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NEWS BRIEFS

Khaleda, Hasina greet Hata

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and Awami League chief and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Sheikh Hasina yesterday in separate messages felicitated newly elected Japanese Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata, reports UNB.

PM opens nat'l gridline today

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the national gridline in Bhola district at 11 am today. The Prime Minister will also visit the gas exploration site at Shahbajpur in the district, reports UNB.

Bangladesh Bank gets 23 bids

Twenty-three bids for Taka 365 crore were received at the 41st auction of the 91-day Bangladesh Bank bill held yesterday. Seven bids were accepted, reports BSS.

Coalition splits within 12 hours of Hata's election

TOKYO, Apr 25: In a grave blow to a prime minister less than 12 hours in office, the largest party in Japan's governing coalition said early Tuesday it was quitting over political disputes, reports AP.

The decision by the left-leaning Socialists, who had battled their more conservative partners for months, made it likely that Tsutomu Hata, elected prime minister by Parliament Monday afternoon, would lead a minority government.

The confusion came before Hata had even selected a Cabinet, and raised severe doubts about his administration's abilities to deal with pressing issues including trade frictions with the United States and tax reforms.

The latest dispute erupted when a group of conservative and centrist parties, led by Hata's Japan Renewal Party, agreed to unite in a single parliamentary bloc.

The Socialists, who were excluded from the bloc, immediately protested. In a statement early Tuesday, party chairman Tomiichi Murayama

announced the party would quit the coalition but would cooperate in passing the budget for fiscal 1994, already more than three weeks old.

"The fact that such willful manipulations were conducted will increase the people's distrust in the new government, and cannot be permitted," Murayama said. "Therefore the Socialist Party cannot remain a member of the coalition government."

The departure of the



Tsutomu Hata

Socialists would leave the coalition with around 180 seats in the 511-seat lower house of Parliament — far short of a majority.

It was not immediately clear whether Hata would attempt to govern with a minority and rely on support on individual issues from the Socialists or the conservative opposition Liberal Democratic Party.

Hata began early Tuesday to discuss forming a Cabinet with the remaining leaders of the coalition, Kyodo News Service reported.

Hata, who heads the conservative Japan Renewal Party, replaced Morihiro Hosokawa, who stepped down because of a financial scandal just eight months after assuming office.

After his selection by Parliament Monday afternoon, Hata had hope to quickly name a Cabinet and move ahead with the overdue budget.

But with the decision by the Socialists, the budget schedule was in tatters — and that was bad news for an economy just beginning to emerge from re-

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Dhaka annoyed with slow pace of repatriation MOU with UNHCR on Rohingyas may not be renewed

By Staff Correspondent

Bangladesh may not renew the memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the repatriation of the Rohingyas because of disappointment over the slow pace of repatriation.

An indication to this effect came from Foreign Secretary Mufleh R Osmany's reply to questions from newsmen at a press briefing in the city yesterday.

The Foreign Secretary said Bangladesh is reviewing its co-operative relations with the UNHCR.

"When we initiated the MOU with the UNHCR last year, our expectation was that it would expedite the process of repatriation."

Continuing, Osmany said: "Our optimism was not well placed."

The Foreign Secretary also resented a press report quoting UNHCR officials that 70 per cent of the refugees did not want to go back to their homeland.

"This is a distortion of facts. As the free citizens of a sovereign country, we decide who will go and who will not," Osmany asserted.

The Foreign Secretary also alleged that some UNHCR officials were engaged in politics which was not only outside the scope of their mandate but was also affecting the image of the UNHCR as an international agency.

The Foreign Secretary said Bangladesh has a sense of urgency to complete the repatriation of Rohingyas refugees as they are a burden on the national economy.

He said that the refugee influx was a huge burden and the money being spent for their upkeep could be diverted to build schools or put to other infra-structural uses.

Osmany said the Myanmar Government was willing to take back the refugees and that nearly 1,50,000 had already been cleared.

The memorandum of understanding was signed between the UNHCR and Dhaka on May 12 last year and will expire at the end of one year should any one party object.

According to Foreign Ministry sources, 54,651 refugees have been repatriated till April 20 this year of which 17,129 refugees had already returned to Myanmar prior to signing of the MOU.

Speaking about the Chakma refugees, the Foreign Secretary said the next batch of Chakmas would return from Indian Tripura state in the first week of May.

He said the recent visit of Romesh Bhandari, Governor of Tripura, had created an enabling atmosphere for the resumption of the repatriation of Chakma tribals.

On the reported border tension along Burmair in the district of Lalmonirhat, the Foreign Secretary said the situation was not so alarming. He said the Indian BSF had obstructed a project of the Bangladesh Water Development Board near Burmair.

About the Ganges water issue, the Foreign Secretary said he could not say anything specific about the dates for the proposed visit of Indian Premier Narasimha Rao.

He described the unilateral withdrawal of the Ganges water as "an unfriendly act".

The Foreign Secretary once again expressed Bangladesh's position to keep the global community informed about the issue and its avowed determination to solve the problem bilaterally.

Blasts kill 19 more on the eve of S African polls

JOHANNESBURG, Apr 25: A 220-pound car bomb ripped through a taxi stand used by black commuters today, and police were questioning someone in connection with the terrorist spree that killed at least 19 people on the eve of the country's first all-race election, reports AP.

Deputy Law and Order Minister Gert Myburgh refused to give any details of the person being questioned, but his announcement followed earlier police statements that they hoped for a breakthrough soon.

Debris was scattered over a four-block area of the Johannesburg suburb of Germiston after Monday's blast, which occurred as the country prepared for its first all-race election Tuesday-Thursday.

Car parts hung from tree limbs and body parts and twisted metal lay scattered on

the ground after the 8:45 am explosion. Ten people were killed and at least 36 wounded by flying shrapnel, glass and a collapsing building.

The deaths followed the killing of nine people and the wounding of nearly 100 Sunday by a car bomb in central Johannesburg. The bombs were the largest ever in the Johannesburg area, police said.

Editorial on Page 4

The blasts sparked the biggest peacetime military callup in the country's history, Myburgh said. He refused to give numbers but said in addition to the troops, more than 100,000 police officers — more than double the number planned — would be deployed at polling stations to protect voters.

A group of desperate people have... declared war on the

rest of this society," President F W de Klerk said. "We will not rest until they have been tracked down, convicted and punished, as they deserve."

African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela visited hospitalized victims from Sunday's blast and said afterward he and de Klerk had discussed measures to stop the violence. He would not specify the steps nor who was believed responsible, but said, "We know who they are."

"I sincerely hope the government will act in such a way as to remove the impression we are dealing with a government of weakness, unable to rise to the challenge that is posed by the madmen who are killing innocent people," Mandela said.

In addition to the two massive explosions, there were at

See Page 12 Col 8

AL, JP, call dawn-to-dusk hartal today

The Awami League has called for a 12-hour country-wide hartal except in Chittagong and Bhola today to press for a package of demands including general elections under a caretaker government, reports UNB.

The dawn-to-dusk hartal, the second one after the Awami League's April 7 siege programme, will be enforced from 6 in the morning.

The Jatiya Party has also called for a 12-hour shut down today. Both the parties had enforced a dawn-to-dusk hartal on April 10 to press for realisation of their demands.

The hartal callers held rallies and brought out torch processions in the capital yesterday urging the people to observe the strike and express no-confidence in the government.

The Awami League has urged the people to observe the hartal to press home its 11-point demands which include resignation of the BNP government and election under a caretaker government.

It also called for resistance against corruption, misrule, the politicisation policy of the

See Page 12 Col 1

Khaleda might mediate in Kashmir dispute

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia is likely to mediate peace in the troubled Kashmir valley over which India and Pakistan had fought two wars since partition of the sub-continent in 1947, reports UNB.

Foreign Secretary Mufleh R Osmany replied in the affirmative to a question if Begum Zia, as chairperson of the SAARC, is expected to take any initiative to mediate in the Kashmir issue between the two neighbours, both grouped in the regional forum.

Osmany also described the recent visit of Foreign Minister ASM Mostafizur Rahman to China as very successful.

China has agreed to finance the Rupsha bridge in Khulna, which is likely to cost more than 100 million US dollars.

For them, soccer comes ahead of exams!

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAHI, Apr 25: Several hundred Honours final students of the Rajshahi University today observed a three-hour sit-in demanding shifting of their examinations set to begin June 12.

The students staged the demonstration from 11 am until 2 pm in front of the Vice Chancellor's office demanding rescheduling of their examinations so that they could watch on TV the World Cup soccer finals which begin in the United States June 17.

They also submitted a memorandum to the VC and brought out a procession.

HK investor gets citizenship

A foreign investor Ms Leung Lai Ching of Hong Kong has been given the citizenship of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

This is for the first time that a foreign national has been given permanent residence permit under the Bangladesh Citizenship (temporary provisions) Order, 1992. Ms Ching will enjoy all the rights and privileges as a Bangladeshi citizen and be also liable to all her duties and responsibilities as a resident under the laws of the land.

The government has offered this opportunity to the foreign entrepreneurs who would invest at least 75,000 US dollars in the both industrial and commercial sectors.



The Bangladesh Mahila Awami League brought out a torch procession in the city yesterday in support of today's dawn-to-dusk hartal. — Star photo

Opposition parties differ on JS boycott

By Staff Correspondent

The leaders of the opposition parties in Parliament yesterday failed to reach agreement on whether to attend the next session of the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), scheduled to begin on May 4.

They, however, decided to continue discussions and will meet again on the 30th of this month.

During the two-and-a-half-hour long parley at the Parliament chamber of the Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad yesterday, the AL leaders said their central working committee had already approved the party's decision not to attend the next session.

The AL leaders, however, maintained that a final decision would be taken at the extended meeting of the party's working committee on May 2. The Jatiya Party (JP) leaders informed the meeting that they had decided not to attend the session.

The JP leaders also said they would not make any compromise over the demand for holding the next general elections under a caretaker government. Anwar Hossain Manju of the JP strongly felt that a free and fair election under the government of Khaleda Zia was a remote possibility, meeting sources added.

When asked by the AL leaders to explain the JP legislators' presence in the parliamentary standing committee meetings, Moudud Ahmed said the AL had unilaterally decided to boycott the JS bodies. "If the Opposition decides not to return to the House, we would immediately stop attending the JS body meetings", Moudud said.

The Jamaat leaders reiterated

See Page 12 Col 3

AL discusses post-hartal strategies

By Staff Correspondent

The Awami League Central Working Committee (ALCWC), in an emergency meeting held yesterday evening, discussed the possible agitation programmes to be announced after today's dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the party.

According to meeting sources, the party would announce programmes like rallies at different parts of the country, including the capital if the hartal passes peacefully. The programmes would also include mass-contact campaigns to mobilise public support. See Page 12 Col 6

Petrobangla asked to supply gas to KAFCO

By Sohail Manzur

The Energy Minister has ordered Petrobangla to supply gas for the Karnaphuli Fertiliser Company (KAFCO) on the basis of undertakings by the company and the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC).

The KAFCO, which is likely to go for commercial production from December this year, is in need of gas for commissioning its gas turbine. A contract will also have to be signed between the Bakhrabad Gas Systems Limited (BGSL), the BCIC and the KAFCO.

But, according to sources, the signing of the contract was being delayed because of differences of opinion between the BCIC and the BGSL on some clauses of the contract.

The BCIC and KAFCO have, in the meantime, assured BGSL that it would be paid gas charges at the stipulated rate

from the beginning of its supply, even if the contract is not signed by the time.

According to Energy Ministry sources, the charge for every thousand cubic feet of gas was fixed at one US dollar in the earlier contract signed between the concerned parties and this would be applicable for this period also.

Meanwhile, the expert, who arrived in Dhaka from Japan for commissioning the gas turbine, left Bangladesh and the Japanese contracting firm had also threatened to demand compensation from KAFCO if their work was delayed for the delay in gas supply.

According to sources, a meeting of the finance committee of the Ministry of Finance is scheduled to be held on May 3 to discuss various issues relating to KAFCO. See Page 12 Col 7

PM urges Armed Forces to help achieve autarky

BOGRA, Apr 25: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia today asked the armed forces to contribute to the government's programmes for building a self-reliant country, reports UNB.

"You can contribute to the government's education, mass education, afforestation and health and family care programmes," she told the officers and troops of Bangladesh Army at a ceremonial parade marking the presentation of National Standard to the Armour Centre and School (ACC & S) at Bogra Cantonment this morning.

The Prime Minister said her government was working relentlessly for the development of the country by utilising its limited resources and the Armed Forces could play a significant role in this regard.

She said the Armed Forces are our pride and the armoured corps is the main pillar of the Armed Forces in protecting the country's independence and sovereignty.

The people will always remember the role of the Armed Forces in consolidating the independence, curbing smuggling and national disaster. See Page 12 Col 6

Govt-teachers talks fail

By Staff Correspondent

Another attempt by the government for a dialogue with the liaison committee which is leading the striking teachers, failed yesterday when the committee leaders rejected the offer of talks with the Education Minister.

"We have again boycotted the meeting with the government because it was not arranged exclusively for the liaison committee and especially to discuss its 15-point charter of demands," a committee leader said. The liaison committee, representing six different organisations of the non-government school and college teachers, also remained absent from the April 17 meeting of the minister and some smaller groups of teachers. See Page 12 Col 7

Directive for power-purchase agreement

The Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources was yesterday asked to formulate a standard power-purchase agreement for the intending private investors in power generation, reports BSS.

The directive came at the regular weekly meeting of the cabinet held at Bangabhaban with Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair.

The cabinet also approved an amendment to Government and Autonomous Bodies' Employees Benevolent Fund and Group Insurance-1982.

Revised policy for indirect exporters of garments

The Bangladesh Bank has formulated a revised policy for giving alternative facilities to the indirect exporters of garments made of local cloth, reports UNB.

Under the policy, garments manufacturers and suppliers will get the alternative facility at a rate of 25 per cent if they do not avail duty bond or duty drawback facility for importing raw materials.

Exporters of different types of locally produced towels, bed sheets, bed covers and other bedding materials, curtains and other items like gloves, bath mats, grill pads, duster cloth, terry rags and socks will also get the facility. See Page 12 Col 5

WIN

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POWERVISION

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a trip to the World Cup Final at Los Angeles

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