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Downtown Dhaka turns into battlefield

Over 100 hurt as cops foil sit-in; opposition declares to hem in PMO April 19

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Riot police clashed with hundreds of opposition protesters in the capital yesterday to foil a sit-in programme around Bangladesh Secretariat, firing tear gas shells and rubber bullets that left around 100, including law enforcers and newsmen, injured.

Surrounding areas of the secretariat, including the Noor Hossain Square, Bangabandhu Avenue, Gulistan, Paltan crossing and Doyel Chattar, turned chaotic during an hour-long chase and counter-chase between the law enforcers and opposition activists.

Meanwhile, the 14-party alliance declared to stage a sit-in programme in front of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) on April 19, demanding reforms in the caretaker government system and Election Commission.

The opposition held the two-hour long sit-in programme starting at 11:00am yesterday, defying the government ban on gatherings, rallies and processions around two-and-a-half kilometre radius of the secretariat.

The opposition blamed the police for attacking their peaceful demonstrations. They staged

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PHOTO: STAR

Police fire tear-gas shells to disperse a 14-party procession heading towards Bangladesh Secretariat for their sit-in programme yesterday. Over 100 people were injured in pitched battle between the police and the opposition activists during the two-hour programme.

Opposition out to create unrest

Says PM

UNB, *Hatia, Noakhali*

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has blasted an opposition political party's destructive action and attack on police in the name of laying siege to the secretariat.

"The opposition wants to create unrest. They don't want development and peace of the country," she told a public meeting at Shaheed Ali Ahmad Memorial High

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Govt pushes country into conflict

Says Hasina

UNB, *Dhaka*

Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the alliance government has pushed the country towards conflict by slapping a ban on assembly around the secretariat to foil the opposition's peaceful sit-in programme.

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US offers training for security personnel to fight terrorism

UNB, *Dhaka*

The United States offered to impart training to high-level security personnel of Bangladesh to fight terrorism, as both sides agree that there is no room yet for complacency although many militants

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Market shaken as call money rate hits 150pc

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The inter-bank call money rate yesterday skyrocketed to an all-time high of 150 percent, forcing the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to ride roughshod over its own norms and enforce a 40 percent rate cap for the day to stabilise the volatile market.

The omens were worrisome for the call money market right in the morning. The day started with a nationalised commercial bank asking 40 percent interest on called money. From then on the rate continued a relentless spiral, with all the private banks lending money at more than 100 percent interest rates.

At one point, a private bank handed out a loan to a leasing company at 150 percent interest that really shook the market and even the central bankers. But it was already evening and the transactions had nearly come to an end. Still, the BB imposed the 40 percent ceiling for the day's call-money transactions and warned the banks of punishment if the cap was violated, a market source said.

However, the central bank seemed embarrassed for its out-of-the-way intervention in a free market. BB officials outright denied the call money rate hike and the central bank's move to reporters.

BB General Manager KM Jamsheduzzaman claimed the rate had never exceeded the 40-to-50 percent range yesterday and said, "We never persuade the banks to do anything."

But, a market source said, "In the afternoon, central bank officials phoned all the banks, asking them to bring down the rates of yesterday's call money transactions to 40 percent."

As a result of the BB diktat, many of the banks that handed out loans yesterday will not get the 'extra' profit they were hoping for, while those who borrowed will be spared of the 'extra' cost.

For instance, a source said the

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Voter-listing hangs in void now

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission (EC) yesterday wound up field level work of preparing the controversial fresh voter list without outlining the steps to follow in the voter-listing process.

The collection and scrutiny of information about the prospective voters and preparation of the draft electoral roll officially ended yesterday, keeping substantial numbers of eligible voters out of the list.

The commission, however, has yet to announce the dates for publication of the draft and final voter lists.

After expiry of time limit for the enumeration, officials assigned the overall task of preparing the roll now have no job in hand as far as the schedule is concerned.

Nobody in the EC knows when it will set the dates for the next steps in the voter-listing as it waits for the outcome of the appeal filed against the January 4 High Court directives for revising the existing electoral roll.

The previous voter list was

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SHAZNEEN MURDER CASE

HC starts hearing appeal

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday began hearing the appeal of the six convicts sentenced to death in Shazneen Tasnim Rahman rape and murder case two and a half years ago.

The Second Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression, Dhaka passed the sentence on September 2, 2003.

A High Court bench comprising Justice Ali Asgar Khan and Justice

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BEGUMGANJ GAS FIELD

3 SoEs propose joint venture operation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For the first time, three state-owned energy companies have proposed a Tk 300 crore joint venture to develop Begumganj gas field, which reportedly has a proven gas reserve of 32.7 billion cubic feet (bcf).

A meeting at the energy ministry yesterday finalised the joint venture proposal, which is likely to be placed before the prime minister, who heads the ministry, within the next two weeks for her approval, sources said.

Adviser to the energy ministry Mahmudur Rahman and the managing directors of the Petrobangla subsidiaries--Bangladesh Petroleum Exploration and Production Company (Bapex), Bangladesh Gas Fields Company Ltd (BGFCL) and Sylhet Gas Fields Ltd (SGFL)--represented their respective organisations at the meeting.

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Free our men or get killed

JMB threatens a judge; Jamaat leader held for extremist link

STAR REPORT

The outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) yesterday threatened to kill a district court judge in Dinajpur with his family and blow up the court if he failed to release JMB activists arrested in the last two days.

The threat was given in a letter sent to Additional District Judge Md Zahedur Rahman, reports received in Dhaka said.

In Mymensingh, a court yesterday placed JMB operations commander Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai on a 10-day fresh remand

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ANNOUNCEMENT

7th O & A Level Special Supplement

A four-colour, 32-page Special Supplement in tabloid size on 7th O&A Level Award Presentation Ceremony for the students who achieved outstanding results in the June 2004 and June 2005 sessions will be published on Saturday, 1st April 2006 along with the regular newspaper of the day. There will be no extra charge for this Special Supplement. Please make sure you get your copy from the hawker.