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Inside Today

Article

Efficiency of the Bureaucracy can Ensure Economic Progress

Column: On The Record
by Shah AMS Kibria
Page 4

International



PPP to win at least 100 National Assembly seats, predicts Benazir

Changes in Japan may promote Asian style of democracy
Page 5

Business

Oil exploration ventures in Bangladesh—updated: Article by Dr Badrul Imam

Germany supports Yeltsin by rescheduling \$4.9b debt
Pages 6, 7

Living

Joys and problems of travelling abroad: Growing up with love: Taking care of your face: And how to take the best candid shots
Page 8

Metropolitan

Dhaka Day by Day



In Love with Orchid
Page 3

NEWS BRIEFS

Humayun Kabir envoy to US

The Government has decided to appoint Humayun Kabir as the country's Ambassador to the United States, an official handout said in Dhaka yesterday. Kabir is at present the Permanent Representative to the United Nations. He will replace Abul Ahsan, who is due to retire in December. Foreign Secretary Reaz Rahman is learnt to have been appointed the country's new Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Bangladesh Permanent Representative in Geneva Osmany has been appointed the new Foreign Secretary, reports UNB.

Five hurt as train derails

RAJSHAHI, Sept 25: At least five people were injured, two of them seriously, when the Rajshahi bound Mohananda Express from Khulna derailed in between Arani and Nandan-gachi railway stations at 10-15 last night, railway sources said today. Three coaches and the engine of the train were derailed due to removal of fishplate by some miscreants, reports BSS.

Screening of Lethal Panther banned

The government has temporarily cancelled the censor certificate of the full length English movie the Lethal Panther under the Film Censorship Act of 1977, an official handout said yesterday. The censored portion of the film was being exhibited illegally at a cinema hall of the city, reports BSS.

Rebels will give up soon, says Yeltsin

MOSCOW, Sept 25: President Boris Yeltsin confidently stated today that his rivals holed up in the defunct parliament were near surrender as they also conceded their resistance to the Kremlin may be moved out of Moscow, reports AFP.

But rebel military commanders in the parliament continued preparing armed paramilitary brigades and Alexander Rutskoi, the rival 'head of state' appointed by parliament, appealed directly to troops for backing and vowed to stay put.

Russia's rebel Defence Minister, appointed by the mutinous parliament, said today military units were being set up to defend the assembly building from any attack by government forces, Itar-Tass news agency reported.

It quoted Vladimir Acalov, who was appointed after President Boris Yeltsin said on Tuesday he was dissolving parliament, as telling the legislature that two motor rifle battalions were being formed.

Yeltsin, interviewed by Russian television in his office, compare the resistance effort centered in the parliament to a 100-meter race and asserted supporters of Rutskoi's nominal administration were 'out of breath.'

He said lawmakers opposed to his shock decision Tuesday to dissolve the Soviet-era legislature were gradually leaving the premises of the parliament, which remained virtually surrounded Saturday by Interior Ministry troops.

"Soon there will be no more

than two left," Yeltsin stated, referring to Rutskoi and Russian Khasbulatov, the speaker of the legislature.

"And what will the pair do, all alone in the building? They have nothing, while we have already received the support of 70 countries."

Among the hundreds of deputies and support staff inside the parliament, the mood today was more one of fatigued resignation than combativeness, but by evening several thousand sympathizers had again gathered beside the building.

Speaking at a news conference in the parliament, Khasbulatov, however, served notice that he did not consider the fight against Yeltsin finished but admitted that Kremlin opponents may need time to regroup.

"If the White House (parliament) remains closed off by force we will transfer the legislative power to one of the regions Russia," Khasbulatov stated.

He blasted Yeltsin's administration as a shameful 'junta' and asserted there was no more room for compromise with an 'ex-president' that he called 'a sickman who is unable to stay his head or his hand.'

Khasbulatov's reference to the regions hit upon the issue of how much support Yeltsin can expect in the days and weeks to come from the Russian hinterland, the ultimate key to victory or defeat in any political struggle.

A key parliamentary defector who has become an important ally for Yeltsin, Nikolai Ryabov,

on Saturday admitted that the President would be forced to backtrack on his opposition to holding simultaneous presidential and legislative elections.

Yeltsin, who has ordered fresh legislative elections for December followed six months later by a presidential ballot, has stated categorical opposition to a simultaneous poll on the grounds it would create a "dangerous" power vacuum.

In other developments today, state law enforcement agencies issued a warning that armed paramilitaries in the parliament were preparing an assault operation against the municipal headquarters and a hostage-taking operation.

In a statement published by Itar-Tass, the city administration called on residents not to go near the parliament and said weapons were being distributed there to "psychologically imbalanced" people and criminals.

Groups of men of various ages — roughly 100 altogether — lined up periodically throughout the day in military-like formations beside the parliament where they were drilled by commanders in camouflage uniforms.

Meanwhile, the dissolved Russian Congress resumed work today in the basement of the White House, with light provided by emergency generator, even as elite government troops surrounded the parliament building.

Electricity supplies and other essential services have been cut off in a bid to force the deputies to leave. Overnight
See Page 12 Col 1

Consumers to bail out Dhaka WASA

By A Special Correspondent

Even though Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (DWASA) increased water tariff rates by 15 per cent less than a year ago, its estimated annual revenue collection of around Tk 60 crores will fall short of total costs.

Taking into account the total debt service liability of Tk 24 crores to the Finance Ministry for 1992-93 alone, the World Bank made a projection in June of this year that DWASA will run a loss of over Tk 6 crores on an annual basis.

With such a level of financial loss DWASA is far from being able to invest in much-needed expansion in water supply for Dhaka dwellers.

DWASA has a recorded capacity of supplying about 150 million gallons of water per day. This, under ideal conditions, can serve the need of half of the city population.

There is a lot of donor interest in funding investment in urban water supply. The World Bank has so far financed three DWASA projects. A fourth project, in association with the French government, which would increase DWASA supply capacity by 50 million gallons per day, has already been lined up.

Processing of this project, which DWASA and the Ministry of Local Government is eager to start, has been delayed by more than four years. The donors have remained skeptical about

DWASA's capability to manage its business in a financially sound manner.

During the last few years the government made DWASA plug its leaking pipes and chase arrears bills. In June 1992 a private firm was appointed by DWASA to enumerate and classify its consumers. Computerized billing system is being installed in phases and revenue zones have been given monthly targets. The October 1992 increase of 15 per cent in water tariff was part of this revenue enhancement package.

Even though DWASA has 'privatised' part of its operation by contracting out consumer survey to a private organisation, the expected concomitant focus on cost control measures has never been apparent.

As a result the prospect of achieving full cost recovery without slapping the consumers with a series of tariff increases is rather dim. In fact the World Bank, whom the government is wooing for a credit of over a 100 million dollars, has already worked out the required water tariff increases. The Bank's June 1993 estimates are that there will have to be two increases of twenty per cent each over end 1993 and end 1994. In fact, the World Bank will not undertake formal appraisal of the next DWASA project without a prior water tariff increase.

25 hurt as police attack rally in N' Ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Sept 25: At least 25 persons including four journalists and three policemen were injured when police batted with some 400 people here this evening.

The hour-long clash originated from a senior police official's sudden attack on a street rally organised by the daily Ajker Kagoj Readers' Forum in front of the municipal library to protest the recent attack on the daily's Dhaka office.

The clash over, agitated people damaged eight vehicles, including three police vans.

The injured journalists are: Mujibur Rahman Badal, Editor of the weekly Sakal Barta, Yusuf Ali Atom, senior reporter
See Page 12 Col 4

50 Shibir cadres forced to leave SSMC hostel

By SSMCH Correspondent

Some 50 activists of the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) were forced to leave the Sir Salimullah Medical College hostel yesterday evening, allegedly by members of the recently formed APSU.

Sources said the All Party Students Unity (APSU) member — enraged by a threat to two of their colleagues by the ICS cadres — brought out a militant
See Page 12 Col 7

'72-like opportunity has come to solidify democracy: Speaker

Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali yesterday strongly pleaded for giving an institutional shape to democracy through the utilisation of the present opportunity, reports BSS.

Inaugurating a two-day seminar on "Democracy: Norms and Practices", organised by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) at the National Museum here, Razzak Ali said, "If we fail this time, the future will be dangerous as we do not know what awaits us."

Recalling the 'golden opportunity' to cultivate democracy in 1972, he said, "We have got it again." He said it was the collective responsibility of both the Treasury Bench and Opposition members to understand and practise the norms and practices of democracy including the use of language of democracy to establish a democratic culture in the country.

Posing a question, he wanted to know what has been achieved during the last two and a half years of the present Parliament. He however, recalled with satisfaction the switching over to parliamentary democracy through the unanimous passage of the 12th Amendment of the Constitution.

He reminded the members of the both Treasury and Opposition benches to take into account what had been done for the people who had voted for them. He said, "If we really want to strengthen democracy and make Parliament sovereign, we have to do a lot of things inside and outside Parliament."

The function was also addressed by State Minister for Planning Dr A Moeen Khan, international participant Peter Nagle, MP and NDI representative Thomas o Mella.

The Speaker said there was

a need to take lessons from the past and look forward. Referring to his experiences in conducting the parliamentary business, Razzak Ali said, "We mostly debate on subject matters without reaching any conclusions. If these matters are taken to sub-committees, conclusions could probably be reached."

He however, said it took ages for democracy to consolidate in different countries. "Democracy can take a strong foothold in our country if we can shun the politics of agitation."

Dr Moeen Khan said if legislators are not available for doing secondary work in their respective constituencies, the prospect of winning next election will be jeopardised. He said, though the role of Parliament members is legislative in nature, in our country we have to be associated with the development process in our respective constituencies.



The Padma cinema hall at Louhajang bazar in Munshiganj district which was awaiting obliteration till The Daily Star staffer took a snap of it 10 days ago (inset) no longer exists. Some bricks were all that was left by the ravaging Padma yesterday.

— Star photo by A K M Mohsin

T & T offers subscribers way out of ghost bills

By Staff Correspondent

The telephone authorities have given a choice to subscribers with nation-wide dialling (NWD) facilities to switch to a non-NWD connection without any additional charges by October 10 to avoid ghost bills.

This was stated by Tariqul Islam, Minister for Telecommunications, while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

The minister explained that while every effort was being made by his ministry to reduce overbilling, the customers could come forward to make their analogue sets non-NWD and ensure there is no excess billing.

Tariqul Islam said the move to switch to a non-NWD system will help to eliminate system loss in the telephone revenue sector by at least 25 per cent.

Digital telephone subscribers can also convert their telephones to include international subscriber dialling (ISD) facilities without incurring any extra cost. They can avail the facility by only informing the T&T Department of their desire to make their digital telephones ISD. The minister said this was being done to extend better service to subscribers and at the same time enhance the revenue of the T&T Department.

Admitting that a culture of corruption was prevailing in the Telephone Department like any other public organisation, the minister said steps had al-

ready been taken to reduce ghost bills, improve telephone services and provide more connections in the shortest possible time.

The minister said steps have been taken to increase the annual revenue of the Telephone Department to Tk 500 crore from the present Tk 350 crore within the next one year.

Tariqul Islam said the present backlog of 77,000 telephone applications in Dhaka would be cleared within the next two years and added, "We will be able to provide connections even for more new applicants."

He informed this correspondent that another 18,500 new telephones would be provided to subscribers in Dhaka within March next year and 1,40,000 customers could have access to new connections by early 1996 in Dhaka alone. Another 30,000 new connections would be provided in Chittagong by 1994, the minister said.

With the expansion in telephone connections, the number of subscribers are expected to double in three years' time, Tariqul Islam said. Presently, the country has some 2,20,000 telephones of which 1,31,000 subscribers are in Dhaka.

Tariqul Islam assured that the quality of service would be substantially improved within the next six months.

He said strict directives

have been sent to all the maintenance people. No telephone will be out of order for more than 24 hours after a complaint has been lodged. At the end of three days, if a telephone is still not made operative, the subscribers can call up the T&T Chairman directly.

And if any telephone is out of order for more than five days, he said "As minister, I myself will entertain the complaint!" He told the subscribers to ring his office directly and give the in-operative number.

The minister himself volunteered his office number for lodging complaints. They are 804800 and 417210.

Tariqul Islam said that on an average 2500 telephones remained out of order everyday in Dhaka. And in the last few days, over 2000 non-functional lines were being restored. The rest were normally fixed the following day, the minister stated.

Dollar drops below BB rate

By Inam Ahmed

The interbank dollar rates in the country have dropped to an unexpected low following de-regulation of the currency market.

On Saturday, the rate was even below the reference rate of the Bangladesh Bank (BB), according to banking sources.

The interbank rate yesterday was, on an average, Tk 39.77 for a dollar against a BB reference rate of Tk 39.95.

"There is very low dollar demand in the market," a private sector banker said. "Trading has become a labourious job in the last few months."

Banking experts point out that the low interbank dollar rate is an abnormal situation resulting from a low demand for the US currency.

Sources said had there not been any reference rates from the BB the interbank lending situation would have deteriorated further.

See Page 12 Col 8

Khaleda may raise Farakka at UNGA

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is expected to raise the Farakka issue in her address to the UN General Assembly on October 2.

A source told the UNB yesterday that Begum Zia would probably highlight, in details, the adverse effect of the withdrawal of dry month flow of the Ganges upstream at Farakka by India.

She would also probably inform the international community of the process of desertification set in motion in north-western Bangladesh due to remorseless withdrawal by India, the source said.

Begum Khaleda Zia is the first head of government of Bangladesh who is going to raise at the world forum this

See Page 12 Col 7

PM urges Islamic thinkers to uphold real values of religion

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia last night called upon the Islamic thinkers and spiritual leaders to extend all-out cooperation to her government in upholding the real values of the religion in the society, reports BSS.

The Prime Minister was addressing the pir mash-aques, representatives of the Bangladesh Waqf Estate and other spiritual leaders who met her at her Sugandha office here.

The Prime Minister said the people of the country were religious minded and the present government wanted to establish the religious values and tenets through different numerous programmes.

See Page 12 Col 6

Qulkhwani

Mrs Shakerah Rahman, wife of Late Khan Bahadur Mujibur Rahman of Jalpaiguri died of old age illness at 10.00 pm on Friday, September 24, 1993 (Innallilahi...). She was 75.

She left behind two sons, Latifur Rahman, President of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, and Saifur Rahman and three daughters, Mrs Munira Wadud, w/o Dr S A Wadud, Mrs Nargis Tajuddin, w/o S A Y M Tajuddin and Mrs Sharmeen Hossain, w/o Iqbal Hossain.

Her qulkhwani will be held after Asr prayers at her residence at House No-13, Road-103, Gulshan, Dhaka, on Monday 27 Sept. 1993.

Friends, relatives and admirers are requested to attend.

Somali gunmen down US chopper: 3 killed

NAIROBI (Kenya), Sept 25: A US Blackhawk helicopter was shot down by Somali militiamen Saturday morning, crash-landing in flames and killing three American crewmen, reports AP.

The pilot and co-pilot survived the crash, but three American and three Pakistani peacekeepers were wounded as they tried to secure the area, Maj. David Stockwell said by telephone from Mogadishu, the Somali capital.

Stockwell, the chief UN military spokesman in Mogadishu, said the helicopter pilot reported that a rocket-propelled grenade hit the bottom of the aircraft, causing an explosion and an on-board fire.

"The aircraft was consumed by fire after landing," Stockwell said.

It was the first time a helicopter was downed in Mogadishu, although several have been hit by hostile fire in

recent weeks. Stockwell said the pilot and co-pilot, both slightly wounded, determined that their fellow crewmen were dead and walked to a nearby control point manned by United Arab Emirates troops for help.

Pakistani troops and a company from the US Quick Reaction Force also responded and came under fire from militiamen, Stockwell said.

The spokesman said Mogadishu's airport had taken six rounds of mortar fire around 2 am (1100 GMT) and the helicopter had observed the firing position of the weapon near Villa Somalia, the former Presidential Palace.

The palace, on a low hill near the center of the city, is in an area controlled by fugitive warlord Mohamed Farrah Aided. As the helicopter circled the palace, it was hit by what Stockwell described "a very lucky shot."