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# The Daily Star

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## Inside today

### Article

The Agenda for the Middle East



Special to the Star by Douglas Hurd, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the United Kingdom Page 4

## International



Saddam goes in 8 months?

US Secretary of State James Baker, just back from a tour of the Middle East, said Iraqi President Saddam Hussein would not be in power in eight months. Page 5

## Feature

### Development



The Factory Act provides that in a factory where there are more than 50 female workers, there should be 'creche' facilities. In Bangladesh we have none to date. Page 6

'Constitution prevails over Joint Declaration, my neutrality can't be questioned', Hasina and others told

## I am obliged to form Council of Ministers, says Shahabuddin

Star Report

Acting President Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed told the leaders of the Eight-Party Alliance and the Five-Party Combine on Monday that he is constitutionally obliged to form the council of ministers to advise him in running the government.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed asserted that the Constitution shall prevail over the November 19 joint declaration of three alliances, which envisaged transfer of power to a sovereign parliament.

The Acting President invited leaders of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Awami League-led Eight-Party Alliance and Five-Party Combine to an Iftar party at Banglabhaban to discuss the prevailing issues regarding formation of the council of ministers. BNP leaders did not attend the Iftar party as they were preoccupied.

Awami League leaders Sheikh Hasina, Begum Sajeda Chowdhury and Abdus Samad Azad, Ganatantri Party leader Syed Altaf Hussain, Baksal leader Abdur Razzak, CPB leader Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, BSD leader Khalequzaman Bhuiyan and Workers Party leader Rashed Khan Menon attended the Iftar party.

The leaders of the two alliances who attended the Iftar party told The Daily Star that the Acting President advised the three alliances to decide

about the form of government. "I have no alternative but to follow the constitution," he said.

Dispelling the misgiving that the formation of the council of ministers by him would affect his neutrality, he said he is empowered by the Constitution to form the council of ministers.

"Constitutionally it will be President's council of ministers and not any party's," he said.

Awami League leader Begum Sajeda Chowdhury told The Daily Star that the leaders of the Eight-Party Alliance and the Five-Party Combine asserted that the Acting President should act as per the joint declaration of the three alliances.

Awami League issued a press release on their talks with the Acting President stating that the party chief Sheikh Hasina opposed formation of the council of ministers by a party.

BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia told Bangladesh Television in an interview that the country should not run into a vacuum and steps should be taken to form the council of ministers. She said the country's economy is in bad shape due to misrule by Ershad during the last nine years.

Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed said his neutrality cannot be questioned so long he acts according to the Constitution. He

advised the leaders to arrive at a consensus to amend the Constitution.

The political analysts viewed the Acting President's meeting with the leaders as positive in resolving the crisis. The Acting President has made his position clear which indicates that the council of ministers will be formed any time after the oath-taking of the members of parliament.

Constitutional experts told The Daily Star that the Acting President has no alternative but to form a council of ministers as per Article 58 of the Constitution. The Article provides for formation of a council of ministers by the President from among the members of parliament and appoint a person prime minister who, according to him, enjoys majority support. They said that BNP Chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia enjoys the majority support with the backing of Jamaat-e-Islami and the Acting President is obliged by the Constitution to appoint her prime minister.

The political crisis created due to the actions by the Acting President and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina over the formation of the council of ministers has caused concern among the people. Political observers compare the scenario with that of 1971 when Bhutto opposed transfer of power to majority party See Page 10 Col 2



Justice Rouf, chief Election Commissioner, administering oath to (top) BNP, (bottom) Jamaat MPs and (left) Begum Khaleda Zia signing the register after swearing-in at the Sangsad Bhaban on Monday — Star photo

## Policy decisions become impossible Absence of Cabinet threatens economic interests

Star Economic Report

The unprecedented administrative void created following the dissolution of the Council of Advisers threatens to jeopardise the country's economic interests.

While the Council of Advisers stands dissolved, no date has yet been announced about the formation of a new cabinet. No policy decisions at the ministerial level are possible without advisers or ministers.

Sources in different ministries said that major policy or administrative decisions are unlikely until the void is filled by formation of a new cabinet. This void, if allowed to

linger, will also complicate the preparatory work for the next national budget.

Normally, the main budgetary work starts every year in March with preliminary fiscal policy guidelines made available to the officials.

No such guidelines are available yet this year.

Finance ministry officials said the political guidelines for the next budget are more important this year taking into consideration the changed situation at home and abroad.

Trade and industry circles have been playing a wait-and-see game over the last three

and a half months following the fall of the Ershad regime.

The circles expected that the uncertainty would be over after the elections. But things are not moving smoothly, the same circles noted.

Meanwhile, the appraisal team from the Washington-based World Bank will be arriving in Dhaka early next week for its annual consultations with the government, prior to the holding of the Paris-based Aid Club meeting.

The World Bank as the co-ordinator of the aid group chairs the Paris meeting and See Page 10 Col 7

## Khaleda hopeful of forming Council of Ministers BNP, Jamaat, Workers Party MPs take oath

By Staff Correspondent

One hundred and thirty four MPs-elect of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by their chairperson Begum Khaleda Zia took oath of office on Monday.

The oath was administered by Chief Election Commissioner Justice M.A. Rouf. Seventeen out of 18 MPs-elect of Jamaat-e-Islami and Workers Party MP-elect Rashed Khan Menon were also sworn in the same day.

After the oath-taking ceremony Begum Zia said she felt good because democracy was being established after a long

movement.

Clad in a light-coloured sarie Begum Zia looked cheerful.

She told a questioner she would retain the Feni-1 seat and vacate four other constituencies from where she was elected.

Begum Zia and her party MPs later visited the mazar of Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman at the Crescent Garden north of the parliament building and offered Fataha.

By Monday a total of 164 members of parliament were sworn in.

MPs-elect of Bangladesh

Awami League, and the Communist Party of Bangladesh are scheduled to take oath today (Tuesday), Parliament Secretariat sources said.

It was for the first time in nine years that the BNP leaders have entered the Sangsad Bhaban.

The Second Jatiya Sangsad in which the BNP had an overwhelming majority was dissolved by former President Ershad following the promulgation of Martial Law on March 24, 1982.

The BNP never accepted See Page 10 Col 4

## Ershad's trial begins today

Star Report

The trial of former President M. Ershad on charges of illegally possessing arms begins today (Tuesday).

The one-Judge Special Tribunal set up to hear the case will be chaired by District and Sessions Judge Mohammad Habibullah.

The deposed President will be produced before the Special Tribunal, set up at a Gulshan house, at 10a.m. today (Tuesday) to be formally charged.

Ershad's trial was to have begun on February 16 but he could not be produced before the Tribunal because of his illness.

The Tribunal then ordered the formation of a high-powered Medical Board to examine Ershad. See Page 10 Col 3

## Smuggling hampers growth of private sector

Star Economic Report

Rising production costs, depressed demand, smuggled items and cheaper imported goods are the major reasons for sluggish growth of the private sector.

The nine-member Task Force on the Role of Private Sector has stated this in its report to the government.

The industrial policy in the Eighties, showing an apparent tilt towards a more expanded role of the private sector, failed to attain its cherished objectives because of lack of effective support by the government, according to the task

force. Industrial activities in both public and private sectors, have thus stagnated.

With Dr Abdullah Farouq of Dhaka University as its convener, the task force on the role of the private sector was one of 28 others, constituted by the Ministry of Planning to examine the situation obtaining in various socio-economic sectors, and recommend appropriate policy moves, within a variety of options, for the elected government to formulate a sustainable development agenda.

About the role of the private

sector, the task force has reported that broad indicators like investments, production, productivity and inputs availability showed declines in the private sector in the period following the announcement of the new industrial policy of 1982.

According to the task force, smugglers earn more money than traders and traders earn more than industrial owners, despite the fact that industrial capital involves maximum risks. Such a situation will never help promote the See Page 10 Col 3

## Question of all-party govt doesn't arise, says Salam

By Staff Correspondent

BNP Secretary General Barrister Abdus Salam Talukdar said on Monday there is now no obstacle to the formation of a Council of Ministers by BNP which is not only the largest party in parliament but also commands support of an absolute majority.

Talking to newsmen after the oath-taking ceremony he said the Acting President is, however, free to appoint ministers as and when necessary.

"We do not understand why some people talk about form- See Page 10 Col 2

## 10 students injured in armed clashes 45 DU hall rooms set ablaze, ransacked

By DU Correspondent

Indiscriminate attacks on rivals, beating up of students, looting and setting rooms ablaze followed Sunday night's gunshot exchanges between workers of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on Dhaka University campus.

Campus sources said at least ten students were injured, 45 rooms ransacked and five others set on fire in six residential halls after the five-hour exchange of gunshots which began at 8.30 pm Sunday.

Armed clashes stopped when riot police reached there at 1.30 pm. The clashes originated from a dispute between two workers of BCL and JCD at the Teacher Student Centre on Sunday evening.

The DU campus remained tense the whole day Monday as the rival groups were active there. None of those who left their halls following the clash, could return to their respective rooms. Till Monday night, Mohsin Hall, Suryasen Hall, See Page 10 Col 1

## APSU reiterates demand for trial of Ershad, associates

By DU Correspondent

All-Party Students Unity (APSU) leaders reiterated on Monday their demand for putting deposed President Ershad and his associates on trial and threatened that any delay would not be tolerated.

In a rally, held in front of the National Press Club, the leaders also demanded immediate implementation of their 10-point demands.

The rally was addressed by Fazlul Haque Milon, Nazimuddin Alam, Shah Alam, Nasirud-Doza, SM Kamal Hossain, Shaif Ahmed, Strajum Munir See Page 10 Col 6

## Arms recovered from AL leader's house

By Staff Correspondent

Police recovered huge quantities of arms and ammunition from the house of a former union pariasd chairman and local Awami League leader at Kalatia union under Keraniganj upazila on Sunday midnight.

Police said a BNP worker, Altaf, was injured when some AL activists blasted bombs at Ashandipur of Kalatia at noon on Sunday.

Soon after the incident about five to six thousand people including BNP supporters See Page 10 Col 8

## Soviet citizens okay Gorbachev's bid to preserve union

MOSCOW, Mar 18: Voters endorsed Mikhail S. Gorbachev's efforts to keep the country together, but referendum results announced Monday also showed overwhelming support for a potentially divisive proposition to strengthen the Russian presidency.

The mixed results on the separate questions made it possible for both Gorbachev and Yeltsin to claim victory. Yeltsin has not said how he voted, but he has spoken

strongly in favour of the Russian Presidency.

Although Yeltsin often is described as the Russian President, in fact he was elected last year as president or chairman of the Russian Federation parliament. He is very popular and would be a favourite to win direct election to the presidency, despite a plan by Communist Party hardliners to dump him at a special session of the Russian parliament next week.

The governments of six

small republics, including the three Baltic states, refused to approve the preservation of the Soviet Union and boycotted Sunday's vote. Separatists in Moldavia, whose government boycotted the vote, attacked would-be voters.

Elsewhere, the vast majority of Soviet citizens favoured preserving the union. But the question appeared to have been defeated in the northern Russian city of Leningrad and the Ukrainian capital of Kiev. See Page 10 Col 1

## Thousands of Iraqi troops joining revolt, dissidents say

NICOSIA, Mar 18: Iraq claimed Monday it had crushed the revolt in the south, but rebel leaders contended the uprising was growing and travellers said the army had set up checkpoints around Baghdad and was searching for weapons, reports AP.

The rebel leaders, speaking in Syria, reported new fighting near Al-Kut, 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Baghdad and Kurdish guerrillas said they were holding on to

neighboring Iran declared Monday a day of mourning for what it called the destruction of Muslim shrines by Saddam Hussein's loyalists.

Iran supports the Shi'ite Muslim rebels in Iraq's predominantly Shi'ite south, and its official news agency on Sunday quoted Iraqi refugees as saying Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard was using napalm to crush the southern rebellion.

None of the claims could be

verified independently. The travellers from Iraq said the army had set up checkpoints around Baghdad and every mile (kilometer) or two on the highways south of the capital. They said soldiers had also begun to search houses and cars in Baghdad for weapons.

Reuters adds from Damascus: A former Iraqi general turned opposition leader said tens of thousands of Iraqi troops were joining the revolt to topple Saddam.