

CJ assigns HC

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granted a three-week anticipatory bail to Abbas, while Justice Gobinda Chandra Tagore rejected his bail petitions and ordered him to surrender before a lower court immediately. The judges on April 23 sent the petitions and split orders to the chief justice. The two cases -- one with Paltan police and the other with Motijheel police -- were filed on December 29 last year and January 4 on charges of vandalising and setting fire to vehicles. On April 21, another HC bench of Justice Md Moinul Islam Chowdhury and Justice JBM Hassan set today for hearing the BNP leader's another bail plea in a corruption case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Abbas, BNP's Dhaka city convener, currently stands accused in at least 60 cases. He is also facing an arrest warrant issued in the graft case.

Biman flight

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board, returned to Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka around 4:00pm, officials said. "It was really an unwise move from our part for which we've earned quite a bad reputation. We should have inquired [about the landing] before sending the flight to Kathmandu," said a top Biman official, wishing not to be named. He said Biman might have incurred a loss of Tk 50 lakh in the incident due to burning of fuel and other expenditures. However, Biman MD Kyle Heywood last night told The Daily Star that the authorities closed the Nepalese airport because of a fresh tremor felt there around 10 minutes before the landing. Biman sent another scheduled flight, Aircraft A 310, to Kathmandu with 105 passengers on board at 5:30pm. The authorities at the airport in Nepal allowed the flight to land there around 8:00pm as it was carrying some relief materials, said officials.

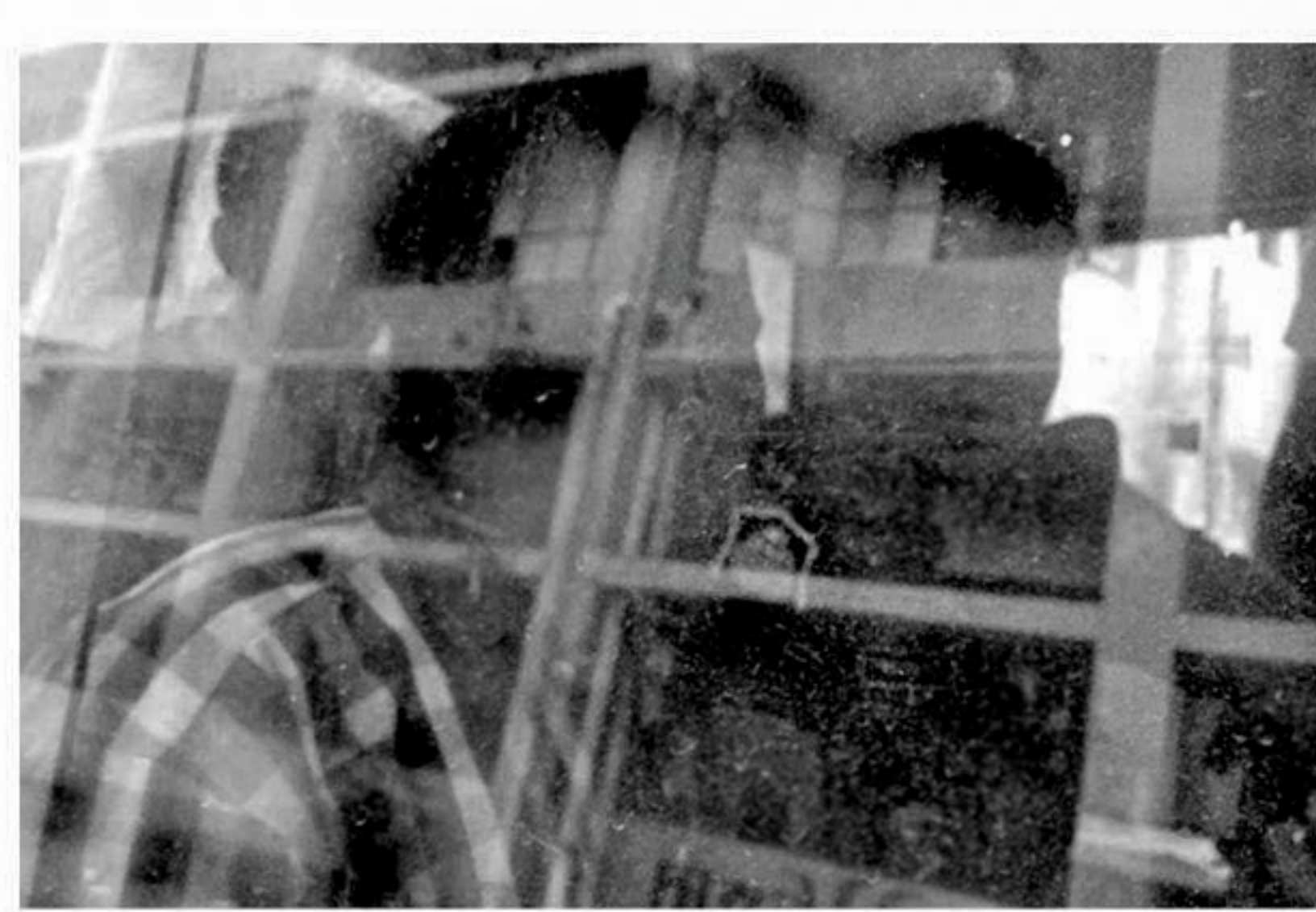
Indo-Bangla

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spectacled langur, Hoolock gibbon and golden langur, is spread across both the countries with the border fencing passing through it, and loss of habitat posing a major threat to the wildlife present in the forest, he pointed out. Spectacled monkeys have been sighted here in large number, though a proper survey is yet to be conducted while several colonies of the Hoolock gibbon and some golden langur have also been sighted within the forest. "The primary focus of the conservation effort will be to preserve the habitat for the survival of the primates and awareness campaigns would be conducted in the fringe villages to urge people not to destroy the forests for firewood," he said. The BSF personnel, guarding the India-Bangladesh border along this sector, have also been urged to ensure that the forest is preserved so that it remains a safe haven for the primates, Gohain Boruah added. The Patharia Hills Reserve Forest, spread over an area of 7647.30 hectares on the Indian side, is predominantly a natural forest on the western border of Karimganj and consists of two blocks Patharia 'A' and 'B'. "The forest is dotted with several 'cherras' or springs which helps to drain out the stock water quickly and along with the alluvial soil present leads to quick growth and natural regeneration of the forests," divisional forest officer S Ahmed said. There has been some plantation along the southern side of the forest of teak trees but the forest remains natural with bamboo, cane, reeds and shrubs mostly found in the forest, he added. In Assam, this is the only forest where the spectacled monkey or the "Phayre's leaf monkey" is found while Mizoram and Tripura, where it is the state animal, are the other two states in the country where it inhabits, he said.

'BCL activist' released

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Police were seen leaving the university campus with Aroj in their vehicle, according to witnesses. At that time, activists of Bangladesh Chhatra Union were demonstrating in front of the vice-chancellor's office, protesting the assault. A student took a photograph of Aroj, sitting next to an officer in a police vehicle, on his mobile phone. When this correspondent sent a copy of the photograph to the victim teacher, she identified Aroj from the chequered shirt he was wearing during the assault. However, Kotwali Police Station's Sub-Inspector Rafiqul Islam denied that the JnU authorities handed any BCL activist over to them.

The victim teacher, who is a lecturer of public administration, expressed her shock at Rafiqul's denial. She claimed she and her husband had talked with Rafiqul who received Aroj from the proctor's office in the presence of her colleagues. In the case statement, she has alleged that Aroj, having blocked her way near the university mosque, started a row with her. At one point, he pushed her, pulled her cloth and slapped her. "I also slapped him, held him by the shirt collar and took him to the proctor's office," the teacher complained in the statement. The acting proctor said a law enforcer had called him to inform him of Aroj's



This photo shows a student, who allegedly assaulted a female lecturer of Jagannath University, sitting inside a police vehicle next to a cop on the campus. Kotwali police later said the university authorities had not handed him over. When this photo was shown to the victim teacher, she identified her attacker.

escape. "A police officer called me around 5:00pm yesterday and informed me about his escape." A senior leader of JnU's BCL unit, wishing anonymity, told this correspondent that Aroj is one of their activists. A leader of a left-leaning student organisation alleged that Aroj was released from police lock-up following a request from the JnU BCL General Secretary Sirajul Islam. Sirajul said Aroj was not known to

A lot depends on fair polling

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stone when BNP clutched at the city polls straw to stay alive in politics. Arch-rival of the ruling Awami League, the BNP boycotted the January 5 parliamentary elections last year since those were not held under a caretaker government. The party and its allies lurched into an extremely destructive agitation this January, after a year of hibernation. Dubbed as anti-government agitation, the BNP and its allies launched kind of activities that can only be called terrorism. The toll on people and the economy grew heavier with each wasteful day since January 6. Eighty-six people were killed, 55 of them burnt to death in attacks carried out on buses and goods-laden trucks. The party turned a deaf ear to repeated SOS from businesses, which lost over \$2.5 billion in a very conservative estimate. It even showed no care for 14.79 lakh SSC examinees who were left to suffer with tests being either postponed or cancelled. The country remained stuck in a sticky stew, even a temporary way out of which appeared impossible to pundits and politicians as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia have hardly any record of agreeing on issues of national interest. But Hasina emerged shrewder of the two when she suddenly declared on February 16 her intention of holding the long-pending elections in the capital along with the one in the port city. She could read well the situation the BNP was in -- the party desperately needed an excuse to come out of its hartal groove. And Hasina's government needed a relief from the hartal spate. So, she killed two birds with one

Split into two, Dhaka will have two mayors. In the north, the BNP threw its weight behind Tabitha Awal after his business tycoon father Abdul Awal Mintoo, who was to be the party's candidate, lost his candidature for a mistake in nomination paper. He will take on the Awami League-backed Anisul Haque, a leading garment exporter and former president of the apex business body FBCCI. BNP stalwart, Mirza Abbas, is pitted against AL rookie Sayeed Khokon in the north. He is staying off electioneering, fearing arrest for failing to get bail in three cases. His wife is now leading the campaign for him. The situation in Chittagong is quite the opposite. BNP candidate Manjur Alam finds no hurdles in campaigning against AL candidate AJM Nasir. It is expected to be an even call for both parties in the port city. Braving the adversities, Khaleda tried to give a boost to campaign by coming out on the streets, but her motorcade came under attack twice. Though ministers and AL leaders claimed hartal-hurt people took it out on Khaleda, but the culprits indeed belonged to the ruling party. Given that many BNP-backed candidates are in legal limbo, the field may appear empty for the Awami League-backed ones to score. But the ruling party should not be that confident because the voters will have the final say. However, one thing is for sure: These city polls are going to decide the future of national politics. If the polls are not free and fair, the country may go back to where it was a month back. People's relief only can last through free and fair polls tomorrow.

One battalion troops

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Sixteen executive magistrates will take position in six cantonment areas in Dhaka and Chittagong, two each in each cantonment, and will work in coordination with the troops. The nature of such military deployment is going to be different from that of all previous elections in the country. In the past elections, army used to patrol the roads to maintain law and order. Their presence alongside regular law enforcers gave voters a strong sense of security. Besides, troublemakers did not dare to create any chaos at the polling centres. But in this election, army will not be seen patrolling the streets during voting,

as the EC apparently does not want them to. The nature of such deployment of army has sparked criticism among different quarters and BNP-backed mayoral and councillor candidates. Apart from the army, around 80,000 police, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab), Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), Coast Guard and Ansar members will be on hand. There would be 24 law enforcers in every "important" centre and 22 in a "general" one to ensure that voters can cast their votes freely. Police have already put all the 1,982 polling centres in two categories -- "important" and "general".

Khaleda calls

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if the polls were held in a free and fair manner but strongly protest it in case of any irregularity and manipulation. In about an hour-long speech, the former prime minister mainly focused on the polls in Dhaka south, Dhaka north and Chittagong city corporations and the BNP-led 20-party alliance's anti-government movement. On the recent violence during its street agitation, she said the Awami League men with the help of police carried out the firebomb attacks on people to blame the opposition. Top government figures and the ruling AL leaders have been calling on voters to vote against the BNP-backed candidates for such violence that saw about 100 people dead across the country, mostly in arson attacks on public transport. "SPREADING MONEY" "We think people will give their verdict against the ruling party's falsehood and propaganda in the polls if they get a chance to cast their votes," Khaleda said. She lambasted the Election Commission for its decision to keep the army inside cantonments during the polls and described such deployment "deceptive and meaningless". "Like the country people, I am in doubt if the election will be free and fair." Khaleda alleged that the ruling party-backed candidates were "spreading money" and violating the election code of conduct. "The money they [Awami League men] are distributing is your money. Don't sell your vote, even if you take money from them. Take the money, but go by your conscience while casting your ballot." Claiming to have got overwhelming response from voters during her electioneering in the city, the BNP chairperson said she was confident that people in the three city corporations would make a silent revolution if they got a chance to vote. "We've taken these polls as a test case for the government, the ruling party, the Election Commission, the administration and law enforcement agencies," she said, explaining why her opposition alliance was running in the polls.

If the government rigs this election, it will once again prove that a national election under the Hasina administration is unthinkable, she added. Asked whether her party would take part in the general election under the AL government if the city polls are held freely, Khaleda said they stuck to their demand for national elections under a nonparty administration. On EC's allegation that she broke election laws by campaigning with a large motorcade, she said there were only five to six vehicles of her security personnel and another for some party colleagues. "The motorcade was long as there were many media vans. It's regrettable that the Election Commission keeps its eyes shut and says what the government wants it to say." She questioned why the EC played a silent role when she came under attacks by alleged ruling party men during her campaign and when the prime minister, other ministers and AL men violated the election code of conduct. "NOTA VOTER" Khaleda said she would not vote in tomorrow's polls as she was not a voter of any of the two Dhaka city corporations. She is a voter of Dhaka Cantonment area, which is under Cantonment Board, not under the city corporation. Replying to a question on the non-stop blockade which is officially still in force, Khaleda said everyone knew the programme had "no effect" now. The alliance will decide on lifting the blockade through a discussion later, she added. Asked if her party reached an agreement with the government, she answered in the negative. "SHUN ARROGANCE" Taking a swipe at her archrival Sheikh Hasina, Khaleda said, "After assuming power illegally, you are showing extreme arrogance. Shun this haughtiness. Bear in mind that not every day is a Sunday. "You've committed many misdeeds and orchestrated many evil designs to go to power and also after taking office. Now state power has become dangerous to you, like riding a tiger. You're afraid of getting down from it."

Goons active ahead

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Mahi, his wife and the driver. The broken pieces of glass hit Mahi's hand and an eye. The criminals also tried to drag Mahi out of the car but the driver managed to drive away and take them to United Hospital. "I do not know who attacked me but conspiracy against me is going on," Mahi told reporters at the hospital. "Time will tell whether Anisul Huq or Tabitha Awal was involved in the attack. I will not make any comments to this end," he said. A case was filed with Tejgaon Industrial Police Station. Officer-in-Charge Salahuddin of the police station said they were trying to arrest the attackers. In a press briefing, Mahi claimed that the criminals tried to kill him. He also sought security from law enforcers.

of AL-backed candidate Sayem Khandakar in West Jatrabari of Dhaka early yesterday. Fakrul Islam Murad, 40, also president of Ward-50 of Jubo League, received treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. Supporters of AL-backed councillor candidate Afsar Uddin Khan and Anwarul Islam, running for councillor without AL-endorsement, locked in a chase and counter chase in Uttara-9. KHASRU'S BRIEFING BNP's Chittagong city unit President Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday alleged that the ruling party men were attempting to occupy the polling centres with the help of law enforcement agencies and party cadres. Addressing a press conference yesterday morning, he alleged that the police had been raiding homes of BNP men for the last few days to harass them. Over 20 leaders of BNP, and pro-BNP Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal, who were assigned to play the role of coordinators in different polling centres, had been arrested in the last two days, he said. Some members of the law enforcement agencies and the ruling party cadres are threatening BNP men not to engage in polls-related activities, he claimed. He also blamed the election office for not taking any step even after lodging several complaints in this connection. Meanwhile, Jubo League men swooped on a campaign booth of CPB-BSD backed candidate Abdullah Al Kafi Ratan in the capital's Kalyanpur yesterday afternoon. They beat up Ratan's supporters and vandalised chairs. At least 20 people were injured in the attack, said Khan Asaduzzaman Masum, media cell coordinator of Ratan's campaign.

Meanwhile, Awami League-blessed mayor aspirant Anisul Huq went to Mahi's home yesterday evening. Mahi was out on the campaign trail then. In Chittagong, mayor candidate Manju at a press conference alleged that some 30 to 40 people hurled brick chunks and stones at his campaign procession near Polytechnic Institute around 1:30pm. He urged the district administration to take proper steps against the attackers. BNP Vice-Chairman Abdullah Al Noman claimed that the attackers were activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League. Sukanta Chakraborty, officer-in-charge of Khulshi Police Station, said, "We have heard that a chase and counter chase took place between the supporters of two candidates in the area." Meanwhile, eight people, including a pro-AL Jubo League leader who is running for councillor without AL blessings, were injured in an attack allegedly carried out by the supporters

Standing by the quake victims

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Jahurul Islam Medical College and Hospital in Bajitpur. "I checked Facebook five minutes later and found that an earthquake had hit Nepal and everything there had already been destroyed.... the monuments and buildings we have grown up seeing had sunk into the ground." "I just could not believe my eyes!" she exclaimed in sheer disbelief. Thunderstruck, she instantly tried to call and send text messages to every number she had of her family members, relatives, friends and neighbours. None of them could be reached over the phone for hours. The messages were also not delivered because of network jam. Fortunately, her close ones in Nepal were safe and she managed to contact them later. Tara Subedi, a young Nepalese volunteer at the Asian University for Women in Chittagong, went through a similar situation on Saturday. Following the devastating earthquake, she talked to her family over the phone around 8:30pm, after making

desperate bids for hours. "They were on the street when I talked to them last. But I haven't been able to reach them again since," she told The Daily Star. Tara said most of the 35 Nepalese students at her university had contacted their families. She did not get news of any relatives of the students being killed in the quake. "But one of my friend's mother was injured and admitted to a hospital," she said. She said in the memory of the victims, Nepalese students held a candle light vigil on the campus of University of Science and Technology Chittagong last evening and initiated a fund raising programme there. There are around 3,000 Nepalese students in Bangladesh, Sushil Kumar Lamsal, deputy chief of mission, embassy of Nepal in Bangladesh, told The Daily Star. Though most of the students know their families are safe, their mobile phone conversations with them were very brief due to poor mobile network

reception in Nepal. "I was able to contact my mother around 6:00pm [Saturday]. She could just say a single sentence that everyone was ok and I should not worry," said Sima Khatri, a first-year student at Enam Medical College and Hospital in Savar. But such words of assurance are not enough for her. "I am feeling helpless," she said, adding, "I watch the news and see how my people are suffering but despite being a medical student I cannot do anything for them." Vishow Vekheyat Karki, a fifth-year student at Jahurul Islam Medical College and Hospital, did not sit idle. Immediately after the quake, he opened a Facebook page called "Help Nepal-Bangladesh" and started collecting blankets, medicines and financial aid for the victims in Nepal. Apart from personally contacting around 80 Nepalese students of his college, he also approached other medical college students via Facebook to make them join the relief effort. Nepalese students at the North

South University in Dhaka were also trying to raise funds for the victims, said Ajit Sapkota, a Nepalese student at the university. Meanwhile, the Nepalese embassy in Dhaka has requested donation of financial assistance at the following bank accounts, which would go directly to the prime minister's relief fund in Nepal. Everest Bank Ltd-- Prime Minister Relief Fund--00101102200012 Everest Bank Ltd-- Prime Minister Relief Fund--00100105200270 Global Bank Ltd-- Prime Minister Relief Fund--0411010000005 Nepal Bangladesh Bank Ltd-- Prime Minister Relief Fund--035141C Nepal Bank Ltd-- Prime Minister Relief Fund--002-11-053313 Standard Chartered Bank Ltd--Prime Minister Relief Fund--01-0132438-01 People can also donate blankets, food supplies, fresh water bottles, tents, drugs and primary health care materials at the embassy located in Baridhara Diplomatic Enclave, Dhaka-1212. (Tel: 02-9892568, 9892490)

Only rickshaw

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circular yesterday declared April 28 as a "public holiday" in areas under the Dhaka south and north city corporations as well as the Chittagong City Corporation. "From 12:01am on April 28, a ban has been imposed on the playing of launch, speedboat, auto-rickshaw, easy bike, taxi-cab, microbus, jeep, pickup, car, bus and truck," says the notification. However, ambulances and vehicles of polling agents, journalists, local and foreign poll observers, law enforcers, fire service and election candidates would be allowed to move with the permission of the returning officer. The restriction on travel by motorcycle in the three cities started 12:01am

yesterday. It remains enforced until 6:00am on April 29. Police seized many motorcycles from different parts of the capital yesterday. "On the Election Commission's directive, separate notifications will be issued by the Roads and Highways Department and the shipping ministry. District magistrates will take necessary measures in this regard," the notification added. Rallies, processions and programmes will remain banned from April 26 to April 30. The ministry also put a ban on the carrying of licensed firearms from April 25 to May 1. Legal steps under the arms act will be taken against those defying the restriction.