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Too many dictators

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NEWS BRIEFS

IJI sweeps Senate polls

ISLAMABAD, Mar 14: The ruling Islamic Democratic Alliance (IJI) of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif scored a clear-cut victory in elections to 42 seats of the 87 member Pakistani Senate today, unofficial results showed, reports AFP.

Baker in Moscow

MOSCOW, Mar 14: US Secretary of State James Baker arrived here today for two days of talks with Soviet leaders on the post-war situation in the Gulf, the Israeli-Arab conflict, and East-West arms cuts, reports AFP.

13 killed in Tokyo

TOKYO, Mar 14: Part of an elevated railway bridge under construction in the southern city of Hiroshima collapsed today, leaving 13 people dead and another two critically injured, Japanese police said, reports AFP.

Zairean PM resigns

BRUSSELS, Mar 14: Zairean Prime Minister Lunda Bululu resigned today, the official Zairean News Agency AZAP said. The agency, monitored in Brussels, gave no immediate reason for his resignation, reports Reuters.

BMA's gherao on March 18

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) will stage demonstration and gherao President's secretariat on March 18 to press for arrest and trial of the killers of "national hero" Dr. Shamsul Islam Khan Milon, reports UNB.

No announcement on formation of Council of Ministers

Shahabuddin dissolves Council of Advisers

Star Report

Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed on Thursday dissolved his Council of Advisers with effect from today without making it clear whether he will immediately invite the majority party in parliament to form the council of ministers.

BNP sources said they did not receive any communication from the Acting President till late Thursday night for submission of a list of ministers.

An official announcement said the Acting President has expressed his gratitude to his Council of Advisers for their sincere cooperation and assistance in holding a free,

and impartial election. Immediately after the announcement of the decision to dissolve the Council of Advisers BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia called a meeting of the party Standing Committee at her Banani office. She cancelled a scheduled meeting to discuss the recent developments.

Standing Committee source said, the Acting President decided to dissolve his Council of Advisers according to his wisdom. He said the Standing Committee members were confident that the measure would hasten the formation of the Council of

Ministers, but were not sure whether such an invitation would come, before oath-taking or after.

Some members of the Standing Committee guessed that the invitation may come today or tomorrow. Some others said it may come after the oath-taking of the MPs-elect on March 17-19.

Even senior bureaucrats were not sure when the Acting President would invite BNP to form the council of ministers.

The Acting President's step is viewed also as one to end administrative snags. Following the February 27 elections the Council of Advisers remained

mostly undecided on major policy issues, because the advisers would not know how long they would continue in their offices.

There was also a feeling that the 3-month period for which the advisers were appointed to help organise a free and fair election, is already over.

It is gathered that the Acting President has shifted a tea party of his advisers from Thursday to Saturday.

A BNP source said party Standing Committee in its meeting on Thursday night discussed the trial of former

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Economic situation was stagnant in '80s

Task Force suggests changes in conditions of donors

Star Economic Report

The 12-member Task Force in Macro (overall) Economic Management has called for opening a "meaningful dialogue" with the donor community on the "reforms" programmes in the changed political context.

The Task Force has suggested "appropriate" changes and amendments to various conditions of the donors concerning the on-going reforms programmes. Public opinion on such reforms should also be solicited before implementing the same.

With Prof Wahiduddin Mah-

mod of the Economics Department of Dhaka University as the convener, the Task Force has pointed out that the economic situation has stagnated in the eighties despite apparently extensive reforms undertaken at the recommendations of the donors. This situation calls for an intensive analysis and objective appraisal, it observes.

The Task Force on Macro Economic Management was one of the 29 groups set up by the interim government for suggesting various options for a sustainable development agen-

da. The reports of the Task Forces were submitted to Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed early this week.

Analysing the current economic situation, the Task Force on Macro-Economic Management has pointed out that the donors have identified a number of causes for failures of the economy to gain any momentum, despite the reforms. These include negative effects of the recent floods, delays and hesitancy in implementation of reforms.

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Officials recalled from abroad fail to turn up

By Staff Correspondent

Not one of the three officials, recalled by the Foreign Ministry from Bangladesh missions abroad, has yet returned.

One of the officials, Jala-luddin Ahmed, who was the Second Secretary at the Bangladesh mission in Sydney, Australia, is learnt to have sought political asylum there.

Jalaluddin Ahmed was the leader of a student organisation prior to his overseas assignment by the Ershad regime.

Another recalled official, Lt. Khairuzzaman, a relative of Ershad was appointed Counsellor in Bangladesh's London mission. Steps are being taken

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An old woman casting her vote in Munshiganj-3 election on Thursday. —Star Photo

BNP wins Munshiganj-3 election

Shamsul Islam of BNP was unofficially declared elected to parliament from Munshiganj-3 where polling was held on Thursday, reports UNB.

Islam polled 63,053 votes while his nearest candidate Advocate Mukhtar of Awami League bagged 29,488 votes.

With this, BNP tally in parliament rose to 139 and Awami League's remained at 88, in the elections in 299 constituencies.

Polling in the remaining constituency — Kushtia-2 — is scheduled for March 28, to complete elections to 300 seats.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: The election in Munshiganj-3 was postponed following death of Islamist Otkya Jote candidates Tofazzal Hossain on February 8.

Four other candidates also contested the polls. They are: Abed Ali Khan of Jatiya Party, Idris Barai of Jamaat-e-Islami, Quddus Bepari of Zaker Party and Siddique of Bangladesh National Council. Polling in all the 75 centres of the constituency were held peacefully.

While visiting some of the centres this correspondent found queues of mostly women waiting for their turn to cast votes. Turn out of the male voters was rather low.

Ershad will not take oath unless released

By Staff Correspondent

Chairman of Jatiya Party and ex-President HM Ershad, who has been elected MP from five constituencies of his home district, Rangpur will not take oath unless he is released.

Acting chairman of the party Mizanur Rahman Chowdhury told The Daily Star that this is party decision and Ershad will act accordingly. He

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Sabah lauds Dhaka's role

Amr Jaber Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah of Kuwait has expressed his gratitude and appreciation to Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed for all the emphasis and efforts of Bangladesh in liberating Kuwait from occupation, reports BSS.

In a message to the Acting President, the Amr said, "this is well evident by your country's stand which leans on noble principles that show the depth of your commitment to defend international legitimacy and the rule of law."

Lauding Bangladesh's stand throughout the crisis, the Amr said that, Bangladesh won great admiration of Kuwait as well as the international community for exertion of arduous efforts in the political forums as well as military to stand with the right against tyranny and oppression.

Office timing during Ramzan

The government Thursday announced new office timing for the month of holy Ramazan, an official handout said.

The government offices at the Secretariat (Ministry/Divisions) and offices affiliated with the Secretariat, Directorates and others including autonomous bodies and corporation will function between 9 am and 3 p m with 15 minutes break for Johar prayer at 1-15 pm.

The Divisional offices, Upazila and Mufassil offices and courts outside Dhaka will function between 10 am and 4 pm with a 15-minute break at 1-15 p m for Johar prayer.

The present office timing of 9 am to 4 pm and 10 am to 5 pm will however be effective after the Ramzan month, the

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Abbas reassures Jamaat support for BNP

By Staff Correspondent

Acting Ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh Abbas Ali Khan said Jamaat supports BNP in forming government with a view to creating a healthy and stable political environment.

He was addressing a meeting at Joypurhat on Thursday. The Jamaat leader said everybody must remain cautious so that no one can create obstacle to transition to democracy by creating political crisis.

Iraqi unrest may slow US troops pullout

WASHINGTON, Mar 14: A senior member of a key US Senate committee predicted today that Iraqi unrest would slow withdrawal of US forces from the Gulf but said having troops there now was useful, reports Reuter.

"It will delay the withdrawal but I think it will be a matter of days or weeks and not a question of months," Senator William Cohen, a Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in an interview on US television.

"It would be irresponsible for US to simply pull out and then let the (Iraqi) forces consume themselves without any direction or assistance or encouragement by the United States, Cohen said.

At the time of the coalition ceasefire with Iraq following the lightning allied victory in the Gulf war there were 127,000 US troops in Iraq. Most are still there.

President George Bush warned Iraq President Saddam Hussein on Wednesday that his use of helicopters to quell Iraqi unrest threatened any permanent ceasefire agreement.

When Bush announced the temporary ceasefire two weeks ago, he said Iraq would only be allowed to use aircraft for humanitarian purposes or to transport retreating troops.

Though Bush did not say how he would respond if Iraq continued to use helicopters against civilians, Cohen said US military action was likely.

"I think the president is sending out a signal," the senator said.

Reports from United Nations adds: A new UN resolution setting the terms for a final end to hostilities in the Gulf war should be ready by the end of March and Britain wants it to include the elimination of Iraq's chemical weapons, diplomats said Wednesday.

Envoys at the United Nations disclosed that consulta-

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Demonstration demanding punishment of Ershad in the city of Thursday. —Star photo

Ershad spent Tk 15 crore on elections?

By Staff Correspondent

The BNP candidates, who were defeated by the former President H.M. Ershad in the parliamentary polls have demanded repolling in all the five constituencies of Rangpur alleging violation of code of conduct and spending excess money.

They were addressing a press conference at the National Press Club on Thursday. Rezaul Haq Sarker Rana, a BNP candidate from Rangpur-3, said the deposed president had spent Taka 15 crore in the five constituencies.

He alleged that eight upazila chairmen of six constituencies received Taka one crore from

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Hearing in Raushan's case ends Agitation during Ershad's hearing

By Supreme Court Correspondent

Hearing in former President Ershad's detention case has been adjourned till Monday.

Division Bench of the High Court Division comprising Justice Abdul Jaill and Justice Kazi Shafuluddin Ahmed is hearing the detention matter.

Attorney General Aminul Haque submitted a supplementary affidavit-in-opposition before the Court. The affidavit accused former President Ershad of forcing the elected President to resign on March 24, 1982, dismissing the cabi-

net, dissolving the parliament and suspending the Constitution of the country.

It further said that the detainee proclaimed himself as Chief Martial Law Administrator on the plea of worst economic condition of the country, wanton corruption at all levels, and deterioration of law and order situation.

The detainee, he submitted, also proclaimed Martial Law, set up Special Martial Law Courts all over the country, created new offences with retrospective effect, tried many

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BKSAL to work for parliamentary system

Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BKSAL) on Thursday made a fervent appeal to all MPs select of the fifth Jatiya Sangsad to work for establishing parliamentary system of government in the country based on the spirit of November 19 declaration of the three alliances, reports BSS.

The party also made its stand clear that it would extend moral support to a bill if it is tabled in parliament for establishing a sovereign parliament and a government accountable to the people.

"The power transfer can be made and the majority party can form the government only after the change of the present system of government", it said.

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AL meeting adjourned till March 19

Stick to Joint Declaration

By Staff Correspondent

The extended meeting of the Awami League has urged elected MPs, irrespective of party affiliations, to stick to the December 19 Joint Declaration of the three alliances for a sovereign parliament.

The meeting, presided over by Party chief, Sheikh Hasina, was adjourned till March 19 following a two-day session on Monday and Tuesday.

In its political resolution the meeting urged all to bring necessary amendments to the

Constitution with a view to establishing a parliamentary form of government. If this was not done, the resolution said, the hopes and aspirations of the people would be betrayed.

Under the existing Constitution parliament would be nothing more than a rubber stamp parliament of the President, the resolution added.

A party which has bagged 139 seats in parliament is trying to take over power by avoiding the issue of a

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Baker sees window for peace in Middle East

DAMASCUS, Mar 14: US Secretary of State James Baker said today, he saw a "window for peace" in the Middle East after crowning a regional tour with marathon talks in Syria, reports Reuter.

"I saw a serious desire to work for achieving peace. There was an agreement to seek a comprehensive settlement to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN Resolutions, 242 and 338," Baker told a news conference at Damascus airport before leaving for Moscow.

Both resolutions require Israel to trade Arab-occupied land in return for peace.

Baker said he agreed that no double standard should be used in dealing with the 43-year-old Arab-Israeli conflict.

"The United States will do whatever it can to use its influence and good offices with Israel to help achieve a solution," he said.

Baker ended seven hours of talks — more than twice as long as expected — with Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad on Wednesday night. It was be-

lieved to be one of the longest meetings of his tour which had also taken him to Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel.

Assad became Washington's most unlikely ally when he sent thousands of troops to the US-led coalition that drove Iraq from Kuwait two weeks ago after a 42-day war.

Asked whether good offices would be enough to reach a settlement in the Middle East, Baker said he was confident US influence with Israel would produce something.

But he added: "It is still

early at this stage to speak about a breakthrough".

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq Al-Shara said Baker's visit was positive and constructive and will help all of us to work actively for a just and comprehensive settlement in the region.

He said Syria wanted the post-Gulf war era to be different from what went before. We will keep contacts to give momentum to the peace process.

Baker said differences remained between Syria and Washington on the issue of terrorism. Syria remains on the US list of countries that sponsor terrorism.

"The issue is still under discussion until the problem is resolved", Baker said, adding there had been some progress.

Shara said the difference was not on the desire to combat international terrorism but was on the definition of terrorism. Asked about reports that Syria had bought Scud missiles, Baker said: "In our opinion there has been some Scud delivery to Syria and this should be discussed".

Shara said: "Syria is in a state of war with Israel which has all kinds of weapons, including those of mass destruction".

"We think this issue should be among the issues to be raised for achieving peace in the region", he added.

Baker said he and Assad had discussed the 12 Western hostages, including six Americans, held by pro-Iranian militants in Lebanon, where Syria is a main power broker.

Shara said Syria was working actively to resolve this.