

Cabinet

FROM PAGE 1
After a long and heated debate on the Rapid Action Battalion proposal, the cabinet that sat at the Prime Minister's Office with Khaleda Zia in the chair, returned it for scrutiny for a second time.

Most cabinet members took a dim view of the proposal that requires the passage of a legislation, empowerment of RAB-men as officer-in-charge of police stations to investigate cases.

The Ministry of Home Affairs first proposed amendment to the Armed Police Battalion Ordinance, 1979 to bring RAB, currently known as Rapid Action Team (RAT), under its cover as an elite force on April 28 for cabinet approval.

Sources said the home ministry placed a harsher version of the RAB proposal in yesterday's meeting that raised the hackles of most cabinet members.

They said although the cabinet agreed to form an alternative force in principle on grounds of failure of existing law-enforcement agencies, they were highly critical of the greater authority vested in the force in the new proposal.

The cabinet members feared that excessive authority to the force would lead to abuse of power by its

members.

Currently, 11 RAT teams, each comprised of 12 highly trained policemen, are tackling sensational and exceptional cases of murder, taka forgery and notorious gangsters in the capital.

An assistant police commissioner is heading each team while a deputy police commissioner is leading the force.

The cabinet also discussed the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and approved its presentation at the Development Forum meeting slated for May 16-18.

The meeting also approved Section 35A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 that deals with damages for filing false cases.

Gas, power

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The government to fulfil in the years to come in connection with the loan. However, the WB does not have any condition on how the government is going to utilise the loan.

Sources say the loan will be used in primary assistance to implement the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

150 DU teachers condemn attack on Azad Chy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Some 150 teachers of Dhaka University (DU) in a statement yesterday condemned the attack on Prof. AK Azad Chowdhury, former DU vice chancellor and demanded punishment of the culprits.

Meanwhile, DU VC Prof. SMA Faiz formed a five-member committee headed by Pro-VC AFM Yusuff Haider to investigate the attack on ex-VC.

The committee urged the people, who witnessed and knew about the incident, to provide information verbally or in writing. A meeting of the inquiry committee will be held at the Pro-VC's office today.

The teachers alleged that the law and order is deteriorating day by day and the attack on Prof. Azad Chowdhury proved how much the situation has deteriorated.

They also called upon the government to ensure public security and curb crime.

The signatories include Prof. Mohammad Maniruzzaman, Prof. M. Sahadat Ali, Prof. Humayun Azad, Prof. Syed Monjurul Islam, Prof. AAMS Arefin Siddique, Prof. Kazi Shahidullah, Prof. Sharifullah Bhuyian.

Young man stabbed to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
A young man was stabbed to death by unknown assailants in Pallabi early yesterday, police said.

They said a gang of 12 waylaid Abbas Ali, 25, at Burirtek in North Kalshi when he was returning home from work and stabbed him indiscriminately.

Locals raced to the scene on hearing the groans of Ali and rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where doctors pronounced him dead.

Some people claimed that Ali was an informant of Kafilur police. But the duty officer of the Kafilur Police Station said he was not sure about this.

Police arrested five people -- Panchanan, Swapan, Jewel, Anisur and Jahangir -- on charge of involvement in the killing.

Ali's brother filed a murder case accusing 12 persons.

Water watch

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Under the new protocol, water samples from hand-pumped tube-wells and deep tube-wells will be collected from different areas and tested at the laboratories. Similar tests will also be done before sinking deep tube-wells.

A member of the task force, which finalised the protocol, said, "This is for the first time the country will have a set standard for water quality."

The protocol however ignores tests for certain chemicals -- uranium, barium, molybdenum, antimony, cadmium and chromium -- already detected in groundwater in many areas at levels more than the WHO-recommended limits.

Officials said such tests were not recommended now due to lack of facilities but would be done in future.

According to a countrywide study by the DPHE and the British Geological Survey (BGS), an alarming proportion of inorganic chemicals like uranium, manganese, boron, sulphur, fluoride, phosphorus remains in groundwater in many places.

The study concluded that 35 per cent of the water samples collected from hand-pumped tube-wells in 61 districts showed arsenic contamination beyond the WHO-recommended limits.

Other studies initiated in 1998-1999 revealed various levels of contamination of groundwater, in some cases very high.

Audit reports submitted to president

UNB, Dhaka
Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) Asif Ali submitted 23 audit reports including nine special and 14 annual reports to President Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban yesterday.

President Iajuddin appreciated the steps taken to enhance the quality of audit by the Auditor General and stressed the need for further accelerating the process of ensuring accountability and transparency.

Secretary to the President Abdul Latif Mondol, Military Secretary to the President Major General Abdul Matin, Deputy C&AG (A&R) Abduhu Mahmood Khan and Assistant C&AG (Report) Abdul Kalam Azad were present.

Graft case

FROM PAGE 12
exploration in 1650 square km area of Haripur oil field in Sylhet in 1987, causing a loss of US \$ 79,000 to the public exchequer.

BAC filed the case against the two on January 16, 1996.

Earlier, they were granted bail by the High Court.

In the charge sheet 25 people were shown as prosecution witnesses.

Roadmap

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Sheikh Rashid Ahmed said his government also has prepared plans for the talks. Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali "has made his own road map, which will begin from small issues and (move) to the solution of Kashmir," he said in a telephone interview yesterday.

Ahmed said on Sunday that peace talks between the South Asian neighbours could begin as early as next month.

"The final thing is to be able to reach an understanding on all the identified issues... so that there is a successful summit and all this understanding could be reduced to whatever document we want to produce," Sinha said.

US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage, who visited Pakistan and India last week, said he was "cautiously optimistic" about the peace process in South Asia.

He encouraged the countries to press ahead on the "long trip" to peace.

In recent weeks, New Delhi and Islamabad have agreed to exchange ambassadors and restore direct flights.

Alam murder case SC allows govt appeal against HC bail order

UNB, Dhaka
The Supreme Court yesterday allowed the government's appeal against the High Court order that granted bail to Jamai Matin and Jamai Babu, accused in the sensational Alam murder case.

A business tycoon of Jurain, Mohammad Alam along with his three mistresses were brutally murdered on the New Year's Day of 2002. Accused Matin and Babu are Alam's sons-in-law.

The High Court granted them bail on January 5 this year. But the order of the high court was stayed following a government petition.

Additional Attorney General Abdur Rezzak Khan appeared for the government while Nitai Roy stood for the accused.

Student dies from beating by teacher for being absent

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha
A madrassah student died Sunday after he was severely beaten up by his teacher for being absent from class for two days.

Sources said Mizanur Rahman, a student of class 5 of Khamar Dashedia Senior Madrassah in Sadullapur Upazila, had been absent from class on May 5 and 6. After Mizan went back to class the next day, his class teacher Qari Mojibar Rahman beat him up black and blue as punishment for his 'unauthorised' absence.

The boy fell sick due to the severe beating and was later sent home where his condition deteriorated over the next four days. On Sunday, Mizan died as he was being taken to the Sunderganj Health Complex.

The incident has sparked strong resentment among residents of the area. The teacher has gone into hiding.

Father of the victim filed a case with Sadullapur thana yesterday.

HC rejects plea for stay of BB order on tenure, appointment of bank directors

UNB, Dhaka
The High Court yesterday rejected a petition for stay of operation of two circulars of Bangladesh Bank restricting the tenure of the directors and barring more than one of a family to be director of private bank.

The circulars were issued on April 26 as per amendments to the Bank Company Act early this year causing annoyance to six directors of Dhaka Bank.

They filed a writ seeking stay of operation of the Bangladesh Bank circulars and challenging the legality of the new provision of the law.

The petitioners are Mainul Islam, his brother Aminul Islam, Aftab Hossain Sarkar, Khandoker M. Shahjahan, M. Amirullah and MMH. Bulu.

Rejecting the plea for stay of operation of the circulars, the court however issued rule upon the government and others to show cause why the circulars of Bangladesh Bank should not be declared illegal and Section 15 (ka) of the Act ultra vires the Constitution.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud appeared for the petitioners.

JS committees

FROM PAGE 1
treasury bench did not want to give the opposition proportionate chairmanship on the committees.

On several occasions, the Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her senior party colleagues said they would form the committees, keeping the opposition slots vacant if the AL did not come up with names of their representatives.

Human chain

FROM PAGE 12
strike at Sitakunda today and a human-chain on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Sitakunda tomorrow to put pressure on the authorities.

At the rally, the speakers expressed concern and resentment over failure to rescue Khosru even after 14 days of his kidnap. They said instead of arresting the suspects, police arrested Mahmudul Haq and Noor Mostafa in connection with "false cases".

They also demanded immediate withdrawal of these cases and formation of a judicial probe committee.

The rally was presided over by Chittagong Journalists Forum convenor Md. Jahangir Alam and addressed by Acting President of Sitakunda Press Club M. Hedayet, Saiful Islam Shilpi, Jahangir Alam and Raozan Press Club leader M. Saiful Islam.



Dhaka City Awami League workers bring out a procession at the Bangabandhu Avenue yesterday to drum up support for today's eight-hour hartal.

Saddam alive

FROM PAGE 12
remains a mystery.

Earlier this month, the Sydney Morning Herald carried the transcript of a purported voice recording of the ousted strongman, but the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard Myers, said Sunday that "we don't know if that was really Saddam Hussein or not."

Chalabi told Asharq al-Awsat that former deputy prime minister Tareq Aziz, the most prominent official in coalition custody to date, had been "arrested by the Americans... thanks to information we provided them on where he was."

The INC leader is favoured by the US Defence Department and many in Congress to head a caretaker administration but he has so far ruled out taking up any post.

"My role is to contribute to the building of civil society and establishing democracy in Iraq," he told the Saudi-owned daily.

UPDF alleged that the gang kidnapped two villagers.

Police and other law enforcing personnel were patrolling the area.

Three killed in Gazipur road mishap

UNB, Gazipur
Three people were killed and six others injured in a road mishap at Kaliganj on the Dhaka-Kaliganj road yesterday.

Witnesses said the accident took place in the morning when a Dhaka-bound truck crashed into a roadside shop in front of Tumulia Boys' School, killing Barkat, 48, Akhter, 35, and Hasan, 50, on the spot.

The injured were admitted to local hospital.

Suicide attack in Chechnya

FROM PAGE 1
The blast damaged six other buildings, said Akhmad Kadyrov, head of Chechnya's pro-Russian administration, quoted by Interfax news agency.

The blast proved that federal and local forces were incapable of putting an end to rebel activity, Kadyrov told Interfax. "Where did this car packed with explosives come from? How could it get to Znamenskoje?" he asked.

Separatist rebels have vowed to step up attacks to disrupt the results of a controversial March 23 referendum that sealed Chechnya's place in the Russian Federation.

Violence has flared since the poll, when voters massively approved a new pro-Moscow constitution following several months of relative calm.

Last month, 16 people were killed in a minibus blast claimed by separatist rebels.

Armed men torch UPDF office, abduct 2 in Khagrachhari

UNB, Khagrachhari
Unidentified assailants torched 8 houses including offices of United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) and its front organisations at Swanirvor in the town yesterday.

UPDF, a regional political party, has accused the armed men of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanhati Samity (PCJSS) for setting fire to its offices at 9 am.

Witnesses said the armed gang fired shots in the air and set fire to UPDF office. The fire soon engulfed the nearby shops and chamber of a lawyer. None was hurt.

UPDF alleged that the gang kidnapped two villagers.

Police and other law enforcing personnel were patrolling the area.

Whatmore

FROM PAGE 12
He became available after the Sri Lankan cricket board decided against renewing his contract after the World Cup in South Africa.

Bangladesh have yet to win a match since getting Test status in June 2000. They have lost 18 out of 19 Tests played so far. And in one-day cricket have only won three games against 68 defeats.

But the former Australian Test cricketer is optimistic of changing the fortunes of the Tigers within two years.

During his short visit Whatmore, who becomes Bangladesh's eighth foreign coach, will discuss what how he intends to operate and will also assess the available facilities.

Apart from a 100,000 dollar annual salary, which makes him the highest paid Bangladesh coach ever, the Board has promised Whatmore lucrative bonuses for every one-day or Test win.

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Another slaughtered by outlaws in Atrai

BSS, Rajshahi
A youth was slaughtered allegedly by the cadres of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) in Atrai upazila of Naogaon district Sunday night, police said.

Police quoted witnesses as saying a gang of 10/12 armed men belonging to the PBCP hit Sajjad in the head at Panchupur Bazar with an iron rod at about 8.15 pm and then slaughtered him in front of a large number of people.

The outlaws left the scene chanting slogans in favour of Sarbahara Party, witnesses said.

They also left some leaflets threatening to kill those who would act as police informants, police said.

Police sent the body to the hospital morgue yesterday morning for autopsy.

The killing occurred 15 days after the murder of six people in the same upazila.

Superintendent of Police, Naogaon, Obaidur Rahman Khan visited the spot and asked the local police station to arrest the culprits involved.

A case was recorded with Atrai police. None was arrested till 8 pm yesterday.

Cyclone

FROM PAGE 12
Indian coast.

Cyclone alerts have been sounded in the north of Tamil Nadu and south of Andhra Pradesh and fishermen were warned against going out to sea.

The storm moved further and lay centred about 600km south-west of Chennai yesterday morning.

Heavy rain and gales of up to 85 kilometres an hour accompanied the storm.

DU heats up as BCL, JCD stage rallies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
Student wings of two rival political parties staged rallies on the Dhaka University (DU) campus yesterday, stoking panic among students.

The Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student chapter of the Awami League, staged its rally to protest a rise in tuition fees and an attack on Professor AK Azad Chowdhury, former DU vice-chancellor.

The BCL came up with an allegation that activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) tried to kill the former vice-chancellor, as he did not allow the JCD's 'illegal' activities during his tenure. They demanded arrest of the attackers.

Presided over by DU unit JCD President Amirul Islam Khan Alim, the rally was addressed by JCD General Secretary Azizul Bari Helal, Saiful Bari Babu, Salimuzzaman Salim, Sultan Salauddin Tuku and Hasan Mamun.

Meanwhile, another group of JCD workers, who failed to secure suitable posts on a full-fledged committee of the JCD DU unit, protested the new body formed on May 11.

Six activists resigned from the JCD, as they were left out of influential positions. Some non-students and former activists of the BCL and the Islami Chhatra Shibir were inducted into the committee, says sources.

Some JCD activists of the Salimullah Hall unit yesterday beat up a new committee member, Salahuddin, in front of the JCD general secretary.

Staff agitate

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He said voluntary retirement will be offered under the reforms.

"Before making a final decision, the issue would be discussed with the associations and CBA representatives," he said.

He said disciplinary actions may be taken against the demonstrators.

Justifying the demonstration, Zainal Abedin, general secretary of the Bangladesh Bank Jatiyatabadi Karmachari Samity, said the bank staff fear that voluntary retirement system might be forced upon them.

"The officers and employees of the central bank are worrying about their future," he said.

He also said the staff are not satisfied with the financial package of the voluntary retirement scheme.

Criticising the ongoing restructuring programme, he said staff are being made redundant in some departments.

He claimed the demonstration was spontaneous and no-one instigated them.

Hartal

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The 6:00am-2:00pm agitation is also to protest "the government's rendering the parliament inactive", price spiral of essentials, deteriorating law and order and 'attack' on AL leaders and activists including its president member Dr Mahiuddin Khan Alamgir.

AL lawmakers will take out a procession from the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban at 10 this morning in support of the hartal, Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Abdus Shahid said yesterday. The procession will parade down the city streets, he added.

Meanwhile, the government has taken necessary steps to keep law and order under control during the hartal.

Around 5,000 police and paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles will be deployed at different city points. They have been put on alert at strategically vulnerable points to ward off any untoward incidents.

Dhaka city unit of Awami League yesterday brought out a procession and held a protest rally in support of the hartal.

Addressing the rally in front of the AL's Bangabandhu Avenue office in the afternoon, AL leader Tofail Ahmed said the BNP-Jamaat coalition government is rewarding the anti-liberation elements and removing the pro-liberation forces from government services.

Chaired by Dhaka city AL President Mohammad Hanif, the rally, among others, was addressed by Mukul Bose, Omar Ali, Ahsanullah Master, Habibur Rahman Mollah and Haji Mohammad Selim.

Hybrid rice

FROM PAGE 12
bigha, 10 to 15 maunds more than other varieties. I shall cultivate it in more of lands next season," said one farmer, Subal Das, 65.

Another farmer, Suruz Mia, said he cultivated the hybrid variety in one bigha and got about 35 maunds of rice.

School teacher Nikhil Ranjan Majumdar and many more local people made similar statements.

Farmers pointed out that price of Sonar Bangla-1 seeds is around Tk 180 to 200 per kilogram (kg) but it takes only five kg for an acre. Although the price of other HYV seeds is around Tk 20 per kg, about 25 kg of those are needed per acre.

Besides, Sonar-Bangla 1 can be harvested about 20 days earlier than other varieties.

Md Harun-ur-Rashid, an agriculturist and an NGO official, explained to newsmen how per acre yield from farmer Sirazuddin's land would rise to 110 maunds.

Mallika Seed Company's F R Malik said they are getting positive response from farmers about cultivation of the hybrid variety.

In 1998, the government had permitted four companies to import from India and China four varieties of rice for production of seeds in three years. Later, the time limit was extended. Sonar Bangla-1 is one of those varieties.

The three other varieties were imported from India and marketed with the brand names of Alok, Loknath and Amarsiri-1.

Vajpayee

FROM PAGE 12
mies and enjoy considerable clout in the World Trade Organisation.

Industry officials say greater economic cooperation would put them in a strong bargaining position with developed nations.

Indian Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha told AFP last month that the two countries were developing strong relations in every field despite continuing differences over territorial claims.

"We will continue to look upon China as one of the most important neighbours of India. We will continue to look upon China as an important friend of India," Sinha said.

AL deputies protest

FROM PAGE 1
parliament session that begun on Thursday in protest at switching off of the microphone of the Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina. AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, SAMS Kibria, ASHK Sadique, Abdus Shahid, Mirza Azam, Farook Khan and Bir Bahadur were among those who joined the demonstration led by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid.

The opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) also carried placards during the demonstration that read, 'Parliament is for the people, let their voices be heard', 'Stop political oppression', 'Arrest the rising prices of essentials', and 'Let us speak in the house'.

Talking to reporters at the South Plaza, Hamid said, "We've tied up our mouth with black cloth as a symbol of protest as we are not allowed to speak in parliament... We want to speak in the House as the voice of the people."

"We are protesting reinstatement of a convict in Bangabandhu murder case and a charge-sheeted accused in the Jail Killing Case in government service," he said.

"When the AL lawmakers and the opposition leader wanted to speak on the issue in the House, the Speaker switched off their microphones, which is against regulations of the parliament", Hamid, also former speaker, said.

He said his party wanted to speak in the parliament and for this, 12 proposals were placed before the Business Advisory Committee. But, the government had all the proposals overruled.

Hamid reiterated the AL demand for midterm polls saying that the people want to get freed from the tyranny of the coalition government.

He urged the people to observe today's countrywide eight-hour hartal beginning from 6:00am.

Later, the AL lawmakers chanted slogans in support of today's hartal.

British minister quits

FROM PAGE 12
"Unfortunately, we were not able to secure the so-called second resolution but Clare accepted at the time that military action was both legal and indeed necessary," Blair's spokesman said.

"In relation to post-Saddam and post-conflict Iraq and the UN, I am not aware of any assurance the prime minister has given that has not been kept," he said.

Responding to Short's concerns about the relative roles in post-conflict Iraq of the United Nations and the Anglo-American coalition, Blair's spokesman said: "We have never talked about the coalition being subservient to the UN or the UN subservient to the coalition. We have talked about a partnership."

"As the prime minister told the cabinet on Thursday, if people address these issues in a constructive way, it should be perfectly possible to navigate through some of these diplomatic issues to every-

one's satisfaction," he said.

Foreign Secretary Jack Straw was due to make a statement to the House of Commons on Monday afternoon on a draft UN resolution on the reconstruction of Iraq that has been drawn up by Washington.

The resolution demands the immediate lifting of United Nations sanctions on Iraq and the allocation of revenue from its massive oil wealth to a new Iraqi Assistance Fund to be spent "at the direction" of the US-led occupying powers.

It only allows the UN an essentially supervisory role and delegates it to providing humanitarian relief and support in the country's reconstruction.

Before the war began, Short labelled Blair's stance on Iraq "reckless" and threatened to resign if a UN resolution authorising military action was not secured.

She later said she was persuaded to stay on in her role

despite the fact that no such resolution was passed.

"As you know, I thought the run-up to the conflict in Iraq was mishandled but I agreed to stay in the government to help support the reconstruction effort for the people of Iraq," said Short's resignation letter.

Blair himself refused to comment on Short's resignation when he arrived at London's Globe Theatre to launch a reform programme for the capital's schools.

Asked if her departure was an embarrassment for him, the prime minister made no reply and turned on his heels to go into the theatre.

Speculation in London that Short might resign rose last week when she was absent from a key vote on controversial government proposals to reform the running of hospitals.

Two junior ministers also resigned before the war in protest.