhari upazila health complex to offer better treatment.

The district civil surgeon said the students are suffering from "Abdominal Pain" which might have been caused from food poisoning.

Laxmichhari Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Solim Ullah told the press that the WFP workers had distributed biscuits in government primary schools of the upazila around 11:00am Monday. In half an hour some hundreds of students started screaming and vomiting. Teachers, locals and army members rushed to the spots and took the stu-

dents to health complexes.

WFP External Affairs Officer Emamul Haque said the biscuits they sent to Khagrachari were produced at Nabisco biscuit factory. "Without testing we cannot confirm whether the biscuits caused the sickness. We have withdrawn the biscuits from there and are sending them to lab," he said.

He said it was not supposed to happen as they have representatives for quality control at the factory. WFP officials are now visiting Khagrachari, he added.

Executive Officer of Khagrachari Hill District Council (KHDC) Abdur Rahman Tarafder said they had stopped the WFP biscuit distribution among primary schools in eight upazilas of the district.

Lawmaker Zatindra Lal Tripura, Additional Deputy Commissioner Mohammad Khalilur Rahman, KHDC Chairman Rubiyat Karbary, its member Abu Bakar Siddiqi, and many of the party leaders.

He was speaking at a discussion meeting organised by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) in observance of the death anniversary of Ziaur Rahman.

Delwar urged the government to move quickly against India's Tipaimukh Dam project to safeguard Bangladesh's interest.

## Khaleda

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among destitute people.

The BNP chief distributed food at least at 20 spots in the capital and Keraniganj area on the last day of the party's three-day food distribution programme on the occasion of 28th death anniversary of founder of the party late president Ziaur Rahman.

Party leaders including Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Sarwari Rahman, Mirza Abbas and Goyeswar Chandra Roy, among others, accompanied her during the programme.

The former prime minister said price of essentials is increasing day by day with no symptom of an end to this trend. The situation that prevailed when the country was going without democracy has not improved even after the elected government assumed office, she added.

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain yesterday alleged that the government is dilly-dallying over taking a decision on withdrawing the cases filed against Khaleda Zia, her sons and many of the party leaders.

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## Mob burns a station, two trains in Bihar

PTI, Patna/Kolkata

Angry villagers today torched six rail bogies and a station near here protesting against the cancellation of stoppage of a train following which Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee withdrew the order against the halt and set up a departmental inquiry.

Thousands of villagers, perturbed over withdrawal of stoppage of the Rajgir-New Delhi Shramjivi Express at Khusruper, ransacked and torched the station and six bogies of two trains, and uprooted tracks under Danapur division, about 32kms from here.

They stormed the station building, situated on Patna-Rajgir section of the East Central Railway, as soon as it was announced over the public address system that the stoppage of the Shramjivi express had been withdrawn, ECR chief public relations officer AK Chandra said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pawan Bansal had a meeting with the Leader of Opposition LK Advani. When asked whether his party would stake claim for Deputy Speaker, Advani merely said a meeting of the BJP's Parliamentary Board is scheduled for today, which would take a decision.

However, BJP sources said the party will nominate a candidate for the post of Deputy Speaker with the names of Karla Munda and Sripad Naik doing the rounds.

## Pak Army advances further into Taliban stronghold

ANI, Islamabad

The Pakistan Army has made further ground into the Taliban stronghold, and has reportedly entered the Kalam region.

According to a statement released by the ISPR, security forces have killed at least 45 more extremists in the South Waziristan Agency, supposedly a Taliban stronghold region.

The statement said that situation in Mingora was fast improving after the military flushed out the extremists from the area.

"The situation in Mingora is improving and relief activities are in full swing, while patrolling by troops in key areas is being carried out to fully sweep the area," the statement said.

The security forces have also destroyed a terrorist training centre at Yakh Tangi Kandao, 6km southeast of Shangla, The Nation reports.

After eliminating the lower-ranking commanders of the Taliban, security officials are now in the lookout for the top hardcore militants.

"We are going after the leadership and we are going to take care of all the militants in the valley," the ISPR spokesman said.

Soldiers were seen taking positions in

residential compounds, business centres, government buildings and streets.

Trapped people thronged the roads and appeared desperate to catch the next available transport to move out to safe areas or relief camps.

Security forces conducted body searches of the fleeing residents who were proceeding towards Mingora to evacuate their stranded relatives.

"People have been facing a dilemma as there is no timeframe for the military operation and the food had run out. Now, the people are getting desperate to flee the area," said Hassan Khan, a Mingora resident.

Meanwhile, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) team also visited Mingora for the first time and expressed its shock over the grim humanitarian situation.

People have been blocked for weeks. There is no running water, no electricity, and food is scarce. There is no fuel left for generators and most medical facilities in the district are no longer functioning," said Daniel O'Malley, who led the team.

Phone lines are down, so people have been cut off from the outside world and are anxious for contact with relatives who fled the area," he added.

## Meira Kumar emerges as consensus LS Speaker

PTI, New Delhi

Meira Kumar was today emerging as a consensus candidate of both the ruling and opposition parties for Lok Sabha Speaker and they will file nominations in favour of the senior Congress leader today. Congress President Sonia Gandhi, who is also UPA chairperson, is expected to propose Kumar's name in the nomination paper which is likely to be seconded by Leader of the Lok Sabha Pranab Mukherjee when the process of electing the Speaker will be set in motion today.

Elections for the post of Speaker, if required, will be held on Wednesday. Parliament sources said Kumar's candidature is likely to get an overwhelming backing of the UPA as also those from the NDA in the election as she would be the first woman and Dalit leader to occupy the post.

Though the government is yet to make a formal announcement, 64-year-old Kumar, who resigned as Union Minister for Water Resources yesterday, today said she has been nominated for the post of Lok Sabha Speaker by the UPA. "Yes I have resigned (from the post of the Union Water Resources Minister). UPA has nominated me for the post of (Lok Sabha) Speaker," the daughter of former deputy premier Jagjivan Ram and a five-time MP told reporters here.

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Congress Party Leader Meira Kumar arrives for the opening session of the fifteenth Lok Sabha in New Delhi yesterday. India's newly elected parliament began its inaugural session with lawmakers set to elect the country's first ever woman Speaker, who is also a Dalit or "untouchable".

## Aila sufferings

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area blamed the shrimp farmers for the breaches in the embankment saying the dam got damaged at several points when water was pumped into their enclosures from the river.

Executive Engineer of WDB Division-2 AKM Mujibur Rahman Hawlader said around 3.9 kilometre area of the embankment in Assasuni upazila was washed away by tidal surge while another 98-kilometre area was partially damaged.

He said they have estimated that Tk 27.14 crore would be required for rehabilitation programme and another Tk 20.10 crore for protection from river erosion.

Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Sathkhira Mohammad Abdus Samad told The Daily Star that they hope to complete repair of the small breaches within a week.

He also said the government has decided to repair the large breaches with the help of the army.

Asked about the fate of the affected people if the embankment is not repaired before the rains, he said, "We shall continue providing them with relief until they return home."

"Many houses mostly the thatched ones were destroyed by tidal surge," he said.

When asked whether they would help the survivors rebuild their houses, Samad said he has already requested the higher authorities to provide loans to the survivors.

Meanwhile, Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzak told The Daily Star that they will start repair works of the damaged embankments on a temporary basis within 10 days.

But the permanent repair works will begin in October-November, he said.

An allocation of Tk 116 crore -- Tk 41 crore in cash and 25,000 tonnes of rice -- has been made for repairing the embankments immediately.

"We have instructed the authorities concerned to start the work across the country within 10 days," he said.

The Army will also be involved in the work.

He said it will require around Tk 420 crore to complete the permanent repair works of the embankments expected to begin in October-November.

Razzak said the affected people, who will do repair work, will be paid Tk 250 to Tk 300 each daily.

## People, firm legal action

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The rivers around Dhaka are arteries not only of the city but also of human lives here, said Murshid, adding that Dhaka will turn into an uninhabitable city posing a serious health hazard to city people once the rivers are dead.

"River-grabbers are enemies of the society; death of rivers will give rise to mental poverty of people," he said, adding, "The initiative taken by The Daily Star is great."

Noted architect Shamsul Wares was sceptical about the government's ability to stop the long hands of encroachers.

"It is like crying in the wilderness, as the protectors turn out to be grabbers," he said and added, "The offenders constitute a major section of those whom we appeal for protection."

Noted economist and environmentalist Prof Muzaffar Ahmad said that the prime minister could bring about a change if she takes interest in the issue.

But a continuous people's movement is a must to save the country's entire river system, he added.

Agriculture Minister Motia Chowdhury said that maintaining navigability of rivers is an election pledge of the ruling Awami League (AL).

"Government is planning to remove the thick layer of polythene from the bed of the Buriganga and we will resume dredging the Gorai River and then go for capital dredging soon," she said.

She also said the government would soon take measures to reduce too much dependency on the ground water and make the best use of surface water.

Farida Akhter, executive director of Ubinig, an NGO, said, "I am doubtful about the government's ability to take actions against the powerful river-grabbers and polluters."

She, however, said the campaign should go so far as to prevent construction of the proposed Tipaimukh dam on the river Barak otherwise it would be difficult to save the rivers ultimately.