

## Sealed city turns

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police following commands of government top shots attacked their peaceful programme without any provocation. The police, on the other hand, said they went on action only when opposition workers broke the barricades violating the ban and pelted them with bricks.

The 14-party opposition line-up announced to stage the two-hour sit-in from 11:00am to press home its demands for reforms of the caretaker government system, the Election Commission and electoral laws, and to protest the Kansat killings, power crisis and price spiral of essential commodities.

The opposition camp will also observe a dawn-to-dusk country-wide hartal today to protest the deaths of at least 17 villagers in police atrocities at Kansat in Chapainawabganj.

### SECURITY PREPARATIONS

On the eve of the opposition programme, the police on Tuesday night went on a blanket-arrest drive. The lockups in the city police stations were reportedly sardine-packed with opposition activists and apolitical arrestees yesterday, sources said.

On Monday, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) termed the opposition programme a "security threat" to the PMO and announced the imposition of section 144, which bans every kind of gathering, in a vast area around the PMO for 24 hours from Tuesday midnight.

The roads the police sealed off from early morning yesterday include Shahbag Roundabout-Farmgate-Mohakhali Flyover, Moghbazar-Bangla Motors-Hatirpool, Shyamoli-Asad Gate-Panthapath, Dhanmondi Road 27 and Russell Square, and Rokeya Sarani-Bijoy Sarani.

**CLASHES AT BANGLA MOTORS**  
Bangla Motors crossroads and the surrounding area including Eskaton Road, Maysingh Link Road, Paribagh and Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue turned into a battlefield as an AL procession tried to breach a police barricade at about 11:50am.

AL Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury led the break-through attack on the barricade. In retaliation, riot police fired teargas shells and rubber bullets at the opposition men. Police and pickets also pelted each other with bricks, and chased and counter-chased for about an hour.

The demonstrators burnt some 15 to 20 tyres and two rickshaws in this area reportedly to minimise the effects of teargas. They also set fire to a microbus of Channel S, a private satellite TV channel.

The clash led Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Asaduzzaman Nur injured, among others.

Police arrested about 20 opposition men in this area.

AL leader HBM Iqbal alleged some ruling BNP cadres threw at least 10 crude bombs on them near Eskaton Road.

Police exercised maximum tolerance, DMP Deputy Commissioner (South) Mazharul Hoque told The Daily Star after the skirmishing. "We dispersed the opposition workers only when they broke the police barricade and hurled bricks on us, violating the ban," he added.

On the other hand, Saber claimed, "Police baton-charged us indiscriminately, and lobbed teargas shells and fired gunshots on our leaders and workers, when we were trying to make them understand that this is a peaceful sit-in programme."

### CLASHES IN DHANMONDI

Opposition members and supporters led by 14-party leaders started to gather near Russell Square, at Sobhanbagh and in Dhanmondi Road 27 in small processions since

10:00am.

They held a rally near Rapa Plaza in Mirpur Road.

The clashes started after police had lobbed teargas shells at the rally and dispersed the crowd at around 12:20pm.

The opposition demonstrators counter-attacked by throwing bricks at police from the lanes and by-lanes in the area from Russell Square to Dhanmondi Road 27.

They damaged a truck of Dhaka City Corporation and a jeep of a donor agency, as well as broke windows of nearby markets.

Police lobbed more than 100 teargas shells to disperse the demonstrators during the hour-long scuffle. There was no report of any serious injury.

Before the clash, the demonstrators gave chase to the flag-carrying car of Chief Whip Khandoker Delwar Hossain, who was passing through the area.

### HOUSE OF BNP MP VANDALISED

During the clash in Dhanmondi, a group of angry opposition men broke into the house of BNP lawmaker Harun Ur Rashid Khan Monno, a former minister without portfolio, in Dhanmondi Road 27.

They broke the doors of his office and drawing room, and the windshields of two cars, creating panic among the inmates. At that point, three police constables guarding the house fired four shots from inside the house and drove the mob away from the house. No body was injured.

### MOHAKHALI, PMO AREAS

Police put up barricades on Mohakhali fly-over, at Mohakhali-Gulshan crossroads, Nabisco crossroads. They also had diverted many buses at Kuril crossroads on Airport Road to Badsha since early morning, forcing thousands of people to walk to reach their destinations.

About a thousand activists of the 14-party alliance held a peaceful rally at the eastern side of Mohakhali rail crossing. Opposition leaders Tofail Ahmed, Kazi Zafurullah MP, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haq Inu, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Advocate Sahara Khatun, and AKM Rahmat Ullah addressed the meeting.

After the end of the rally at about 12:45pm, a few opposition men threw bricks at police, who drove them away by charging baton.

The law enforcers did not remove the barricade on the fly-over until 2:30pm.

During scheduled time of the sit-in programme, the road in front of the PMO was literally deserted.

Except a pair of policemen, no other law enforcer was seen deployed there, although thousands were guarding the barricades set far away from the PMO.

## SC Bar protests

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the constitutional process and existing laws, since the common people are not involved in the enactment of the law," he added.

The cabinet Monday approved the contempt of court law providing six months' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 5,000 or both as the maximum penalty for contempt of court. Under the existing law of 1926, the highest penalty for this act is six months' imprisonment or a fine of Tk 2000 or both.

Barrister Amir said the contempt of court act has been developed on the light of some particular judgments in the countries where common laws are practised.

"This law should have been enacted carefully incorporating the constitutional and fundamental rights of the people for freedom of expression," he said.

## Opposition hartal

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Member Abdur Razzak, who chaired the meeting, said, adding that the government has deprived them of the democratic rights by imposing ban on rallies and procession.

Over 300 opposition workers were arrested and over 200 including AI leaders Motia Chowdhury, Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Mohammad Nasim, Asaduzzaman Noor, Nurul Islam, Shirin Akther, Bahaudin Nasim, Pankaj Debnath, newly elected BCL President Mahmud Hasan Ripon and General Secretary Mahfuz Haider Roton were injured during yesterday's mayhem, he said.

The AL leader said the government agents who set fire to a vehicle of Channel S are trying to pass the blame to the opposition.

There is no way but to topple down the alliance government to get rid of its repression, torture and misrule, Razzak said.

Fourteen-party leaders Tofail Ahmed, Obaidul Quader, Dilip Barua, Saifuddin Ahmed, Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Abad Samad, Zafor Sazzad, Nurul Islam, among

## Dhaka to start

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positive results through increasing trade and commerce which encourages the country to sign FTA with other countries.

Humayun said Pakistan expects the negotiations will end by July this year and the CoE will finalize a date for FTAsigning.

He said Pakistan has launched negotiation to sign an FTA with Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and China.

The existing trade between the countries is heavily in favour of Pakistan as Bangladesh export products to Pakistan is worth \$ 63.12 million while import is worth \$138.6 million.

## Britons warned

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In a major report 12 years ago, Human Rights Watch said up to 3,000 organs, mainly kidneys and corneas, were being taken from executed prisoners every year, with government officials reportedly enjoying priority for operations.

Last month Beijing announced it would ban the growing trade in human organs, amid domestic pressure to regulate the chaotic industry and reports that Japanese and Malaysians had died from botched transplants.

Its health ministry issued regulations to go into effect on July 1 banning the purchase and sale of organs, while also introducing a set of medical standards for transplants.

In a phone interview with AFP, Stephen Wigmore, chairman of the British Transplantation Society's ethics committee, said the group decided to take a stand in light of the number of Britons enquiring about transplants in China.

"Increasingly, patients from the UK are looking towards China as a source of potential organs for transplants," he said.

"We wanted to make both the medical profession and patients aware in the UK that there are some moral and ethical dilemmas which may not be evident" from websites which offer to help arrange transplants in China.

One such website, www.en.zoukiishoku.com, offers kidney transplants for 62,000 dollars (50,000 euros) and heart transplants for up to 160,000 dollars. It does not say where the organs come from.

Wigmore recalled that, typically, a liver must be transplanted within 12 hours of a donor's death, and a kidney in 24 to 36 hours.

"It almost sounds as though the timing of an execution is at the convenience of the timing of a transplant," he said.

## Jamaat men

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are among the injured who were admitted to Shyamnagar Upazila Hospital and private clinics, said Ashwini Munda, a leader of the community.

Tarak Munda and Kamruzzaman submitted separate FIRs (first information report), Sub-Inspector Nuruzzaman of Shyamnagar Police Station said.

## McClellan

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But now, the job of deputy chief of staff for policy is being given to Joel Kaplan.

The move signals a broad effort to rearrange and reinvigorate Bush's staff by new chief of staff Joshua Bolten. Bolten moved into his position last week; Kaplan was his No. 2 person at the Office of Management and Budget.

At least for the time being, the promotion of Kaplan would leave Bush with three deputy chiefs of staff: Rove, Kaplan and Joe Hagin, who oversees administrative matters, intelligence and other national security issues.

Appearing with Bush on the South Lawn, McClellan, who has parried especially fiercely with reporters on Iraq and on intelligence issues, told Bush: "I have given it my all sir and I have given you my all sir, and I will continue to do so as we transition to a new press secretary."

Bush said McClellan had "a challenging assignment."

"I thought he handled his assignment with class, integrity," the president said. "It's going to be hard to replace Scott, but nevertheless he made the decision and I accepted it. One of these days, he and I are going to be rocking in chairs in Texas and talking about the good old days."

McClellan is expected to remain in his job until a successor is named. Among those under consideration are Tony Snow, a former White House speechwriter under the first President Bush, former Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke and Dan Senor, a former coalition spokesman after the invasion of Iraq, according to Republican officials.

McClellan was named press secretary in June 2003.

## Road crashes

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The injured, including a woman, were admitted to Gazipur Sadar Hospital. Seven of them, were later shifted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) as their condition deteriorated.

The bodies were sent to Gazipur Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsy. Our Staff Correspondent adds: A mother and her four-year-old girl child were killed in a road accident at Dhaka-Chittagong Highway yesterday triggering protest in the area.

A speeding bus ran over them at Shanir Akhra temple at Jatrabari when they were crossing the road.

Protest spread across the area just after the accident as mob had blocked the Highway for an hour and broke glasses of seven buses.

Shyampur Police Station arrested the bus driver Kabir Hossain and seized the bus.

Quoting the bus driver, police sources said, when he was taking turn to Jatrabari to Donia College road the woman along with her baby was injured and died.

The bodies were sent to Mitford Hospital morgue. Nobody came to identify the bodies till filing this report last evening.

## BTTB declining

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attending a meeting of the consortium members in New Delhi in which the decision on the cable expansion is being finalised.

A top BTTB official said the offer is being declined because the present bandwidth allocation in the submarine cable is good enough. The cable system will give the country a data transfer capacity of 10 gigabyte per second, which will be 68 times the present capacity.

This capacity is considered as adequate for the next 10 years while the cable has a life of 15 years. Bangladesh is not in a position to spend any additional money for this project, he added.

Besides, only three of the 16 consortium members -- Bharti, Singtel and VSNL-- are involved with the expansion. Except Saudi Telecom, the others are also not considering the proposal for expansion, the BTTB official said.

But another BTTB official termed these arguments a whitewash. "It is true that for Bangladesh's own use, it has more capacity than it needs. But by participating in the upgrade, Bangladesh could have owned valuable capacity in international cable with large market value," he said.

The BTTB will bear a minimum operating cost of \$13.69 million per year for the cable system. The expansion could have eased its burden through additional revenue, the official added.

Industry insiders pointed out that for an investment of only \$4.4 million, the return is so enormous that an European telecommunications company had offered the BTTB the fund as loan, saying that BTTB should go for it as it can have return on this investment almost instantly. But the BTTB had declined.

"Firstly, the per MIU km cost of BTTB will drastically fall if it participates in the expansion," said one industry insider.

"BTTB does not need to use it for local purpose, it can sell or lease out the expanded kilometres to international communication companies. It is a hot deal. Bharti, Singtel and VSNL are expanding the cable for small amounts of money to lower their business cost and eat up any international cable business prospect for Bangladesh,"

## EC ill-equipped

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elections freely and fairly in future," the former CEC had told journalists before making a courtesy call with the president.

Referring to the proposals both the election commissioners said there are no moves of the EC to bring any reforms.

"The EC does not have adequate time to complete all the preparatory tasks including the voter list before the next parliamentary election," Munsef Ali said. He however confessed some important tasks have been delayed due to rift within the EC.

He suggested increasing the election expenditure ceiling from Tk 5 lakh. "The existing expenditure ceiling is not realistic and it should be increased," he said.

Mohammad Ali said increasing the expenditure ceiling would not solve the problem. "Usage of black money in the election must be stopped," he said.

Munsef Ali suggested introducing a tougher provision to prevent the habitual loan defaulters from contesting in the parliamentary elections.

About the political party registration system with the EC, introduced before the last parliamentary elections, Munsef Ali said the system should be made mandatory.

Mohammad Ali said they felt embarrassed at the end of their tenure due to the reported irregularities in the EC secretariat. But the secretariat has not protested against the news published in different notional dailies about financial irregularities and the shady activities regarding the preparation of the voter list.

Munsef Ali said the EC should have initiated steps for introducing electronic voting system and voter identity cards in phases.

### LAST WORKING DAY

**IN OFFICE**

Munsef Ali and Mohammad Ali, who opposed the preparation of the controversial fresh voter list decided unilaterally by CEC MA Aziz, failed in three attempts to make a courtesy call to the president and the CEC on their last day at the office.

Munsef Ali did manage to get an appointment with President Iajuddin

Munsef Ali, around 1:25pm, walked Mohammad Ali to his car and embraced him while Munsef left the EC premises at 4:00pm.

## Jamaat leader

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Majid had hosted several JMB regional meetings in his home and in his bookstall at Dinajpur station road in the past. Bakul was an active JMB member and carried out August 17 bombing in Dinajpur.

Rab arrested Majid from his bookstall last Sunday afternoon. Majid is also the president of the editorial board of the Weekly Ajker Dinajpur, which is published locally.

He was taken to Rab's temporary office at Shapla Square in Rangpur and interrogated.

Rab had arrested Majid once earlier from the Rokon conference in Dinajpur last October in suspicion of his involvement with August 17 bomb blasts. Rab sources said Majid was released on a guarantee from one Aftab Uddin Mollah.

He went on, "Besides, in this consortium of 16 members, only Bangladesh does not have any other cable system connecting the information superhighway. All others have more than one cable system. So, if others decline this expansion offer, it does not justify Bangladesh's refusal."

It is the same kind of stubbornness of Bangladesh that deprived it of getting connected with another submarine cable almost free of cost in the early nineties, another industry insider mentioned.

The cost of expansion would be low because the basic cable system is already in place. Consequently, Singtel, Bharti and VSNL, which now have 8,60,438 MIU Km each, will increase their capacity to 1,391,718 MIU Km each.

The current cable system was commissioned in October 2005, where Bangladesh's capital investment was \$ 35 million paid to the Cable Consortium. In addition, Landing Station in Cox's Bazar Cost \$4.8 million, other capital cost and interest expenses were \$5.2 million and some other cost amounted to \$2 million, raising the total cost to \$47 million.

Soon after the main trunk line was commissioned, Bharti, Singtel and VSNL forwarded a resolution to the consortium proposing an expansion of the cable system. As per rules adopted by the consortium, if members wish to upgrade the system, they can do so as long as others do not have to make any fresh investment and others are given some additional capacity without extra cost.

As per rules of the consortium, the BTTB was also offered to participate in the upgrade. But the BTTB made an internal report saying it need not participate because it has more capacity than it can use.

The BTTB's non-participation is practically serving the purposes of Singtel, Bharti and VSNL who, by not having much stakeholders in the expansion, will have monopoly in the cable market in which smaller consortium members like the BTTB will have no power to sell their capacity in the open market, said an official.

Ahmed on April 16 but the president cancelled the appointment and the officials at the Bangabhaban informed the election commissioner that the time would be given to him later.

Mohammad Ali also sent a letter to the Bangabhaban expressing his willingness to meet with the president.

Mohammad Ali said the president could not give time to them. "The president may be busy with state affairs."

Questions have been raised whether the president avoided the courtesy call with the two election commissioners as they have been strongly opposing the preparation of the fresh voter list, which the government had favoured. Munsef Ali however brushed aside the question.

The two election commissioners also failed to meet CEC MA Aziz as they could not communicate with the CEC over telephone. They called the CEC to inform him that they want to meet him but the CEC did not pick up the receiver.

The CEC, at that moment, was in a meeting at his office with the two other election commissioners, Justice Mahfuzur Rahman and SM Zakaria who had been supporting the CEC since they joined in last January.

The EC secretariat did not arrange any formal farewell to Munsef Ali and Mohammad Ali who have been on the sidelines for the last seven months due to their opposition to prepare the fresh voter list.

Munsef Ali however wrote a letter to the EC secretary thanking all the officials at the secretariat for their cooperation during his tenure.

Munsef Ali, around 1:25pm, walked Mohammad Ali to his car and embraced him while Munsef left the EC premises at 4:00pm.

## Outage

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trend in the past few years with the GDP (gross domestic product) growing at about six per cent, the industry growing up at eight per cent and export growing at over 19 per cent.

The chamber said interest rate in Bangladesh higher compared to its neighbours. "Our interest rates are in 12 per cent to 15 per cent against six to seven percent in India, five percent in Pakistan and two point seven per cent in Sri Lanka".

"Our export credit is also much higher around seven to ten percent which is more than twice the rate prevailing in India and Pakistan," said an MCCI statement on the talks.

The government must immediately put a limit on borrowing from the banking sector, other wise, liquidity crisis in the nationalised banks as well as over all availability of credit for industry and other sector will pose a serious threat, the delegation said.

It observed that the increase in government borrowing from the banking sector is a threat to industrial and other sectors as the borrowing already increased by 23.6 percent compared to that during the corresponding period last year. The net borrowing from the banking sector reached Tk 2,460 crore till April 13 this year against Tk 1,997 crore last year.

The MCC urged the government to continue the tax holiday, saying that the industrialisation programme would be jeopardised if it is withdrawn.

Expressing concern over the worsening power supply, the chamber body said the situation has become precarious particularly in the industrial areas around Dhaka city. The energy ministry should take comprehensive measures to increase power generation instead of only resorting to load-shedding.

Load-shedding without prior information must be avoided. It causes immense loss of man hour and loss of production, it said.

According to the MCCI, the major factors which contributed to price increase are budget deficits, supply shocks, production losses, decline in productivity, frequent increase in the prices of fuel, oil, power and gas, devaluation of currency and toll collection on supply routes.

"It was always seen that when the government withdrew the monetary policy support to industry, its growth slowed down," the business body pointed out.

The prime minister gave a patient hearing to the business leaders and assured them of doing everything to facilitate trade and economic activities in the country, meeting sources said.

Khaldi Zia said the present government is business friendly, and stressed continuity of it for uninterrupted development of the country. She also said her government implemented one after another its election pledges, including improvement of law and order, combating terrorism and improving people's socio-economic condition.

The delegation included MCCI Vice President A K M Rafiqul Islam, Secretary General C K Hyder and executive members M Shamsul Alam, Imtiyaz Hossain, Nurul Islam, Mahbub Zamil, Obaidur Rahman Khan, Syed Nasim Manjur and Feroz Rahim.

## Journalists

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compensation to the injured journalists and judicial investigation into the incident were met.

Chaired by SSKOP Co-convenor Fazle Imam, the meeting was addressed, among others, by President of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Member-Secretary of SSKOP Ruhul Amin Gazi, joint-member secretaries Motiur Rahman Talukder and Manjurul Ansan Bulbul, members Abul Hashem, Khairul Islam, Altaf Mahmud, Elahi Nawaz Khan, Omar Faruk and Sardar Farid.

Leaders of Photojournalists Association, Sports Journalists Association and Dhaka Reporters' Unity were present at the meeting.

The SSKOP leaders urged the government to meet their demands by April 22. Otherwise, they threatened to announce a tough programme from the rally.

They also requested the home, sports and information ministries to take joint initiatives to resolve the crises immediately.

Our staff correspondent from Chittagong reported that the journalist here yesterday observed a three-hour token strike from 11:00am protesting Sunday's police action.

They also announced a fresh programme at a rally. Chittagong Union of Journalists (CUJ), Chittagong Metropolitan Union of Journalists (CMUJ), Chittagong Press Club (CPC), Chittagong Photo Journalists Association (CPJA) and Bangladesh Sports Journalists Association (BSJA) Chittagong chapter jointly organised the rally at CGC auditorium.

The programme includes token hunger strike by photojournalists on Chittagong Press Club premise at 11:00am today, view exchange meetings with all the five agitating organisations of Chittagong journalists tomorrow, human chain, protest rally and work abstention from 11:00am to 2:00pm on April 22, and three-hour hunger strike at Chittagong Press Club on April 24.

## Developing countries

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Pakistan and Sri Lanka and to 30 percent in Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives.

In the second phase, from January 2008 to December 31, 2009, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are supposed to reduce their tariffs within zero to five percent for products from those member countries, which are among the least developed countries (LDCs).

Earlier, the member states agreed that the first round of tariff reduction will take place in July 2006.

The CoE meeting also decided that all LDCs have to reduce their import tariffs to 30 percent within the next two years.

Meeting sources said as an LDC, Bangladesh might benefit by increasing its export volume to Safta's developing countries. Bangladesh has no obligation to reduce its tariff line because it is already below 30 percent.

"As per the Safta agreement, developing countries have to reduce their tariff lines within the next three years. But there was no specific date in the agreement, so we reached a consensus on by what date the developing and LDC countries will reduce their tariff lines," AKM Fazlur Rahman, deputy secretary to the commerce ministry of Bangladesh, said after the meeting.

He however did not say whether there were specific dates fixed for the second and the third years' tariff reduction schedule for the developing countries.

Yesterdays CoE meeting discussed the rules of procedure for Safta CoE, rules of procedure for SMC, trade liberalisation programme and procedures for notifying WTO (World Trade Organisation) about Safta. The meeting also reviewed the list of sensitive products.

Fazlur said only tariff reduction is not enough for full implementation of Safta, all member countries have to remove their non-tariff and para-tariff barriers also.

## Curfew in Kathmandu

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