

Anti-speak on reforms

FROM PAGE 1
December 07: Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina disclosed her party proposal to reform the caretaker government system. She demanded appointment of the caretaker government chief and the chief election commissioner on the basis of consensus of all political parties through dialogue.

2005
March 15: Prime Minister Khaleda Zia criticised the opposition's demand for reform of the caretaker government system, asking it to table its suggestions in parliament rather than at roundtables.

March 15: BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan said Awami League has joined parliament to bring changes in the existing provisions of the non-party caretaker government.

April 28: Bhuiyan ruled out any immediate possibility of holding talks with Awami League regarding reforms of the caretaker government system.

May 13: AL formed a committee comprising senior leaders and leading legal experts to finalise a combined reform proposal on the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC) by the end of May.

May 13: AL General Secretary Abdul Jaill said his party is ready to join parliament for endorsement of the reforms if any constitutional amendment is needed.

July 10: The prime minister in parliament urged the main opposition party to place the demand for reform of the caretaker government system in the House. She said the demands will be discussed if necessary.

July 15: AL and its left-leaning allies announced three sets of proposals seeking to reform the caretaker government system, the EC and some electoral laws and regulations to ensure free and fair elections.

July 15: Mannan Bhuiyan said the reform proposal made by the opposition parties is to 'hinder' the country's smooth electoral process. "If the opposition parties are sincere about their demands then they should come to parliament and place their demands there," he remarked.

July 21: Law Minister Moudud Ahmed said if the opposition really wants any positive change for the welfare of the country, they must come to parliament for dialogue. "But the reality is -- they

will not come, because their target to create anarchy and fishing in the muddy water will not be successful then."

August 28: The AL-led opposition parties declared a set of proposals to bring reforms in the caretaker government system and electoral rules.

December 02: Mannan Bhuiyan asked the 14-party combine to reconsider the government's proposal to sit for dialogue on finding out ways to combat the recent trend of militant activities in the country.

December 02: Responding to Bhuiyan, Abdul Jaill told The Daily Star: "We have made it clear that we cannot sit for a dialogue meant for diverting public attention. However, I cannot say anything readily about any fresh call."

2006
February 12: AL placed reform proposals in parliament.

February 12: In response to the main opposition's reform proposal, Mannan Bhuiyan in parliament said the government is ready for discussion on ways to make the elections more credible, free and fair.

February 28: The prime minister in parliament proposed to form a committee to discuss the opposition's reform agenda.

March 13: The prime minister categorically rejected the opposition's proposal to bring the armed forces under the caretaker government. She declared that the armed forces will remain under the president during the caretaker regime.

March 14: Chief Whip Khondakar Delwar Hossain thanked to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid and said they could discuss the formation of the prime minister-proposed committee.

March 15: AL asked the government to send a written proposal specifying the terms of reference of the committee to be formed.

March 20: The BNP secretary general sent his first letter to the AL general secretary seeking names of the opposition representatives in the proposed committee, but he did not specify terms of reference of the committee.

March 22: Abdul Jaill replied to Mannan Bhuiyan's letter seeking some clarifications including the proposed committee's format, its mandate, timeframe and the number of its members.

March 29: The prime minister categorically rejected the reform

proposals. "There is no need for reforms. The opposition parties are trying to create unrest in the name of reforms," she said.

March 29: Mannan Bhuiyan asked the opposition parties to sit in a dialogue with open mind to discuss the reform issue. "There is no way to realise the demands of reform through agitation," he told a rally.

March 30: The BNP secretary general replied to the AL general secretary seeking five names from the AL for the committee.

April 6: The 14-party in a letter, signed by Abdul Jaill, to the ruling BNP suggested constituting the proposed committee with the leaders of BNP and AL, keeping Jamaat-e-Islami outside of the committee.

April 6: The prime minister claimed that the EC is neutral to ensure free and fair polls. She defended the existing form of the caretaker government and accused the opposition of creating unrest in the name of reform demand.

April 12: BNP sent its third letter to AL about constituting the proposed committee to discuss the reform proposals.

April 16: The 14-party sent another letter to the BNP secretary general mentioning the names of five AL representatives for the proposed 10-member committee to discuss the opposition-proposed reforms.

April 17: Sheikh Hasina said 14-party will not sit for a dialogue with the government on the reform agenda taking Jamaat men at the discussion table.

April 29: The 14-party formally rejected BNP's letter nominating Jamaat and Islami Oikya Jote leaders to discuss the reform agenda.

September 14: The prime minister offered a secretary-level dialogue on reforms between the ruling and the opposition parties.

September 16: The PM said she offered discussion to the opposition to bring them onto the 'right track' from the path of violence. "We are least bothered whether anyone accepts it or not," she said.

September 16: Sheikh Hasina said Khaleda Zia's offer is nothing but doublespeak.

PM asks RMG owners

FROM PAGE 1
 fabrics, accessories and machinery to attract foreign buyers.

The PM inaugurated the fair. Commerce Minister Hafizuddin Ahmed, State Minister for Finance and Planning Shah Mohammad Abul Hossain and BGMEA President SM Fazlul Haque also spoke at the inaugural function.

Khaleda said the government has already formed a forum led by the commerce ministry to meet the compliance issues of the RMG sector.

She expressed her satisfaction at the initiative of the BGMEA and BKMEA for a joint project with the ILO to make the garment industries compliant. The government has taken the compliance issue very seriously, she said.

Recognising the importance of compliant garment factories, the government has taken steps to establish a 'Garments Pali' in Gazaria upazila in Munshiganj district, where about 300 compliant garment factories will be set up, she mentioned.

"To retain our place in the apparel industry in the global competitive market, we have to produce fabrics and other accessories in the country. We have also to set up more backward linkage industries, rather than being confined only to sewing of garment products," the prime minister added.

The government is ready to give all assistance in this regard, she said, and urged the foreign and local entrepreneurs to invest in backward linkage industries.

Responding to the BGMEA demand for rehabilitating sick industries, Khaleda agreed that it is very urgent to start these factories for socio-economic development and stability in the society.

In this regard, she said a committee formed by the commerce ministry at her directive has submitted its recommendations.

The PM directed the authorities

to examine the recommendations and start implementing those immediately.

The commerce minister said compliance in the garment sector is the demand of time.

So, everyone should follow the instructions that are better for the industry as well as the national economy, he said.

Hafizuddin urged both the garment factory owners and workers to accept the minimum wage announced recently.

A total of 85 entrepreneurs from countries including Pakistan, China, Taiwan, India and host Bangladesh are participating in the fair, the BGMEA president said at a press conference yesterday.

The overseas participants in the fair include Kavi International Ltd of Hong Kong, China, Classic Denim Mills Pvt Ltd of Pakistan, Zong Sine Textile Ind Ltd of Taiwan and Envision Exports of India.

As in the previous years, special arrangements have been made to display stocks of apparels for on-the-spot sales at the fair.

Three seminars on different issues relating to garment industry and its challenges ahead will also be held on the sidelines of the exhibition.

Meanwhile, the BGMEA has opened a buyers' reception cell at Zia International Airport to provide services to the foreign visitors on their arrival. Besides, there is a buyers' corner at the fair venue to provide internet facilities and other logistic support to the visitors.

My Shipment.Com of MGH Group, Banglalink and Exim Bank Ltd are the co-sponsors of the fair, while ATN Bangla is the media partner of the show.

Garment exporters received orders worth \$68.6 million from foreign buyers at the Bateexpo-2005.

POWER OUTAGE Bullet-hit protester dies at DMCH

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The textile mill worker bullet-hit during Tuesday's blockade of the Palli Bidyut office at Chaola in Narsingdi succumbed to his injuries yesterday morning at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Kamal Hossain, 30, was hit by a bullet in the chest on Tuesday as a huge crowd blockading the Palli Bidyut office demanding uninterrupted power supply in the area. Critically injured Kamal was rushed to DMCH Tuesday night.

An uneasy calm settled over village Chaola after Kamal's body was sent there. Extra forces have been deployed in the area to prevent any untoward situation.

Local sources said the local textile mills geared up to increase their production for extra profit on the eve of the Eid-ul-Fitre, but frequent power outages in the area had been foiling their bid.

Thousands of textile mill workers and locals blockaded the Palli Bidyut Samity 2 office at Chaola on Tuesday protesting frequent power cuts in the locality.

Palli Bidyut authorities claimed that the mob ransacked documents and furniture in the office and set fire to 12 motorcycles and two transformers worth Tk 2.5 crore.

The police rushed to the scene, clubbed the crowd, lobbed tear gas shells and at one stage opened fire on the mob to control the situation, Narsingdi police sources said.

Around 50 people were injured and two including Kamal sustained bullet injuries during the police action.

Ctg Port

FROM PAGE 1
 yesterday to offload another 2502 TEU containers while three vessels carrying 1721 TEU containers were anchored in the outer anchorage waiting to berth, the sources added.

The congestion of containers as well as the cargo are creating a space crisis and hindering handling operations at the port.

Sources in Chittagong Port Authority blamed delay of container delivery and imported cargo for the situation.

Besides, increasing flow of imported containers and slow delivery of the containers, particularly the ICD bound ones, also attributed to the congestion, they said.

They said the delivery rate of ICD bound containers was low due to insufficient numbers of railway wagons.

The situation is causing the vessels in the outer anchorage to stay there for additional time before berthing at the port jetty, thus it is threatening a congestion of vessels at the port as well, said the sources.

The CPA is considering to impose a four times higher penalty rent on any container remaining undelivered after the free-time of four days from September 26.

Govt failed

FROM PAGE 1
 House that the ministry has already taken necessary steps and allocated rice and money for the affected people in 13 districts and opened control rooms in those areas.

Denying the allegation of the Met office's failure, the state minister said, "The Met office showed cautionary signal No. 3, but the fishermen did not take it seriously. Now we are working to rescue the missing fishermen."

Earlier, BNP lawmaker Shahiduzzaman told the House that more than 100 trawlers are still missing and the families of those ill-fated fishermen have been worried about their lack. He demanded for immediate government action in this regard.

AL lawmaker Panchanan Biswas said the Met office and the government have failed to alert the fishermen and people in the coastal area; as a result, the fishermen could not return from the deep sea while the coastal residents failed to take shelter.

"At least 500 trawlers and 5,000 fishermen are still missing. Many houses in the coastal area have been destroyed. The government should allocate enough money for the fishermen's families and the distressed people," he said.

BNP lawmaker Sohrab Uddin, AL lawmakers Promod Mankin and Delwar Hossain also spoke on the issue and demanded enough relief for the distressed in their constituencies.

14-party

FROM PAGE 20
 Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, 14-party Coordinator Abdul Jaill, Motia Chowdhury, Rashed Khan Menon, Hasanul Haque Inu, Dilip Barua, Advocate Zahirul Islam, Abdul Mannan were present at the meeting.

Thai coup leaders

FROM PAGE 20
 coup leaders on the same night that they overthrew Thaksin.

On Wednesday, the king publicly endorsed Sonthi as the leader of Thailand's new military government in a statement read out by Sonthi.

The monarch is believed to have tacitly approved the coup against the premier, who had endured months of protests demanding he quit amid corruption allegations.

Earlier the coup leaders banned political parties from holding meetings or from conducting any other activities, according to a statement read on national television.

"In order to maintain law and order, meetings of political parties and conducting of other political activities are banned," the statement said.

"Political gatherings of more than five people have already been banned, but political activities can resume when normalcy is restored," it said.

The coup leaders suspended the constitution and imposed martial law when they took power late Tuesday, drawing condemnation from human rights groups who have urged the military to respect basic civil liberties.

The statement also said that the office of the auditor general would remain in operation, a decision that clears the way for corruption investigations against the ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

The coup leader, General Sonthi Boonyaratgrin, said Wednesday that Thaksin could face prosecution for charges already filed against him, including complaints of corruption and vote fraud.

Thai media voiced concern yesterday over efforts by coup leaders to slap limits on press freedom as the generals mull whether to stop them carrying expressions of public opinion.

"I want to know how free people are to express their opinions," an official from Chula radio, a university broadcaster, told the generals during a nearly two-hour meeting.

"We have many critics and academics who express their opinions on our programmes," he said, worrying that dissenting voices would be silenced.

An executive from the Modern Nine TV company worried that the military would use vague rules to crack down on the media.

"We want it to be made clear what the limits are, because different people will see things in different ways," she said.

World powers

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 that European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana would not meet, as expected, this week in New York with Iranian negotiators.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany and Italy agreed late Tuesday to give European negotiators more time to convince Iran to give up enrichment before seeking sanctions under a UN resolution.

A senior European diplomat told reporters the new deadline would stretch to early October, in the hope that new talks between Solana and Iranian negotiator Ali Larjani would bear fruit.

The UN Security Council had set an August 31 deadline for Iran to comply with the demand for a suspension of enrichment operations. But Tehran, which denies US claims it is seeking a nuclear weapons, has so far refused to comply.

Bush meanwhile warned time was running out for Iran, and again wondered out loud whether the latest delay was a symptom of Tehran running out the clock.

"I'm not going to discuss with you our intelligence on the subject, but time is of the essence," Bush said, when asked on CNN whether he backed the Israeli line that only a few months remained before Iranian scientists learned how to enrich uranium -- the critical step towards building a bomb.

"I'm concerned that Iran is trying to stall, and to try to buy time, and therefore it seems like a smart policy is to push this issue along as hard as we can and we are," Bush said.

Bush's secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice meanwhile declined to confirm the new deadline but also warned diplomacy couldn't stretch on indefinitely.

"Everyone wants to resolve this through negotiations and everyone wants to solve this thing quickly," she said here.

"There is a really excellent opportunity for Iran to engage with the international community, if it will simply meet a condition (freezing uranium enrichment)."

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy said Wednesday major powers -- Britain, China, France, Germany, Italy, Russia and the United States -- agreed that Iran must respond rapidly.

"We must have a response fairly quickly," he said, "its becoming urgent."

At Tuesday's meeting, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice backed away from the long-standing US position that Iran should face sanctions immediately for failing to meet an August 31 UN deadline for suspending its uranium enrichment.

She agreed to permit a new round of negotiations between Solana and Larjani in hopes of

convincing Tehran to meet the UN demand, US officials said.

Iran suspends its enrichment, Rice said she would personally attend the launch of direct negotiations with Tehran aimed at rewarding the Islamic republic for winding down its nuclear programme.

Chances of a quick breakthrough in the standoff were hit by the announcement that Larjani would not meet with Solana in New York this week as expected.

Instead, Larjani and Solana agreed in a telephone conversation to hold talks next week in an unidentified European capital, the official Iranian news agency reported in Tehran.

"It seems to have been difficult to get some of those (talks) scheduled and we would encourage the Iranians to take him up on his offer to meet with him and to clarify any remaining questions," said Rice.

"But this cannot go on for very much longer."

As well as the extended deadline for an Iranian response, Washington got its partners to agree to the new deadline for imposing sanctions if Iran stands firm, according to senior US and European officials present at the meeting.

Douste-Blazy said Tuesday's meeting had agreed on the need to give Iran one more chance.

"We all thought that we had to avoid confrontation and do everything possible to pursue a dialogue ... while also avoiding a situation where the Iranians, through meeting after meeting, are able to play for time and we end up with a fait accompli" of an Iranian nuclear weapons programme, he said.

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) kept round-the-clock contact with the local administration in coastal areas to monitor the latest situation.

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina expressed her deep shock at the loss of lives in sudden storms over the Bay.

In a separate message, she alleged many people died due to indifference and failure of the government. "If the government was sincere and gave the warning timely, such deaths could be avoided, she said.

She prayed for salvation of the departed souls and expressed deep sympathy for the bereaved families.

1,500 still missing in Bay

FROM PAGE 1
 Nearly 1,200 fishermen who narrowly escaped death after their trawlers were overturned in the rough seas have taken shelters at the Patharghata camp.

More than 400 fishermen swam ashore at Kuakata yesterday afternoon. They managed to float in the turbulent sea, grasping empty drums, logs and lifebuoys, report our correspondents.

Our Barisal correspondent adds: Some 27 trawlers with 245 fishermen reportedly capsized during the storm.

Our Cox's Bazar correspondent reports: At least two bodies were located on Kotubdiya beach yesterday. Some 500 local fishermen still remained missing after 50 trawlers with 600 people on board went under Tuesday.

The Coastguard members and locals rescued some 100 during overnight operations, said a coastguard source. The missing fishermen were mostly from Moheshkhali, Kotubdiya, and Teknaf, added the source.

Mohammed Aminul Islam, Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar said the district administration and the trawler owners have launched rescue operations for the missing ones.

Water Development Board sources said about a four-kilometre stretch on the flood control embankment in Maheshkhali was washed away by unusually high tides in the last two days.

Our Barisal correspondent reports that 25 of the 43 bodies recovered were buried at Dublarchar yesterday.

Dulal Master, president of Barguna district Trawler Workers Union, said around 160 trawlers were still missing.

With two speedboats and two trawlers, a group of fishermen from Dublarchar was working round the clock to trace their missing friends and relatives. So far, they have rescued 47 fishermen alive.

Our Patuakhali correspondent adds: Four more bodies were recovered from Gangamati area yesterday, pushing the number to 10 in two days.

Relatives of the missing fishermen were waiting on the beach for their dear ones to return.

Local Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Abdul Bari said nearly 70 fishermen have taken shelter at Char Kukri Mukri of Bhola while 16

from Bhola got back to the land at Kuakata.

LOWLANDS FLOODED IN RAJSHAH

Heavy rains throughout the day flooded many low-lying areas of Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Naogaon and Natore districts.

Due to a sharp rise in the water level in the Padma, a 17-kilometre stretch of the Padma Dam between Godagari and Charghat upazilas of Rajshahi was at the risk of being split open. The authorities have been dumping stone blocks and sandbags at vulnerable points to resist the surging water.

Lowlands in 25 unions across six upazilas of Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj districts have gone under water.

Water Development Board officials said the Padma and the Mahananda rivers continued to swell yesterday threatening the municipal and low-lying areas of Chapainawabganj, Godagari and Rajshahi.

Our Noakhali correspondent adds: More than 200 houses were destroyed while 25 people were injured in the Tuesday's storm across eight villages in Hatia upazila. Besides, thousands of people were marooned as the Meghna burst its bank submerging a vast area at Sonadia, Burirchar and Nijhumdip.

UNB adds: The Disaster Management ministry at an emergency meeting yesterday decided to strengthen the monitoring of storms in the coastal areas.

The meeting also reviewed the aftermath of Tuesday's storm.

Sources said it also reviewed if there were lapses on the part of disaster management officials in tackling the situation and also the forecast of the Storm Warning Centre.

The meeting felt the urgency of gearing up 33,000 trained volunteers in the coastal districts for rescue operation and giving assistance to the affected people in the event of natural calamity.

Chaired by Deputy Minister Asadul Habib Dulu, it also sanctioned an additional 900 metric tons of rice and Tk 19 lakh for the storm victims in 13 coastal districts. The DCs and UNOs have been directed to take speedy relief measures, said a press release.

The DCs and UNOs have also been asked to open control rooms to co-ordinate the relief measures.

UNB from Chittagong reports: Eight unions in the seaside Sandwip upazila were submerged yesterday morning as mighty tidal waves tore down a cross-dam along the Bay of Bengal.

Locals said the seawater suddenly rolled into the vast area washing away a 5-km stretch of the embankment at about 10:00am.

Robbery

FROM PAGE 20
 and other accessories from a cellular phone sales centre at Lake Circus in the capital yesterday.

Keraniganj police quoting family members said a gang of around 22 robbers cut open window grills and entered the one-storey house of Kuwait expatriate Mohammad Milon at Abdullahpur at around 1:00am.

Equipped with firearms, machetes and iron rods, the bandits took the family members hostage and tied them up with ropes. They beat up the family members injuring six as they did not hand over the keys to the almshouses.

The robbers finally broke open all almshouses and looted 82 tokes of gold ornaments, Tk 3.50 lakh and US \$2,000 in cash. They took their time and spent around two hours to complete their mission before leaving the house safely with the booty.

Locals were suspicious of the role of the police stationed within a kilometre of the crime scene during this long robbery. Police was supposed to beef up the patrolling in the area as four such incidents took place at Abdullahpur in the last two months.

Meanwhile in the capital, burglars broke into Mobile Link, a cellular phone sales centre at Lake Circus in Dhanmondi, and stole cellular phones, prepaid cards and other accessories worth Tk 3.32 lakh.

Dhanmondi police said the burglary might have taken place some time between 10:30pm on Wednesday and 5:00am early yesterday after the owner of the store closed the store at 10:30pm on Wednesday.

The storeowner found the collapsible gate of the store busted and goods stolen when he came to open the store at 9:00am yesterday.

Police could not arrest anyone in connection with any of the incidents till 7:30pm yesterday.

Reform onus

FROM PAGE 1
 the opposition has to accept even former Chief Justice KM Hasan as the caretaker government chief as per the constitution, which will help BNP in politics.

Meanwhile, from the beginning of their movement the AL has asked the ruling party to hold dialogue between the two parties only, but the BNP did not agree to exclude its coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami from the dialogue.

Now the PM spoke of a BNP-AL dialogue, which the AL leaders considered the beginning of their victory.

Following repeated pressure from the international community for holding the dialogue, the BNP high-ups are now thinking to invite the AL. However, the matter will be finalised after Mannan Bhuiyan returns from Singapore.

After Mannan's return, BNP will formally invite AL for a one-to-one dialogue which will help keep the political atmosphere peaceful, and amid this quiet situation the BNP plans to hand over the power, sources said.

Meanwhile, the AL-led 14-party opposition has been agitating for its demands and the political situation is deteriorating day by day.

The situation will worsen during handover of the power to the caretaker government, many feared, as the AL vowed to resist Justice Hasan's taking over the