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NEWS BRIEFS

Hasina returns

By Staff Correspondent Awami League Chief and Leader of the Opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad Sheikh Hasina returned home yesterday after treatment for typhoid.

6 die of diarrhoea in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Oct 9: Diarrhoea claimed at least six lives and attacked 150 people in three thanas of the district during the last 24 hours, official sources said.

Rohingyas go home

From Our Correspondent COX'S BAZAR, Oct 9: A group of 694 Rohingya refugees have been repatriated to Myanmar this morning.

Voting in Pak provincial polls held peacefully

Punjab is the key

LAHORE, Oct 9: Pakistanis voted today in provincial polls that will decide whether Benazir Bhutto, whose party won an inconclusive victory in national elections, can return as prime minister of a viable government, report agencies.

Three days after she emerged with the largest party in the National Assembly, the premier and her arch-rival and successor Nawaz Sharif took to the streets of Lahore to drum up votes for their candidates for four provincial parliaments.

Supporters showered Bhutto with rose petals as her jeep inched its way through the narrow streets of the ancient capital of central Punjab province.

"I am confident that, fed up with centre-province tensions, the provinces are going to go along with the party that has been elected at the centre", she said on Friday, forecasting a clean sweep for her Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

Workers of Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League (PML) waved green party flags as he drove all day around the city that is his power base. His party swept eight of the nine National Assembly seats from Lahore in Wednesday's national elections.

"This is a crucial day because much depends on the results," Sharif said in an interview. "If we win the provincial elections I think it will change the whole scenario."

Benazir Bhutto will need to have support from Punjab, the largest and the most influential of the country's four provinces and home to more than 70 million of Pakistan's 120 million people.

Ms Bhutto spent Saturday touring polling stations in Lahore, the capital of Punjab. Her previous government collapsed in 1990 partly because the Punjab government opposed her. Nawaz Sharif faced similar problems and resigned in July.

The polls closed at 5:30 pm (1230 GMT) and voter turnout was light. It appeared about 40 per cent of registered voters cast ballots, about the same as in the national election. Final results were not expected until Sunday.

Ms Bhutto's party is favoured in the southern province of Sindh, the second largest. In the smaller Baluchistan and northwest frontier provinces, Ms. Bhutto's party and Sharif's party were believed

to be running neck-and-neck.

The People's Party won 86 seats and Ms Bhutto claims to have enough allies to guarantee the 109 seats she needs to form a government in the 217-seat National Assembly.

The test will come on Oct 19 when parliament meets to select a new prime minister.

Ms Bhutto, however, warned of fresh elections if her party isn't able to form the government.

"If the Pakistan People's Party can't form a government there will have to be fresh elections because nobody else can form the government", she said.

Pakistanis had hoped general elections would put an end to the confrontational politics that have resulted in three elections within five years. However, many observers say the lack of a clear-cut result means the power struggles will continue.

According to reports, polling in all the four provinces were held in a peaceful manner.

Nearly four thousand candidates contested for 481 seats of four provincial assemblies.

Of the total contestants, 3770 fought for 458 Muslim seats while 217 candidates belong to other parties. Sec Page 12 Col 6

Half-day hartal today

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League (AL) and the Jatiya Party (JP) will observe a countrywide eight-hour hartal beginning at six this morning.

The AL hartal aims at pressing home its demands, including the repeal of the Indemnity Ordinance which bars the trial of the killers of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the trial of the Jamaat chief Golam Azam as a 'war criminal' in a special tribunal, repeal of the Anti-Terrorism Act, a halt to the large-scale retrenchment of public sector workers and increased subsidy for agriculture.

The AL may also announce a fresh agitation programme. However, such programmes are unlikely to include further hartals in the immediate future, an influential leader of the party told The Daily Star last night.

The AL announced the hartal from a public rally held at the Manik Miah Avenue on August 20.

On the other hand, the JP on September 28 also called for today's hartal demanding restoration of the Upazila system, mid-term parliamentary elections under a caretaker government, release of its party chief former President H M Ershad - jailed on charges of corruption - and an end to political harassment of the JP activists.

The AL is also scheduled to hold a public rally at the Bangabandhu Avenue in the city at four this afternoon.

At the rally, the AL leaders are expected to raise a few 'burning issues' like corruption by the cabinet ministers and the need for a united resistance against religion-based politics of the Jamaat-e-Islami, Bangladesh.

The AL may also announce a fresh agitation programme. However, such programmes are unlikely to include further hartals in the immediate future, an influential leader of the party told The Daily Star last night.

The JP, on the other hand, has not planned any rally in the city today. However, JP activists will picket at 21 specific points of the city, a JP leader told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, a large number of smaller parties, including the Bangladesh Janata Dal led by former BNP minister KM Obaidur Rahman, the Progressive Nationalist Party led by Shakhawat Hossain Neelu - another former BNP man - have supported the AL-JP called hartal.



Awami League leaders including party general secretary Zillur Rahman (R) and party president Abdus Samad Azad (L), received party chief Sheikh Hasina at the Zia International Airport yesterday when she returned from Singapore after undergoing medical treatment.

Star photo

Make today's hartal a success: Hasina

Awami League leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people to observe the countrywide hartal today to register their protest against the misuse of the BNP government, reports UNB.

The eight-hour hartal was called by the Awami League to press for repealing the Indemnity Ordinance for the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu, holding trial of Golam Azam as 'war criminal, scrapping Anti-Terrorism Act and reducing the prices of agri-inputs.

"People are fed up by the two and a half-year rule of BNP... The economy is badly affected by unchecked corruption by the ruling party," Hasina said in a statement.

The opposition leader expressed concern at the politicisation of administration and nepotism pushing national institutions towards ruin. Hasina said inefficient ruling of BNP discouraged foreign investment, put the economy in shambles and increased the problem of unemployment.

Hartal callers want to ruin country: PM

The Prime Minister yesterday said those trying to damage the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) by calling hartals are actually causing harm to the people and themselves, reports UNB.

"Failing to come to power with people's votes, they are now out to harm the people through politics of hartal and indiscipline," Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia told a gathering of students here last evening.

Begum Zia said the 'politics of hartal and chaos' will only hinder the development of the country and discourage the foreign entrepreneurs who are getting attracted by the policies of the present government to invest in Bangladesh.

The students, including newly elected leaders of Noakhali Chakhal Government College students union, met with the Prime Minister at Sugandha, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student front of the ruling BNP, had swept the college election.

"Those indulging themselves with hartal and terrorism are not friends of the people. They do not love the country, they want to ruin the country and the hard-earned democracy," the Prime Minister told the students.

The people had rejected them for their politics of terrorism, anarchy and indiscipline, she added.

The country will develop and the sufferings of the people will be mitigated if democracy remains, Begum Zia said asking her student front to be tolerant and not be instigated by the opposition activities. "We do not believe in politics of revenge, we believe in politics of development and democracy," she said.

The Prime Minister said the students have to come forward with true nationalist spirit to build up a self-reliant and self-respecting country. She asked the JCD workers to attract the general students by their constructive politics of peace and discipline.

Sec Page 12 Col 8

Talks on return of Chakmas end without accord

The official-level talks between Bangladesh and India ended in Dhaka yesterday without any agreement on a date for resuming the repatriation of Chakma tribals living in Tripura, reports UNB.

"We'll meet periodically to expedite the process of repatriation," said Home Secretary Azimuddin Ahmed who led the homestead at the talks after the concluding session.

Indian Home Secretary MN Vohra headed his country's team at the meeting that began on Thursday at the state guest house Meghna.

Vohra kept mum on questions put to him on the outcome of the talks as well as on other contentious issues between the two closest neighbours.

Azimuddin, however, said the two sides had discussed all issues satisfactorily. "The Indian side has appreciated measures taken by Bangladesh to resolve the issues."

The meeting also discussed other transborder problems, including smuggling and immigration issues.

It dealt with problems arising out of the continued pushing of Bengali-speaking Indian citizens into Bangladesh.

The meeting's failure in fixing a repatriation date disappointed both sides. Sec Page 12 Col 8

Bomb blast kills one at Dr Kamal's meeting venue

BRAHMANBARIA, Oct 9: A student of the Brahmanbaria Government College was killed in a series of bomb blasts outside the town hall where Gano Forum president Dr Kamal Hossain held a meeting today, reports UNB.

Mizanur Rahman, a first year commerce student, succumbed to the splinter and burn injuries on way to the Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital at about 5:15 pm.

Witnesses said four bombs were exploded in a series as soon as the Gano Forum meeting began in the town hall. People who gathered outside the hall to listen to Dr Kamal Hossain, ran helter skelter. The meeting, however, resumed after 15 minutes.

Mizan who came from a poor family in the Barura thana of Comilla district did not belong to any political party. He used to sell goods in the pavement to earn his college fees and other expenses, said his class mates.

Sec Page 12 Col 7

Bhola launch death toll

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Oct 9: With the recovery of five more bodies the death toll in the launch capsized near Bhola's Char Zahiruddin rose to 32. Authorities fear the death figure could cross 45 with about 15 more bodies still to be recovered.

Salvage operation is continuing in full swing under the supervision of the DC and the SP of Bhola. Most of the bodies were, however, recovered by the efforts of the local fishermen.

ML Kazi, the small engine-driven passenger launch, has been salvaged and has been towed to nearby by Char Tamujuddin.

Sixteen of the recovered bodies have been handed over to their relatives. The launch, overloaded with three times its capacity, had 160 passengers on board.

It was proceeding from Bhola's Char Tamujuddin when one of its engines failed near Char Zahiruddin. The vessel was caught in a strong current and capsized.

The DC Bhola has made arrangements for supply of relief to the affected passengers and has announced a cash grant of Tk 2000 per passenger.

Varsity teachers go on 3-day strike from today

By JU Correspondent

The university teachers go on a three-day strike from today to hammer home their demands for arrest and trial of those involved in the recent armed vandalism at the Jahangirnagar, Islamic and the Rajshahi University.

The strike has been called by the Federation of Bangladesh University Teachers' Association (FBUTA), which also demands the withdrawal of charges levied on the teachers. Sec Page 12 Col 7

Pak EC declares 10 minority seats

ISLAMABAD, Oct 9: Pakistan Election Commission tonight announced the results of ten (10) National Assembly seats reserved for the minority communities in the country, reports BSS.

Of the four Christian seats and four Hindu seats, the candidates who won the elections three each of the two communities were "confirmed supporters" of the Pakistan People's Party, the PPP sources claimed here.

The two remaining seats were shared by the Parsis and the Kadianis.

Candidate shot dead in Karachi

ISLAMABAD, Oct 9: An independent election candidate in the southern Pakistani city of Karachi has been shot dead, apparently the victim of a stray bullet fired by campaigners of a political party, reports said today, says AFP.

The candidate, 27-year-old Bilal Ali Chohan, was sitting in his polling office late Friday when the bullet hit him, the Daily News said quoting police.

Aideed ready for a ceasefire

MOGADISHU, Oct 9: Fugitive Somali warlord Mohamed Farah Aideed said today that he was ready for a ceasefire in Somalia and agreed with a US proposal to resolve differences "peacefully," reports AFP.

In a broadcast on his rebel radio station Aideed said he would also accept a US proposal for an Ethiopian-led independent investigation into the June 5 killings of 23 Pakistani UN troops in an ambush, for which he was held responsible by the United Nations.

Speaking on the radio at 8:20 pm (1720 GMT), Aideed said: "The SNA (Aideed's movement, the Somali National Alliance) is proposing a total ceasefire not to attack the US and UN forces."

"We also proposed the US government and UN stop any attacks and any of the terrorising of the Somali republic," Aideed said.

Aideed said his militia would accept an investigation into the killing of 24 Pakistani peacekeepers on June 5. UN forces have been hunting Aideed since June, saying they want to put him on trial for ordering the

massacre of the Pakistanis.

He sent condolences to the families of Somalis and UN peacekeepers killed in fighting and said Somalis should settle their own affairs and end his brief speech with the words: "Peace, justice, progress."

Earlier, Aideed called for a ceasefire and said a ceasefire will benefit everybody including Somalis. So there will be no more losses like last Sunday, Burhan Gultale spokesman for SNA said.

Thirteen US troops were killed in Sunday's fighting - 12 on Sunday and one later in hospital in Germany. Four other bodies have been found and if identified as US troops will bring the US death toll to 17.

Hospital staff and relief agencies here said scores of Somalis were also killed in Sunday's battle, when rangers found themselves trapped by Somali gunmen after capturing 24 of Aideed's aides.

Meanwhile, Reuter says: US President Bill Clinton's special envoy to Somalia arrived in Ethiopia today to push attempts to arrange a ceasefire with Aideed.

Diplomats said Robert Oakley was carrying a message from Clinton for Ethiopian President Meles Zenawi requesting he take an active role in trying to mediate an end to the crisis.

US diplomats said Oakley was trying to negotiate a ceasefire in exchange for a US commitment to suspend efforts to capture Aideed.

"There are discussions underway but it would be incorrect to say that any deal has been struck," one US official told Reuters, adding: "I doubt if anything is likely on this before tomorrow (Saturday)."

There would be a ceasefire and the United States would agree to suspend its efforts to apprehend Aideed," said the official.

In a sharp reversal of policy, Oakley is expected to push Meles to set up an international inquiry into violence in Mogadishu blamed on Aideed.

Another report says, a senior Italian general today said Rome would be willing to mediate between the United States and Somali warlord if Washington suspended military actions.

Yeltsin dissolves city councils, extends emergency

MOSCOW, Oct 9: President Boris Yeltsin dissolved thousands of city councils throughout Russia on Saturday in the most far-reaching action he has taken since crushing his hard-line opponents in parliament, reports AP.

But Yeltsin stopped short of disbanding the larger, more powerful regional councils, or Soviets, and the legislatures of Russia's 21 republics.

He did strip the regional councils, however, of their right to pass budgets without the approval of regional administrators - whose jobs are de-

pendent on Yeltsin. Yeltsin said local administrators, such as mayors, would keep their jobs and assume the responsibilities of the disbanded local councils in Russia's far-flung cities, villages and towns.

Local councils are often holdovers from the Soviet era and have resisted some of Yeltsin's economic and political reforms.

Saturday's action could have a great impact on Russians on a local level.

Many Russians outside Moscow have felt removed from the president's long power

struggle with parliament, but Saturday's decree touches officials in even the smallest Russian village.

Also Saturday, Yeltsin extended the state of emergency in the capital for another week and Moscow's new military commandant warned that any weekend demonstrations would be "decisively stopped."

Soldiers and police arrested 3,803 people overnight for curfew violations, the commandant's office said Saturday.

Police Col. Gen. Alexander Kulikov, whom Yeltsin appointed commandant of the capital,

Plots to kill Arafat foiled

TUNIS, Oct 9: Yasser Arafat has foiled two alleged plots to assassinate him within the last two weeks for making peace with Israel, PLO officials said Saturday, reports AP.

The officials blamed the latest attempt on Thursday on Arafat's longtime nemesis, Abu Nidal.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, the sources said at least 10 bodyguards of Yasser Arafat, a close aide to the Palestine Liberation Organisation Chairman, and Ahmed Qurei'a, head of the PLO's economic department, were seized on charges of plotting to kill the two leaders and Arafat.

The reported crackdown came as Arafat is struggling to rally support within the Palestinian leadership for the peace accord.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation representative in Jordan, Tayeb Abdel-Rahim, described another attempt two weeks ago to bomb Arafat's plane as he crisscrossed the Arab world seeking support for his landmark September 13 peace accord with Israel.

said Friday he would crush any attempts to organize pickets or rallies this weekend.

"I warn that any actions that destabilize the situation in Moscow will be decisively stopped with the use of all available means and forces, and the organisers will be detained in accordance with the law," he said.

The state of emergency that Yeltsin imposed October 3 had been scheduled to expire Sunday. But the president issued a decree extending it until October 18 to keep the city calm. Police and soldiers with as-

Exploration and mining of coal More foreign firms to be invited

By Special Correspondent

Offers from more foreign companies will be invited for the exploration and mining of coal in Bangladesh.

This was decided by the government recently and the authorities concerned have been advised to advertise in some internationally reputed magazines.

A similar invitation was extended to the foreign companies last April but met with poor response. Only BHP Minerals International, an Australia-US multinational which has been showing an interest in such exploration since 1986 and which had already offered specific proposals, responded then.

According to an official source, the Council Committee for Finance and Economic Affairs reviewed the issue in a meeting where the offers from BHP Minerals, received by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, were discussed.

The meeting agreed in prin-

ciple that the proposed terms and conditions of BHP Minerals were acceptable and an agreement with the company might be signed. The committee also decided to permit BHP in coal exploration and mining in the country except those places where government agencies have already discovered coal deposits.

However, the committee in its recommendations also maintained that the authorities should try to obtain more offers from other interested foreign companies and the Energy Ministry should advertise again, giving at least 45 days' time.

Before signing any agreement on coal exploration, the ministry concerned will place a summary before the cabinet containing the responses to the fresh advertisements along with the proposals of BHP Minerals.

The source said publication of advertisements in two foreign weeklies is now under process.

The confirmed death toll from the two days of violence was 187, with 437 wounded, and more bodies likely to be found, city officials said.

The ITAR-Tass news agency, citing sources in the prosecutor general's office whom it didn't identify, said hard-line leaders probably would be charged with treason. If convicted, the usual sentence is death.

The report named Alexander Rusko, Yeltsin's rebellious vice president; former parliament speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov and five others. They all were in solitary confinement.