

Downtown Dhaka

FROM PAGE 1
 rallies at different parts of the city in the afternoon in protest of the attacks.

Assistant Deputy Commissioner (East) Imliaz Ahmed, however, counter-blamed the opposition men for "provoking" the police to go into action.

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) had deployed around 9,000 law enforcers at different strategic points around the secretariat to thwart the opposition men.

The police put up barbed-wire fences at Matsya Bhaban, Paltan crossing, Baitul Mukarram, Nour Hossain Square, Bangabandhu Avenue and Doyal Chatter early in the morning and prevented all kinds of traffic in the areas.

They also took positions at different lanes and by-lanes, and rooftops of high-rise buildings in the areas.

Earlier on Tuesday, the DMP issued a release, imposing the ban on all kinds of gatherings and rallies in the adjoining areas of the secretariat for 24 hours from Wednesday midnight, considering the opposition programme a "security threat" to the secretariat.

THE CLASHES

Processions of opposition activists from different parts of the city and adjacent districts started gathering at the police barracks in different areas at 10:00am. Led by senior leaders of the alliance, the demonstrators chanted anti-government slogans.

As a post-sit-in rally ended near the Bangabandhu National Stadium, the main venue of the sit-in programme, at Gulistan around 12:35pm, the demonstrators and the law enforcers locked in a clash.

The protesters pelted stones at the police in a bid to break the barricade while the law enforcers fired dozens of

Call money

FROM PAGE 1
 40 percent ceiling has 'saved' about Tk 28 lakh of one bank, "which borrowed money at 120 percent interest."

WHY DID IT HAPPEN

Normally, the call money rate does not exceed 10 percent.

But, as the Bangladesh Bank since early this month has more frequently been using reverse Repo (repurchase agreement) to withdraw money from the market, a liquidity crisis emerged, pushing the call money rate up to a range between 15 and 40 percent.

Pubali Bank Managing Director Khandker Ibrahim Khaled held two major factors responsible for yesterday's bizarre phenomenon. "It was the last day for the banks to maintain their cash-reserve ratio [CRR, 5 percent on average]. To attain that, many banks had to borrow heavily, pushing up the call money rate," he cited as one of the factors.

The second factor, he said, was the reverse Repo by which the central bank yesterday withdrew Tk 444 crore from the already cash-stranded market.

On the reason for withdrawing so much money from the market by the BB yesterday, Jamsheduz-zaman said the central bank assumed the liquidity situation of the banks was healthy.

Reflecting on yesterday's hue and cry, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya said, "It is an expression of mismatch between aggregate demand and investable surplus. Since the government has not got enough foreign aid as projected, it has probably exhausted its limits for borrowing from banks and possibly resorted to reverse Repo to meet its expenditure demand."

"Given the general shortage in liquidity in the financial sector," he went on, "the Bangladesh Bank needs to meet its quarterly monetary target set by the IMF, resulting in such a situation."

According to Debapriya, "This shows the mismatch between the fiscal and monetary policies. The central bank is also possibly trying to protect the value of taka and has thus mopped up the resources. One has to take a deeper look at the aggregate demand, management and the complementarity between the monetary and fiscal policies."

teargas shells and rubber bullets. The police chased the opposition men and charged batons indiscriminately, leaving over 12 persons injured.

In a few minutes, the clash spread near the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue when demonstrators started hurling stones at the police from rooftops. The police lobbed teargas shells at the AL office and dispersed the protesters from the area after 30 minutes of chase and counter-chase.

Top opposition leaders, including Dr Kamal Hossain, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Rashed Khan Menon, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Mainuddin Khan Badal, Obaidul Quader, Dilip Barua, Enamul Haque and Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, addressed the mammoth rally.

The opposition leaders told the rally that by imposing the ban on a democratic way of protest, the government is forcing the country towards a chaotic situation.

Around 12:00 noon, leaders and activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), student wing of the AL, locked in a violent clash with the police near Doyal Chatter as the law enforcers prevented them from proceeding towards the secretariat.

Dispersed as the police charged baton on the procession, the BCL activists regrouped in the surrounding areas and again locked in clashes with the police. A group of BCL leaders and activists managed to hold a brief rally near Doyal Chatter but ultimately came under police attack.

The sporadic clashes left at least 20 BCL men, five policemen and two journalists injured.

The agitated BCL activists damaged at least three vehicles in front of the Bangla Academy and assaulted a police officer.

Clashes also erupted near the Paltan intersection as the police attacked an opposition demonstration led by AL leaders Asaduzzaman Nour, Shahjahan Khan and Shihara Khan at 1:00pm. Five people were injured in the clashes.

The senior opposition leaders later brought the situation under control.

The police also barricaded the Matsya Bhaban intersection to prevent an opposition procession from advancing towards the secretariat around 11:00am.

The opposition procession led by AL central leaders Mohammad Nasim, Prof Abu Sayeed, Dr Hasan Mahmud, Dr Abdul Razzak and Lt Col (ret'd) Faruk Khan sat there and held a rally, protesting the police obstruction.

JOURNALIST INJURED

During the sit-in programme, the police assaulted Zakir Hossain, staff correspondent of the Daily Amar Desh, near the Jatiya Press Club Area.

Zakir said he was going to office from his home near the press club when the riot police stopped him. As they asked to see his identity card, Zakir showed them his accreditation card.

The law enforcers then asked him where his camera was and then started to beat him indiscriminately.

APRIL 19 SIT-IN

Opposition alliance Coordinator and AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday evening said the 14-party will stage a two-hour sit-in in front of the PMO on April 19 from 11:00am.

Vowing to force the government to resign, Jalil told the press after a meeting of the alliance at the AL Dhanmondi office that the opposition will go for continuous strikes if the government tries to resist the sit-in.

Jalil said the alliance will also demonstrate agitation programmes across the country today in protest of yesterday's police attack that injured around 200 opposition men.

The alliance will take up mass contact programmes in districts and upazilas during April 3-13, he added.

"Given the general shortage in liquidity in the financial sector," he went on, "the Bangladesh Bank needs to meet its quarterly monetary target set by the IMF, resulting in such a situation."

According to Debapriya, "This shows the mismatch between the fiscal and monetary policies. The central bank is also possibly trying to protect the value of taka and has thus mopped up the resources. One has to take a deeper look at the aggregate demand, management and the complementarity between the monetary and fiscal policies."

15 hurt as JCD factions clash at RU

RU CORRESPONDENT

At least 15 persons, including four policemen and a journalist, were injured in a clash between the law enforcers and Jatiyatabad Chhatra Dal (JCD) activists on Rajshahi University (RU) campus yesterday.

The clash erupted as the JCD faction loyal to RU JCD Convener Masudur Rahman attacked a police camp on the campus while chasing opponent faction member Anwar Hossain Nipura around 4:30pm.

Earlier in the morning, JCD followers of Golam Kabir beat up Masud over formation of the Bangabandhu Hall committee.

Masud's supporters chased Nipu to retaliate the attack on their leader but Nipu took shelter at the police camp.

As the law enforcers prevented them from capturing Nipu, the JCD cadres led by Miron and Romel attacked them.

The policemen called for reinforcement who charged baton to fight back the JCD activists equipped with brick-bats and iron rods.

Later, the JCD men assaulted RU Proctor Prof Enamul Haque and damaged his vehicle for allowing the police to set up the camp on the campus.

During the clash, the police beat up Ali Azar Khokon, RU correspondent of the Daily Janata, mercilessly. He was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College and Hospital (RMCH).

Injured policemen—Rana Sarkar, Masud Rana, Abdur Razzak-1 and Abdur Razzak-2—were admitted to police hospital.

The injured JCD cadres—Masudur Rahman, JCD members Anis Ferdous Ratul, Mahmudul Hasan Miron, Nazmul Alam Bony, Hamidul Islam, Nipu and Shankar—were admitted to RMCH and shown arrested in a case for attacking the police.

Outlaws kill 1, blasts injure 3

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Criminals killed a man in Chuadanga while two boys and a woman were severely injured in two separate explosion incidents in Khulna and Meherpur yesterday.

In Chuadanga, criminals allegedly belonging to an outlawed party killed a man at Khejurtala in the Sadar upazila. Police could not identify the 28-year-old deceased, our Kushtia correspondent reports.

Locals found his body in a pair of jeans on a field and informed police.

Meanwhile, two boys were severely injured as a bomb they had earlier got in a dustbin went off around 10:45am on BL College road in Daulatpur in Khulna City, our staff correspondent in Khulna reports.

The injured Forkan, 10, and Jonny, 9 were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital (KMCH) for treatment.

Police said the bomb exploded when Forkan tossed it unwittingly. His right arm was blown off in the explosion while Jonny received severe splinter injuries. KMCH doctors said both are in a critical condition.

In Meherpur, Naria Begum, 37, wife of Nabis Uddin of Dorbeshpur in Sadar upazila, was severely injured when a bomb went off in her house around 9:30am, says our Kushtia correspondent.

According to police, Naria touched the bomb unaware that it was a bomb while doing her chores at home.

Her left arm and left eye were blown off and she received severe injuries to her face. She was admitted to Chuadanga Sadar Hospital for treatment.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested Kalu Kha of the village, also nephew of Naria, in connection with the bomb planting.

Rab sources said Kalu is a cadre of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Janajuddha faction.

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Govt pushes Bandage left

FROM PAGE 2
 "The opposition has declared sit-in demonstration in front of the secretariat, but the BNP-led alliance government blocked the roads around the secretariat in a bid to foil our programme," she said on her arrival at Zia International Airport in the morning.

Hasina, also president of the Awami League (AL), returned home after a two-week visit to the United States for the treatment of her ears. She left Dhaka on March 16 for the United States and went to London from Washington on March 28.

She said the government has made successful the opposition's programme by slapping a ban on gathering near the country's civil administration hub.

Criticising the Wednesday's remarks of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at the Rajshahi divisional rally of the BNP, Hasina said on one hand the government sends letter for discussion, but on the other it says the opposition's demand for electoral reforms is a pretext for creating an issue.

She said: "Khaleda Zia knows that without vote rigging they won't return to power. So, they are conspiring to rig the upcoming national polls."

"No free and fair election will be possible under the next caretaker government headed by Justice KM Hasan," Hasina said, adding, "So, the opposition wants to reform the caretaker government and the Election Commission."

He also claimed three people came to the RMCH ward from the clinic two days ago and took away the clinic's discharge letter and prescriptions.

"They lied to me. They said an RMCH doctor wanted to see the papers. I am an illiterate man. I could not understand that they came to take away the papers to destroy proofs that she was operated there."

The surgeon, a private practitioner, acknowledged that she operated on Roksana but could not say for sure if she left the foreign part inside her abdomen.

3 SoEs propose

FROM PAGE 1

Besides reducing the gas supply shortfall, the first-ever joint venture exclusively of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) will also enhance their production, management and other technical skills and capabilities, a high official of the ministry observed.

He said a large amount of money at the Petrobangla companies is lying idle, which can be profitably invested in developing Begumganj Gas Field.

According to the preliminary estimates, the project will be able to supply gas to the national grid at a price as low as Tk 50 per thousand cubic feet (mcf), while the lowest price rate of any international oil company (IOC) is Tk 122, he added.

Of the project partners, BGFC and SGFL will invest Tk 150 crore each. Bapex, which owns the field, will not invest any money but will be the working partner in charge of operations.

The project will seek VAT (value-added tax) and duty exemption from the finance ministry, like the IOCs enjoy, sources said.

A 5-member joint management committee comprising two BGFC, two SGCL and one Bapex representatives will run the project.

An energy ministry official said earlier three IOCs had expressed interest to develop and operate Begumganj Gas Field under joint venture, but the ministry decided to award the gas field almost ready for production to the joint venture of SOEs.

Bapex explored the gas field in 1976-78 and put the amount of proven gas reserve in its first and second wells at 32.7bcf.

Currently five companies--BGFC, SGFL, Bapex, Shell Bangladesh Exploration and Development BV and Unocal Bangladesh Ltd--are producing gas in the country. Of them, BGFC, SGFL and Bapex are subsidiaries of the state oil and gas agency Petrobangla, and Shell and Unocal are IOCs operating under production sharing contracts (PSCs).

BGFC operates eight gas fields--Titas, Bahigani, Bakhrabad, Narsingdi, Meghna, Begumganj, Feni and Kamta.

SGFL runs five gas fields--Sylhet, Kailashtila, Rashidpur, Beanibazar and Chhatak, and also Haripur Oil Field. Of them, Chhatak Gas Field and Haripur Oil Field are now out of production.

The third SOE, Bapex, operates Saldanadi, Fenchuganj and Shahbazpur gas fields.

Shell is producing gas in the offshore Sangu Gas Field. It also operates two other gas fields--Semutang and Kutubdia. Kutubdia is also an offshore field discovered in the 1970s.

The other IOC, Unocal operates Jalalabad, Maulavibazar and Bibiyana gas fields. Of them, only Jalalabad Gas Field is in production.

Officials at the EC Secretariat had said the EC would not timetable the publication of the draft and final rolls before the result of the appeal comes out.

Meanwhile, after issuing a suo moto contempt rule against the chief election commissioner (CEC) and a ruling BNP lawmaker on Monday, the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court said the CEC's leave to appeal petition against the High Court directives on voter list will remain adjourned until disposal of the contempt issue.

The next hearing on the matter will be held on April 9.

After publication of the draft list, the EC will need at least four months before publishing the final roll. Two more stages like accepting objections and disposing those of by appointing revising authorities will follow. The commission in its original schedule had kept four months for these two jobs.

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3 get death for killing teacher after rape

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday sentenced three people to death for murdering a woman after rape in the city's Pallabi area in March 2004.

Judge AR Masud of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 handed down the sentence in presence of the convicts--Nazrul Islam and Mojibur Rahman, while Habibur Rahman was tried in absentia.

Nineteen other accused were acquitted of charges.

The complainant, however, expressed dissatisfaction over the judgement saying that some of the culprits responsible for her daughter's death were acquitted of charges.

In his order, the judge said the convicts were given punishment on the basis of Nazrul's confessional statement and circumstantial evidence. The convicts can appeal to the High Court against the verdict within 30 days of receiving the judgement copy, the judge added.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 17 prosecution witnesses.

On March 11, 2004, six youths allegedly led by Habibur Rahman of Pallabi abducted and gang-raped 25-year-old Fatema Aktter Kohinora, a teacher, and then burnt her to death at an abandoned poultry farm in the area.

Following the incident, victim's mother Almida Khatun filed a case with Pallabi Police Station under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act accusing six people the next day.

The investigation officer pressed charges against Habibur Rahman and 21 others on July 7 the same year.

Victim's mother Almida Khatun told the journalists at the courtroom yesterday that in his confessional statement to Metropolitan Magistrate Abdur Rouf Khan, Nazrul also mentioned names of Shafulul Islam Safu, Abul Kalam Azad, Sumon, Boro Babu, Chhoto Babu and five to six unknown people as the rapists of the victim, but only Mojibur, Habibur and Nazrul were convicted for the incident.

Advocate SMA Sabur conducted the case on behalf of the complainant while advocates Syed Rezaur Rahman and Abul Kalam Azad defended the accused.

Outages back in Rajshahi after PM's visit

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Rajshahi was plunged into the woes of power outage yesterday as the entire North Bengal region suffered 200 MW load-shedding.

Against a 616 MW power demand, the Power Development Board (PDB) managed to supply only 144 MW from two Baghabari units and 150 MW from the eastern sources.

"We had to cut power supplies as there was no fresh generation of power," said a senior PDB official of Rajshahi Zone.

There was, however, no load-shedding in Rajshahi for 24 hours on Wednesday during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's day long visit.

PDB sources said the power situation deteriorated as two 125 MW power units at Barapukuria in Dinajpur tripped on Tuesday. The situation eased a bit in the early hours yesterday when one of the two coal-based units resumed operation.

Another unit that started operation on test in January and tripped at the end of February would start functioning today, they added.

Both the coal-based Barapukuria units went out of operation following technical faults in the 'evacuation line', said PDB sources.

Robber killed in 'shootout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A notorious robber was killed in crossfire during a "shootout" between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his accomplices in Beanibazar upazila in Sylhet early yesterday.

The elite force arrested the robbery gang leader Channu Miah, 40, along with three others earlier after a robbery at a house in Kakordia of Beanibazar upazila.

A Rab team along with Channu went to Sodakhal to recover the loot and weapons where Channu's accomplices opened fire on the team forcing Rab to retaliate. Channu died on the spot as he was bullet-hit while trying to escape.

Earlier on Wednesday a gang attacked the house of expatriate Helaluddin. They took gold and money in local and foreign currencies from the house. The robbers also beat up family members injuring six of them.

A Rab contingent arrested the four including Channu on Sylhet-Jakiganj highway on the same day and recovered some of the booty from them. The four admitted their complicity with the robbery to Rab. Beanibazar police also arrested five others in connection with the same incident.

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Free militants

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while a Dhaka court remanded two Majlish-e-Shura members Abdul Awal Sunny, also military commander of JMB, and Abdul Awai for another seven days.

The law enforcers in Rangpur have arrested a Jamaat-e-Islami activist on charge of his involvement with the banned Islamist militant outfit JMB.

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