

Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS

Gordian knots



Kazi Fazlur Rahman, an adviser in the interim government headed by justice Shabbuddin Ahmed and a former civil servant, observes that everyone must realise that what is at stake is much more than the chairs of office. At stake is the credibility and survival of democracy as a system of governance and a vehicle for the social and economic progress of the nation.

He feels that the Election Commission has contributed substantially to the current impasse by its unwillingness or inability to exercise effectively and consistently even the powers and authority it already enjoys.

Full text of his responses to The Daily Star questionnaire is on Page 4.

TOMORROW: Muslehuddin Ahmad, Chairman, Civic Watch-Bangladesh and president of North South University speaks on the issue.

Big blow to dry season irrigation

Groundwater level in 36 dists falls by 3-26m

By S Y Bakht

An alarming fall in the groundwater level in 36 districts around the country is severely hampering the current dry season irrigation. According to Water Resources Ministry officials, the decline in the groundwater level ranges from three to 26 metres, affecting a large number of districts from Nilphamari in the north to Bhola in the south.

A big percentage of the irrigation pumps has been rendered inoperative in the affected districts, raising fears of a profound impact on the country's annual foodgrain output.

The government is yet to initiate any contingency measures to deal with the situation

and no move has been taken to implement a detailed action-plan recommended by a task force earlier last month.

The unusually sharp fall in the groundwater level is being attributed to last summer's drought and poor rainfall so far this year. Thus, the recharge of both the surface and underground water levels has been much lower than that of previous years, officials said.

The problem has been compounded in the northern districts by the seasonal low water-flow in the Padma river and the increasing salinity of the available water in the southern coastal regions. The large Ganges-Kabardak (GK) irrigation project in Kushtia has also been rendered inoperative

as all its channels have seen dry, officials said.

The most severely affected areas include Dhaka, Gazipur, Comilla and the districts in the northern region. The groundwater level has been recorded to be lower by 15-26m in Dhaka, Gazipur, part of Comilla and Rajshahi city area while Naogaon, Kushtia, Mymensingh, northern Comilla and the rest of Rajshahi district have marked a fall of 10-15m.

The underground water table has receded by 5-10m in Dinajpur, Rangpur, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Bogra, Joipurhat, Nilphamari, western Nawabganj, Sirajganj, Pabna, Tangail, Rajbari, Manikganj, Narayanganj, western

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Opposition announces fresh course of action

By Staff Correspondent

The Opposition parties yesterday announced a 13-day fresh agitation programme, including countrywide road-railway barricades on March 23 and 'Dhaka Siege' on March 28.

The identical programmes beginning on March 16 were announced by the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat-e-Islami separately on the second day of their 48-hour countrywide hartal as part of their on-going agitation demanding dissolution of the present Parliament, resignation of the government and holding of national elections under a neutral caretaker government.

The leaders of the three parties, whose MPs resigned en masse on December 28, announced the programmes from their own party forums

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Gen Manzur murder case

Ex-general, colonel taken into custody

Star Report

CID officials yesterday arrested two retired army officers and took them into remand for interrogation regarding the alleged murder of Major General Abul Manzur, police and court sources said.

Plainclothesmen arrested a former chief of the forces intelligence and principal staff officer Major General (Retd) Abdul Latif and Lt Colonel (Retd) Shamsur Rahman. According to the autopsy report, Shamsur Rahman had identified Gen Manzur's body at the CMH, Chittagong.

Both were arrested from their city residences late Sunday night and produced before the court of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) Dhaka yesterday.

The CMM, after hearing the petition moved by the Court Inspector, granted a five-day remand.

Criminal Investigation Department (CID) sources said that the arrests were made following the confessional statement of accused Major (retd) Kazi Emdadul Haq, who is now in the Dhaka Central Jail.

Emdad, arrested by the CID on March 1, reportedly told the magistrate in his statement recorded under Section 164 of the CrPC that Abdul Latif and Shamsur Rahman were involved in the killing of General Manzur.

Latif, also a former head of the Bangladesh Rifles, was a brigadier and Shamsur Rahman a Lt. Colonel, both posted in the Chittagong Cantonment in May-June 1981.

Maj Gen Manzur was killed on the night of June 1, 1981 after having led an abortive coup in which President Ziaur Rahman was assassinated at

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Looking Back at March towards Independence

On this day in 1971, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in a speech at Nishtar Park, Karachi, said that if power was to be transferred to the people before any constitutional settlement, as demanded by Sheikh Mujib, it would be transferred to the majority party in East Pakistan, and the majority party here.

Mr Bhutto spoke strongly in favour of "one Pakistan." He gave his views on how democratic principles should work in a country divided in two, saying that in the situation of Pakistan, against a background of the majority parties of both Wings had to arrive at a general settlement. He said that the rule of the majority for the whole country would become applicable only if the six-point demand was dropped.

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Clarification

No early move to review lock-in policy: SEC

The Chairman of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has issued a statement clarifying the position of SEC in respect of a report published in The Daily Star on March 12 under the headline 'SEC may reconsider lock-in rule'.

In the report he was quoted as saying that the SEC was examining the possibility of withdrawing the lock-in period for liquidation of shares by foreign investors. This was stated by him in connection with a representation sent to the SEC and the Ministry of Finance by five leading global firms, the report said.

In his clarification the SEC Chairman said what he had told the reporter was that he had just received the aforementioned representation and would go through it, but that there was no immediate intention to review the policy because sufficient time had not been allowed for its implementation.

Indian team due today to see CHT rehabilitation

CHITTAGONG, Mar 13: A 20-member Indian delegation arrives tomorrow at Khagrachhari under the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) on a five-day visit to see for themselves the rehabilitation programmes for the tribal refugees in the CHT, reports BSS.

The delegation will enter Bangladesh through Ramgarh border.

The delegation comprising Tripura State Health and Energy Minister Keshab Majumder, Sports and Youth Affairs Minister Jitendra Chowdhury and others will be accompanied by the CHT Rehabilitation Commission.

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Quantity of rice, atta under OMS increased

The government has decided to increase the quantity of rice and atta for open market sale (OMS) throughout the country from today in view of high price of rice in various parts of the country, according to an official announcement, reports BSS.

Under the new arrangement, one and a half tons of rice and one and a half tons of atta will be sold daily in thanas consisting of four unions while two and a half tons of rice and same quantity of atta will be available for sale in thanas having five to 10 unions each day.

Three and a half tons of rice and equal quantity of atta will be sold daily in thanas having 11 and above unions, the announcement said.

For Rajshahi and Barisal Divisional cities, a total of 12 tons of rice and 12 tons of atta have been allocated for open market sale everyday. Earlier allocation in those areas was

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia being received by Chinese Premier Li Peng (C) and his wife Zhaou Li at a reception hosted by the Chinese Premier in honour of some heads of State and government at the Sheraton Hotel in the Danish capital Copenhagen on Sunday. — PID photo

Copenhagen summit concludes

10-point declaration to fight poverty adopted

COPENHAGEN, Mar 13: The first World Summit on Social Development approved by consensus a 10-point declaration and a 65-page Programme of Action against poverty, unemployment and social injustices early Monday at the end of a week-long conference, reports AFP.

The non-binding declaration had been agreed by the various delegations Friday, before the two-day weekend session attended by an unprecedented 118 heads of state and government out of 184 countries represented.

However some states voiced reservations on certain aspects of the programme, such as the Vatican and Iran on references to procreation and a number of Islamic states on items which could be contrary to Quranic Sharia law.

The number of speakers in the final session was so great that the clock was stopped at midnight to respect formally the scheduled summit timetable from March 6 to 12.

The final vote and closure came at 2:40 am (0140 GMT). The approved programme

addresses specific issues, such as debt relief for African countries and honouring International Labour Organization (ILO) rules on child and forced labour, but its significance, delegates said, was larger — putting social considerations on the world agenda in the same way the earth summit in Rio de Janeiro brought environmental concerns to the fore in 1992.

Some nations, however, were bitter about the summit, feeling it reinforced a western power structure, embodied in the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, that restricted rather than raised up developing nations.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said Saturday: "We move from one major conference to another, pronouncing with lofty global action programmes, but we have never satisfactorily made available the means of their implementation."

Bangladesh Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia called for developing countries to be allowed to play a role in the deal.

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PM arrives in London

LONDON, Mar 13: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia arrived in London this afternoon from Copenhagen after attending the World Summit on Social Development in the Danish capital, reports BSS.

On arrival at Hotel Hilton in London, Begum Zia was given a hearty welcome by a large number of Bangladeshis living in the United Kingdom.

Leaders of UK unit of the BNP and its front organisations were also present there.

The Prime Minister is scheduled to attend the Commonwealth Day reception here this evening.

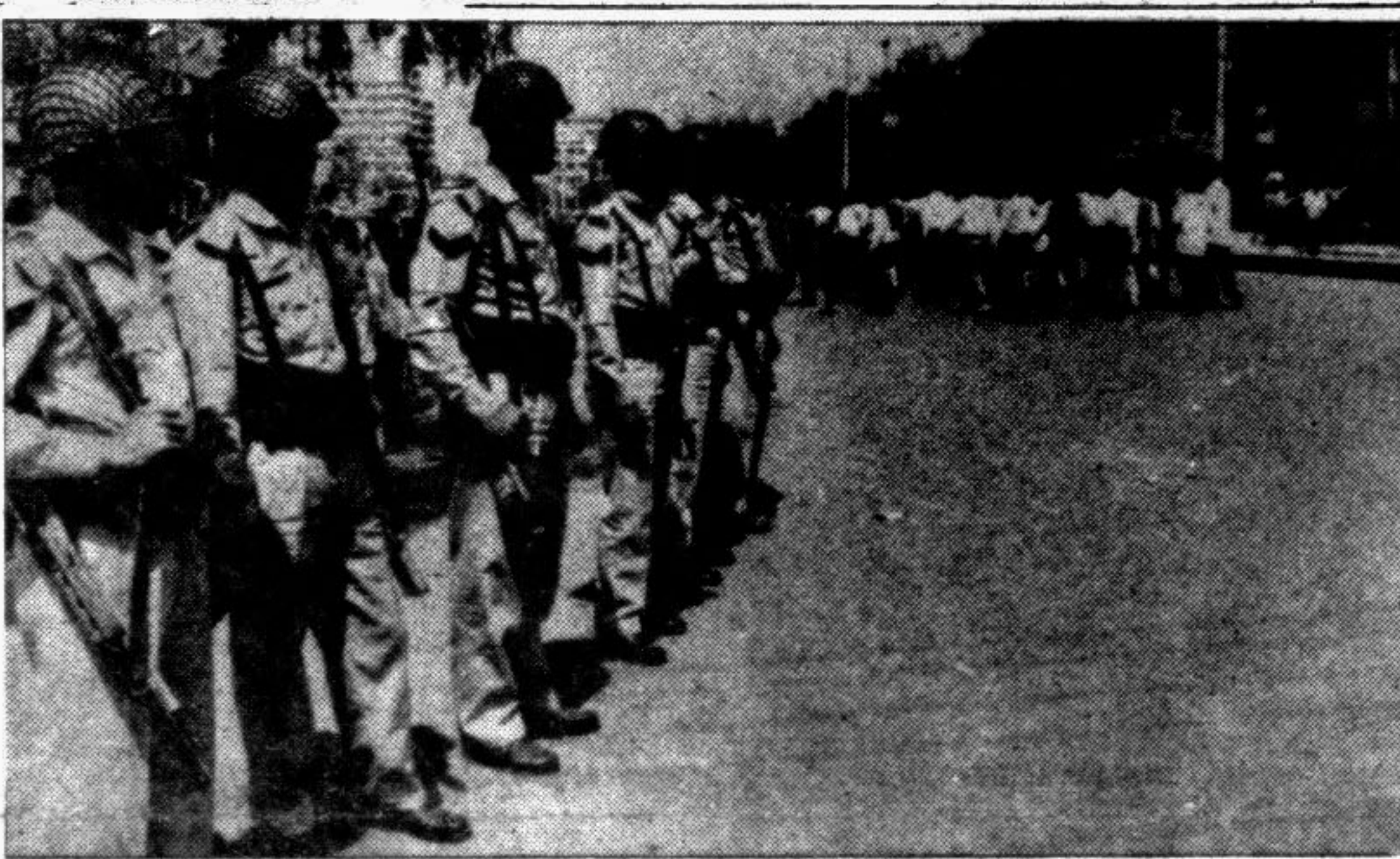
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130 tonnes of urea seized

PABNA, Mar 13: Authorities in anti-black marketing drive seized 130 metric tons of urea fertiliser at the Nagarbari Ghat and in Athgoria thana of the district today, reports UNB.

A vigilance team led by magistrate Al-Fama Siddiqui seized 90 metric tons of urea, allotted for distribution in the district, from Nagarbari ferry terminal area. The fertiliser was heading towards Dhaka in

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A strong contingent of BDR and riot police deployed at the city's Zero Point near the GPO stand and watch as an opposition procession passes by chanting slogans during yesterday's hartal hours. — Star photo

Hartal passes off peacefully

By Staff Correspondent

The second day of the 48-hour countrywide hartal called by the major opposition parties passed off peacefully, barring stray incidents yesterday.

The Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami called the hartal that will end this morning at 6 am in pursuance of their demands including dissolution of the present Parliament, resignation of the BNP government and holding of elections under a neutral caretaker government.

In the capital, small processions were brought out by pro-hartal activists who chanted slogans calling for acceptance of the Opposition demands.

The three main opposition parties held separate meetings in the city during the hartal period.

Since the morning, a number of crackers were exploded in different parts of the city including Mirpur, Farm Gate, Golap Shah Mazar, Bangabandhu Avenue and Demra areas.

Around half a dozen people were reported injured in cracker explosions. Our Dhaka

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Hasina tells press in city

Country facing crisis due to corruption

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina has accused the government of corruption and levelled charges against the Prime Minister and some of her cabinet colleagues.

She also said the country is facing serious food and fertiliser crisis due to the ruling party's corruption, nepotism and politicisation.

"The country's agriculture and industrial sectors have collapsed while the ministers, their relatives and BNP men are making money by resorting to corruption," the AL chief told a press conference yesterday.

Hasina said public life has become unbearable since the government failed to check the price hike of essentials including rice, fertiliser and paper.

"It is needless to say that the government has totally failed to run the country and is further pushing it towards crisis by demonstrating its obstinacy," Hasina told the newsmen at her party's Dhaka office.

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Afghan Shi'ite leader Mazari killed as fighting continues

PESHAWAR, Mar 13: Afghan Shi'ite leader Abdul Ali Mazari was killed today, a spokesman for Taliban movement in Pakistan and military commanders in Kabul said, reports AFP.

The Taliban spokesman, Mohammad Masoom Afghani, said Mazari was killed in a gunbattle on a helicopter taking him and other prisoners to Kandahar in South Afghanistan from Charasyab near Kabul.

But, three commanders of Afghan President Burhanuddin Rabbani said in Kabul that Mazari, the leader of the Hezbi-Wahdat faction, died when the helicopter crashed somewhere during the Charasyab-Kandahar flight.

Mazari's secretary and a commander from Wahdat, who were among the prisoners on the aircraft, were also killed, the pro-Rabbani commanders said.

In Pakistan, the Taliban spokesman, speaking by phone

from the Pakistani border town of Chaman, opposite Kandahar, said the gunbattle occurred when Mazari snatched a Kalashnikov rifle from a guard.

Mazari opened fire killing six Taliban guards, before being gunned down by the others, Afghani said, adding that the helicopter had reached Kandahar.

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Pro-Rabbani troops were expected to launch an imminent assault on the Taliban headquarters at Charasyab, and near the Khairabad hills, military sources said.

"We'll attack as soon as our forces capture Khairabad hills," said frontline commander Gul Haider.

In another development, the Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said in a report monitored in Islamabad that at least 70 people were killed when pro-Rabbani jets bombed the Charasyab base.

300 rounded up in Karachi

KARACHI, Mar 13: Police said today they have arrested almost 300 people in three days as part of a citywide crackdown against the runaway violence in Karachi, reports AP.

Police have confiscated scores of weapons, including a number of AK-47 assault rifles. However, most of those detained are suspected of only petty crimes and none has been charged in any of the recent terrorist attacks that have plagued Karachi.

One Pakistan newspaper, the Nation, said the number of arrested had reached 1,000. But police told The Associated Press that just under 300 men had been taken into custody since the operation began Saturday.

Two people were gunned down today, police said. A day earlier, 13 people were killed, including nine shot dead when attackers opened fire with automatic weapons at the office of the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (Haqiqi).

BJP backs Joshi as Maharashtra CM

BOMBAY, Mar 13: An alliance of two pro-Hindu parties, which defeated India's ruling Congress (I) in recent polls in Maharashtra, named their leader today to govern the prestigious western Indian state, reports AFP.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) backed the selection of Manohar Joshi of its ally, the Shiv Sena, as the next chief minister to govern Maharashtra, of which Bombay is the capital.

Joshi is the number two in the militant Shiv Sena. His unanimous selection was greeted with cheers and the exploding of firecrackers by activists of the BJP and the Shiv Sena at the alliance's headquarters in central Bombay.

AP from Delhi adds: For the third round of state elections

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