

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

Gano Forum president Dr Kamal Hossain says that there is no alternative to an immediate resumption of dialogue between the principal parties at the highest level to deal meaningfully with the agenda to agree on the framework for the next elections, that is, the issue of caretaker government. According to Dr Kamal Hossain, the nation needs a political settlement urgently and if the parties again fail to attain such a settlement to end the state of uncertainty then a major citizens' initiative is called for.

Full text of Dr Kamal's interview with The Daily Star is on Page 4:

Tomorrow — An article by Qazi Khloqqizaman Ahmad, an eminent economist, chairperson of the Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP), a leading think tank of the country

Inside Today Article

Do Our Leaders Care about Development Issues
Column: The Third View
by Mahfuz Anam
Page 4

International

LTTE conditionally welcomes foreign mediation

Benazir slams Muslim militants for giving Islam a bad name
Page 5

Business

BR to import passenger carriages from Iran next year

Two US officials slate ban on aid to Pakistan
Pages 6, 7

STOCK MARKET
DSE Index: 830.36 (-0.34%)
Market capitalization Tk: 42.92 billion
Turnover in volume: 103739.25
Turnover in value Tk: 15.67 million

Law and Our Rights

How's my Bangladeshi, M'Lord? Laws lag behind commerce; and Tucked in by sunset
Page 8

NEWS BRIEFS

CU reopens

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Mar 8: Chittagong University reopened today after a closure of four months. A large number of students attended classes on the first day. Most of the resident students have also returned to their halls. Students were required to produce identity cards and hall rent receipts to enter the halls. Chittagong University was closed in November following the killing of a Chhatra Dal leader Md Musa.

BCL calls hartal in Ctg today

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Mar 8: Chhatra League, Chittagong unit, has called for a half-day hartal here tomorrow in protest against the shifting of 12 BCL leaders from the Chittagong jail to Comilla and also demanding their release. Meanwhile, supporters of BCL held rallies and demonstrations here today in support of tomorrow's hartal.

Two US consulate staff shot dead in Karachi



Pakistani paramilitary troops guard the US Consulate General in Karachi after two American staff were shot dead by unidentified gunmen yesterday. — APP/UNB photo

KARACHI, Mar 8: Two gunmen burst out of a taxi today and sprayed bullets at a van carrying three US government workers, killing two and wounding the third, reports AP.

Earlier a spokesman for the US consulate said two diplomats were shot dead early today and a third was wounded.

The Americans were headed to work at the US consulate when the van stopped at a traffic light on one of the busiest roads in this convulsed port city. As they waited for the light to change, two gunmen got out of a yellow taxi and opened fire with AK-47 assault rifles.

The bullets shattered the front and back windshields, killing Jackie van Landingham, a secretary, and Gary C Durell, a communications technician. Mark McCloy, who worked in the consulate's post office, was injured and was in stable condition, US officials said. Their Pakistani driver was not hit and took them to the Agha Khan Hospital.

"We are outraged and saddened by this terrible act," the US consulate said in a statement. "Why and for what" See Page 12 Col 1

PM leaves for Copenhagen today

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia leaves Dhaka for Copenhagen today to attend the UN sponsored World Summit on Social Development, reports UNB.

The seven-day summit, first of its kind, began in the Danish capital on Monday. About 130 heads of state or government are due to attend the conference.

Begum Zia will lead the Bangladesh delegation that will include Foreign Minister A S M Mostafizur Rahman, State Minister for Planning Dr A Moeen Khan, State Minister for Social Welfare Fazlur Rahman, Rosi Kabir MP and Foreign Secretary Farooq Sobhan.

The Prime Minister is See Page 12 Col 8

Chandrika Due March 28

COLOMBO, March 8: Sri Lankan president Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga will visit India and Bangladesh later this month, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar told reporters today, reports Reuters.

He said the president will visit India for five days from March 24 and Bangladesh for three days from March 28.

Zhirinovskiy warns Pakistan of armed intervention

NEW DELHI, Mar 8: Russian ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy warned Pakistan today not to provoke India and said he would dispatch Russian troops here in the event of another Indo-Pakistani conflict, reports AFP.

"Indo-Pakistani conflict has been artificially heated up, and if Pakistan knows the stand of Russia then it will behave in such a manner that a conflict will not occur," he said.

"If India has a broad-based agreement with Russia and asks for such help then we would send troops against Pakistan," he added.

As an opposition parliamentarian, Zhirinovskiy is in no position to order Russian troops anywhere. But he is known to have presidential ambitions.

Zhirinovskiy also reiterated a controversial suggestion that India should annex Pakistan and Bangladesh, saying that "artificial boundaries" led to regional conflicts.

"We are against the division of any country as it leads to bloodshed," Zhirinovskiy told reporters at a news conference marking the end of his three-day visit.

Foreign investors urge withdrawal of lock-in period

Star Report

Five leading foreign investors, all having a substantial presence in the domestic share market, have requested the government to reconsider the lock-in period of one year on private placements and allotment of securities and cautioned that it might discourage foreign investments in domestic securities.

In a recent joint letter addressed to the Finance Secretary, the Investment and Banking Secretary and to the Chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Hong Kong-based representatives of the five foreign investors (FIs) reacted strongly against some of the recent regulatory changes initiated by the SEC.

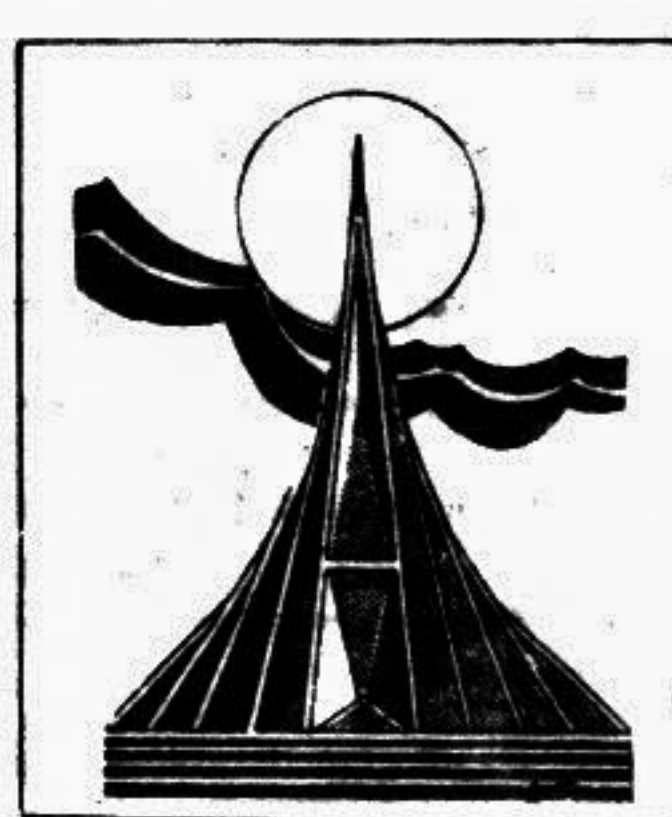
"For the sake of the smooth development of Bangladesh's capital market, we would be very appreciative if you reconsider the lock-in period of one year on private placements and allotment of securities, as the success of the (Dhaka) stock exchange last year owes much to Bangladesh's commitment

to liberalisation," said the letter.

While acknowledging that setting up rules to enable a smooth development of the local capital markets is vital for the Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), it, however, feared that the one year lock-in period would discourage FIs from investing in Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh is competing worldwide for funds which are becoming more and more wary of emerging markets. It should use all the weapons it has to remain attractive," the letter added.

Written on February 28 from Hong Kong, the reactive letter was co-signed by Ayaz Ebrahim, Manager of the Bangladesh Fund, Charles Lansford, Fund Manager of the Moghul Fund, Marianne Page, Managing Director for the sub-continent of Smith New Court, Niall Scheiner, Regional Research Director of UBS Securities East Asia, and G Lejinder, Chief Operating Officer of WI Carr Indoseuz. See Page 12 Col 1



Looking Back at March towards Independence

On this day in 1971, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani addressed a public meeting at Paltan Maidan and stated that the majority party alone was authorised to frame a country's constitution in a democracy. Black flags were hoisted atop private houses and educational institutions in response to a call given by Sheikh Mujib for protesting against firing on unarmed civilians. A number of exemptions and clarifications, pertaining to the directive of Sheikh Mujib to continue the non-violent, non-cooperation movement, were issued by Tajuddin Ahmad. (More on page 4)

US to spend \$100m for Third World women's edn
Hectic negotiations for final WSSD declaration

COPENHAGEN, Mar 8: As the World Women's Day celebrations across the globe today renew vow to fight inequality, the delegates at the World Summit on Social Development (WSSD) here are negotiating hard to prepare the final document that promises action against poverty, unemployment and social exclusion.

Delegates from different countries are discussing the language of the final declaration of the summit and the Plan of Action so that, in the last two days, the document could be adopted smoothly.

The summit mark the Women's Day with a sober message: Women are among those most hurt by poverty and inequality.

The United Nations, which is sponsoring the 193-nation meeting says women constitute up to 70 per cent of the world's 1.2 billion poor and two-thirds of the world's illit-

From Masud Hasan Khan

Women groups participating in the parallel NGO forum as well as lobbying in the main WSSD meeting here have charted a wide range of programmes, focusing on gender issues.

US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton is playing a prominent role.

Hillary Clinton told the summit today that the United States would spend 100 million dollars in 10 years to improve women's education in poorer countries.

In a speech marking International Women's Day, she told the gathering that more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate are women.

She said the US aim is a 20 per cent rise in women's literacy and girls primary school finishing rates in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

"The goals of this initiative are ambitious," Clinton said. "I respectfully urge other gov-

ernments to join the United States in creating or expanding the opportunities for all women worldwide."

Meanwhile, the self-exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasrin is scheduled to speak here at the NGO forum on the women's issues Friday.

Danish chapter of PEN, the international writers' forum will bring Taslima in Copenhagen from the neighbouring Sweden where she is now staying.

Despite the near-minus weather outside, the WSSD working group after a heated debate late last night agreed on the most controversial resource issues — the 20:20 concept and the debt relief.

To satisfy all parties of negotiations, 20:20 will not be a binding, but a possible tool for 'interested' countries.

This 'vague' agreement means that the social summit will fail to make any ground- See Page 12 Col 3

Saifur for changes in laws relating to women

From Staff Correspondent

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, speaking on the occasion of International Women's Day yesterday, called for changes in the country's legal system to remove discrimination against women.

Addressing a discussion meeting in the city, Saifur Rahman said that without a drastic reform of the laws pertaining to women's rights, discrimination against women cannot be eliminated.

Citing the Muslim law of inheritance as an example of gross discrimination against women, he said that a legal system that does not permit daughters to inherit the entire parental property unless a son is born, is not fair at all. See Page 12 Col 6

Concerted move urged to improve women's lot

By Staff Correspondent

The International Women's Day was observed in the country yesterday as elsewhere in the world with a call for concerted effort by all concerned to improve the socio-economic condition of women, especially the under-privileged ones.

In observance of the day, various political, socio-cultural and voluntary organisations organised colourful processions, rallies and discussion meetings in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs organised a discussion meeting at the Osmani Memorial Hall which was graced by President Abdur Rahman Biswas as chief guest.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, State Minister for

Women and Children's Affairs Sarwar Rahman, and country representatives of the UNDP and Unicef attended as special invitees. Prof ZN Tahmida Begum of the Dhaka University presented the keynote paper.

Speaking on the occasion, President Biswas said there is no alternative to joint endeavour of men and women to ensure socio-economic development of the country and improvement of the lot of the commonman.

He stressed the need for speedy implementation of the government's multi-dimensional programmes for women's uplift.

Finance Minister Saifur Rahman said massive pro- See Page 12 Col 4



Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina was accorded a warm reception at Rajshahi airport yesterday when she arrived to attend the Divisional AL workers' conference. — Star photo

Princes Anne visits SCF projects

KHULNA, March 8: Princess Anne, the visiting Princess of Britain, had another field day here today as she inspected a number of humanitarian projects run by the Save the Children Fund (SCF), reports UNB.

In Khulna, which she last visited in 1984, the Princess saw a slum at Sheikhpara where the SCF runs a children welfare project.

As she arrived at the slum, she was greeted by Tabezur Rahman, the city Mayor, who presented her with a bunch of tuberose.

At the Sheikhpara slum, the SCF has been providing very basic health services to mother See Page 12 Col 6

Fertiliser worth Tk 1 cr seized at N'ganj

From Our Correspondent

NARAYANGANJ, Mar 8: Some 1214 tons of urea fertiliser worth about Taka one crore have been seized from four barges anchored at Narayanganj river port tonight.

Acting on a tip, River Traffic police led by magistrate Abdul Malek raided four barges namely, MV Jharna, MV Masud, MV Shimaand, MV Nehar on river Shitalakya at 7:30 pm today and seized the fertiliser, which were reportedly being unloaded illegally.

The consignment of urea was being unloaded in the name of Zakaria Traders, Noapara, Jessore. Selim Traders, Narayanganj and Shaheed Traders, Manikganj. See Page 12 Col 7

Smelling police presence crew of two barges fled their vessels. The crew of the other two barges were being interrogated when last report came in tonight.

Urea was loaded on MV Jharna and MV Masud in Chittagong while it was loaded on other two barges at Ghorasal.

Deputy Commissioners of the districts have been assigned to distribute urea among farmers and no middlemen or traders are allowed to transfer or stock the fertiliser. UNB from Jamalpur adds, Several hundred farmers today staged a demonstration in front of DC office to See Page 12 Col 7

Land degradation costs seven S Asian states \$10b a yr

Severe and spreading land degradation today costs seven countries of South Asia a staggering 10 billion US dollars yearly — roughly 7 per cent of their total agricultural output, says a report prepared by FAO received in Dhaka yesterday.

"The impact is greatest on the poor," says the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in its latest study on severity, causes and impact of land degradation. And the damage is still spreading.

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) collaborated in the study, covering 321 million hectares of agricultural land supporting

over 1.2 billion people. FAO's Anthony Young and Frank Dent note: "A total of 43 per cent of agricultural land of the region is affected by some time and degree of degradation."

They document startling percentages of damage in vital agricultural land that underpin food production: Afghanistan (33pc); Bangladesh (75pc); Bhutan (10pc); India (25pc); Iran (94pc); Nepal (26 pc); Pakistan (61pc); and Sri Lanka (44pc).

The UN study pinpoints five areas with the most severe damage: (1) the cultivated Himalayan belt, stretching through Northern India and Nepal; (2) western Ghats of

the Indian Deccan; (3) highland watersheds of Sri Lanka; (4) semi-desert areas of Iran, Afghanistan and the Thar desert of India; (5) parts of the Indo-Gangetic plains of Pakistan and India.

Other ecological disasters loom ahead. Most threatening is the "severe deforestation and water erosion in the mountain and hill areas of Nepal," the report adds.

Alluvial plains and basin areas of dry zone countries — Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan and India's western region — are waterlogged. Water tables have dropped sharply. Salt is seeping into aquifers. Rained and deforested land See Page 12 Col 8

Atta on sale in packets at fair price in city

The government arranged sale of atta in packets at fair price in 84 markets of Dhaka city from yesterday, according to a Food Ministry press release, reports BSS.

This arrangement will continue side by side with selling of rice and atta on trucks under open market sale (OMS).

The packet atta is being sold through a shop in each of the markets in first phase and the number of shops will be increased soon. Each packet contains two kgs of atta and its sale price of Tk 21 has been printed on it. Red banners inscribed with fixed price have been hung in iron poles in shops. Buyers have been requested not to pay excess price under any circumstances. See Page 12 Col 7