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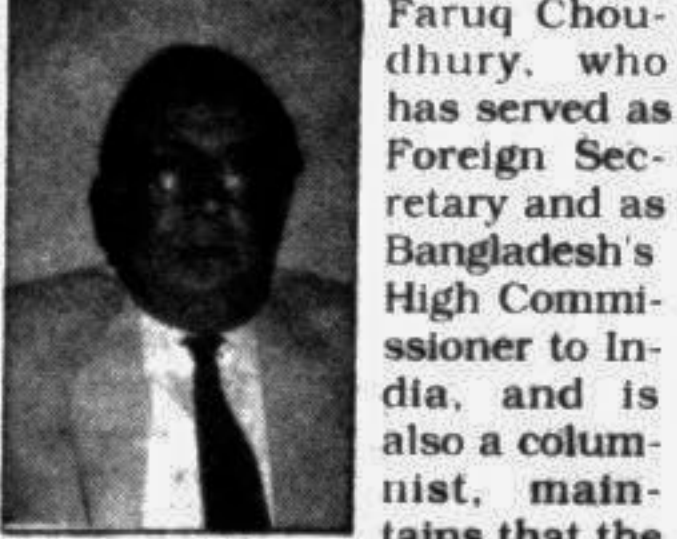
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Untying the Gordian Knot of Our Politics

A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS AND ARTICLES ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL CRISIS



Faruq Chy
Faruq Choudhury, who has served as Foreign Secretary and as Bangladesh's High Commissioner to India, and is also a columnist, maintains that the present crisis is basically a crisis of confidence. That experience of bye-elections has been far from happy and there is no point in blaming one party or another. He is for correcting the situation so that such deeds are not repeated ever in future. He feels that the basis of democracy is free and fair elections and this should not, therefore, be left to chances. Full text of his responses to the Daily Star questionnaire is on page 4.

Tomorrow: Khurshid Alam, chairman of Dhaka Stock Exchange, responds to the Daily Star questionnaire.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Clashes leave 26 hurt in Sirajganj

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 17: At least 26 people were injured, three of them seriously, in two different clashes between rival groups here today. Police said centering a dispute over leasing a khas marsh, a clash erupted at Masimpur area of the town at about 11-30 am which left 17 people wounded. Three people — Faziur Rahman, Mokhlesur Rahman and Akbar Ali — were admitted to Sirajganj General Hospital with critical injuries. The other clash occurred in front of Eye Hospital at Dhanbandi between two groups of youths leaving 9 people injured, reports UNB.

Bumper potato harvest turns into a bane

By Morshed Ali Khan back from Munshiganj

A bumper potato crop in Munshiganj district appears to be turning into a bane for the farmers as traders are only offering prices much below the production cost.

During a visit yesterday, this correspondent found thousands of maunds of potato stockpiled along the village roads and highways, and the farmers trying hard to sell off their crop.

"We farmers are dead," said a hysteric Mohammad Karimullah of Tongbari thana. "We have been turned virtually into beggars because nobody is buying our produce."

Many of the farmers have gone out of their wits apparently because of the stress they are now undergoing due to the extremely dull sale situation.

Many more sold out their household goods to make up the loss and save their families from consequent sufferings.

Farmers and traders pointed out that severe transportation problem and inadequate storage facilities have contributed to the crisis.

According to Munshiganj Agriculture Extension Department, the on-going potato harvest, which began earlier this month, is projected to produce over 3.5 lakh tonnes compared to an actual production of 2.2 lakh tonnes last season.

The bumper harvest saw a dramatic fall in wholesale prices as traders are taking advantage of the situation and offering only around Tk 100 per maund, which is way below

the production cost of Tk 140 per maund.

Even during the last season, the wholesale price of potato at this time of the year was between Tk. 140 and Tk. 170.

Alam Mollah, a potato grower from a village on the Munshiganj-Tongbari highway, expressed his disgust at the situation and said, "For growing one maund (37.5 kg) of potato I spent Tk. 140. So far I have been offered only Tk 100."

Farmers in Munshiganj, Tongbari, Sri Nagar and in parts of Bikrampur complained that the canals in the area, the main routes for transportation of the harvest, are absolutely dry this year, hampering sale

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AT WITS' END: A farmer casts a vacant look sitting by a mountain of just harvested potatoes at a field in Munshiganj yesterday. —Star photo by AKM Mohsin

Rare protest against Beijing's choice for vice premier

BEIJING, Mar 17: In a rare show of protest, nearly one-third of deputies to China's parliament today rejected the government's choice for the vice premier who will be in charge of the huge agriculture portfolio, report Reuters, AP.

The 2,752 deputies at the National People's Congress meeting in the cavernous Great Hall of the People voted by secret ballot on two candidates for vice premiers proposed by premier Li Peng.

In polling for Jiang Chunyun, 605 deputies voted against, 391 abstained and 10 did not vote, while 1,746 voted in favour — an unusually low 63.44 per cent support rate.

Deputies said this was one of the largest protest votes on record in the normally timid parliament.

The National People's Congress also approved the appointment of Wu Bangguo as vice premier of the State Council, or cabinet. They join four other vice premiers for terms that end in 1997.

Wu is a former Communist Party leader in Shanghai, an important power base of President and Communist Party Secretary Jiang Zemin, who himself was promoted from the party city.

Jiang Chunyun was party

leader in Shandong province, an important food-producing region in eastern China. He is not related to Jiang Zemin.

Wu is expected to take charge of industry and reform of state-owned enterprises, and Jiang Chunyun likely will oversee agriculture. Both are crucial sectors facing difficult economic reforms.

The promotions were expected to strengthen President Jiang as the influence of senior leader Deng Xiaoping wanes.

Deng, 90, is believed to be in failing health, and Jiang is considered the core of a new

generation of leaders. Jiang reportedly pushed the appointments last fall during a party plenum that decided on the candidate list for the vice premiership.

The rubber-stamp legislature approved the promotions in the first 10 minutes of its session. Wu and Jiang were the only candidates.

But when the results of the voting on Jiang Chunyun appeared on an electronic board, a long, low rumble went through the auditorium.

Delegates said later that the results reflect concern about Jiang's age, 64. Although many Chinese leaders, including Premier Li Peng and the existing four vice premiers, are older, the delegates said they felt Jiang was too old to be a vice premier in charge of one of the most difficult issues facing China's development.

They also said his promotion runs counter to the government's stated intention of bringing younger blood into its ranks.

Jiang is considered to have done a good job with agricultural reforms in Shandong, including the development of flourishing township enterprises that provide jobs to surplus rural labourers.

But some delegates said

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BCL-Shibir clash in Sylhet: 15 hurt

SYLHET, Mar 17: At least 15 persons were injured in a clash between the activists of the Bangladesh Chhatra League (S-P) and the Islami Chhatra Shibir on the Beanibazar government college campus yesterday.

Chhatra League activist Sarwar was admitted to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital while others to the thana health complex. Separate cases were registered.

been present for previous Singapore death watches said the pre-dawn hanging at Changi prison saw unusual security at the jail's entrance, which is as close as outsiders are allowed during a hanging.

They said several officers were outside the gates on patrol, and others, some wearing bullet-proof vests and carrying automatic rifles, could be seen just inside. Police dogs were also on hand.

A crowd of about 25 outside the gates comprised mostly journalists. But also present were Contemplation's Philippine lawyers and a woman who had flown through the night in a futile effort to save Contemplation with her testimony.

Virginia (Vangie) Parumog

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Flor Contemplacion, the Filipino maid hanged for murder in Singapore yesterday. —AFP photo

Singapore rejects Manila's appeal, hangs maid

SINGAPORE, Mar 17: Singapore hanged Filipino maid Flor Contemplacion for double murder today after rejecting an appeal from Philippines President Fidel Ramos and an 11th-hour plea by her lawyers — and despite protests and threats in Manila, reports Reuters.

The 42-year-old mother of four was convicted of strangling another maid and drowning the son of the victim's employers on May 4, 1991.

In the days before her execution, claims she was innocent emerged in the Philippines, there were public protests by human rights groups and others, and threats were made to the Singapore embassy.

Journalists who had also

CPA body to improve port activities

CHITTAGONG, Mar 17: The Chittagong Port Authority has constituted a 19-member consultative committee to ensure operational improvement in the port which handles over 80 per cent of the country's imports and exports.

The committee, headed by the port Chairman, includes representatives from the Chittagong Chamber, the FBCCI, BGMEA, the stevedores' association, the steamers' association, the clearing and forwarding agents and other organisations.

According to port sources, the committee will meet once a month to review the operational activities of the port and suggest ways of raising the efficiency of cargo handling.

Meanwhile, increase in the

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Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina along with other party leaders, intellectuals and student leaders placing wreath at the mazar of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Tungpara in Gopalganj on the late leader's 75th birthday yesterday. —Star photo

PM tells Bangladeshis Continue efforts to supplement march towards progress

LONDON, Mar 17: Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia has urged the Bangladeshis living abroad to continue their united efforts to supplement the country's march towards progress, reports BSS.

Addressing two separate receptions catered to her by Bangladesh Caterers' Association and Greater Sylhet Development Council here last night, the Prime Minister asked the Bangladeshis to work for further brightening the country's image abroad.

Bangladesh has now emerged as a country of huge potentials, the Prime Minister said urging the expatriates to avail the opportunities of in-

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Bangabandhu's 75th birthday Hasina criticises govt indifference

The 75th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was observed throughout the country yesterday with a renewed pledge to materialise the dream of the late leader.

The Bangabandhu's birthday celebration committee took elaborate programmes at Tungpara in Gopalganj district, the birth place of Mujib.

The committee, led by Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina, placed wreaths at the mazar of Bangabandhu at Tungpara in the morning.

Hasina, who is also chief patron of the celebration committee opened the two-day programme through a rally of children and juveniles.

Addressing a discussion meeting at the mazar premises, the AL chief urged all concerned to project the true history of the Bengalee nation and Bangabandhu's contributions in liberating the country before the new generation.

Hasina criticised the state-controlled electronic media for not putting up any programme on the birthday of the 'father of the nation.' 'The government' is remaining si-

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First batch of deportees from S Arabia arrives

CHITTAGONG, Mar 17: The first batch of Bangladeshi deportees from Saudi Arabia arrived here today on board a Panama flag carrying vessel 'MV Mecca-1'.

One of the deportees identified as Nur Mohammad (26) died during the voyage.

The fellow deportees alleged that Nur Mohammad died due to lack of medicare facilities on board the vessel.

They said Nur was seriously injured as he was beaten by Saudi Police in Jeddah.

The deportees were received by the customs and immigration officials. A large contingent of police was deployed at jetty no. 1 where the vessel anchored after arrival at 1 pm today.

The arrival of the ship was delayed by six days.

It sailed from Jeddah on February 28.

The deportees left the jetty after completing customs and immigration formalities.

The dead body was sent for post mortem examination.

The ship captained by Amin Pakhi, and Egyptian national, is owned by a company of Egypt. It was chartered by the Saudi government to send back the Bangladeshi deportees who were declared illegal.

The Saudi government has

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Farmers block rail track for fertiliser at fair price

JAMALPUR, Mar 17: Rail communication between northern districts and the capital was disrupted today as farmers blocked the rail track here demanding fertiliser at fair price, reports UNB.

Witnesses said Dhaka-bound inter-city Ekota and Jamuna, and two mail trains, one bound for Chittagong and another for Dhaka, were stranded at different points after several hundred farmers put barricade near Narundi station at about 2 am.

The farmers, however, withdrew the barricade with the intervention of railway police this morning.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner of Jamalpur Akhtar Hossain Khan told UNB that production of BCIC's Jamuna Fertiliser Factory in the district had decreased due to mechanical trouble.

He said the factory now produces 1,100 metric tons of Urea everyday against the production capacity of 1,700 metric tons.

"We need 22,000 metric tons of Urea, but till now we have received only 7,000 tons," the DC said adding that Jamalpur is the worst sufferer of the present fertiliser crisis.

The supply of Urea fertiliser from the factory has also been hampered due to shortage of transports, including railway wagons and trucks, he



Looking Back at March towards Independence

On this day in 1971 The Awami League chief Sheikh Mujibur Rahman rejected the commission of enquiry set up by the Martial Law Administrator Zone B "to go into the circumstances which led to the calling of the Army in aid of civil power in various parts of East Pakistan between March 2 and March 9".

In a statement issued in Dacca the Awami League chief declared the people of Bangladesh shall not co-operate with such a commission in any respect. He also said no one should nominate any member to this 'commission' nor serve as its members.

More on Page 4

Manzur's murder Latif, Shams likely to be produced in court today

CID officials continued interrogation of the two former army officials detained in connection with the alleged murder of Major General Manzur.

The five-day police remand of Maj Gen (rtd) Latif and Lt Col (rtd) Shamsur Rahman, ended yesterday but they were not produced before the court.

Court sources said they are likely to be produced in the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court today. Another source hinted that the two former army officials might be taken to Chittagong since they were posted at Chittagong cantonment when Gen Manzur died on June 1, 1981 at the cantonment following an abortive coup in which President Ziaur Rahman was assassinated.

Until yesterday, Gen Latif and Col Shamsur Rahman were kept at the CID office at Malibagh. Tight security and top secrecy were being maintained at the office.

Details could not be known.

AL to gherao Food Directorate tomorrow

The Awami League will gherao the Food Directorate in the city tomorrow as part of its country-wide programme to protest the price spiral of essentials including rice, fertiliser and paper.

Prior to the gherao programme, the party will hold a rally at Bangabandhu Avenue at 10 am. AL chief Sheikh Hasina will address the rally.

Besides, there will be demonstrations at all district headquarters.

2 UN planes come under gunfire at Sarajevo airport

SARAJEVO, Mar 17: Two UN planes came under heavy machine gun fire at Sarajevo airport today, prompting the UN to close the airfield, UN protection force (UNPROFOR) spokesmen said here, reports AFP.

Four more shot dead in Karachi

KARACHI, Mar 17: The death toll from violence in Karachi, Pakistan's economic capital, rose to more than 100 late Thursday after four people were shot dead in separate incidents, witnesses and officials said today, reports AFP.

The dead included two boys aged 10 and eleven, killed when gunmen fleeing a bungled robbery in western Karachi opened random fire from a yellow taxi to deter pursuit, witnesses said.

Ctg Urea Factory Efforts on to resume production tomorrow

The authorities are trying to resume production at the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser factory from tomorrow since its stock of the soil nutrient is being exhausted fast, according to official sources.

Production at the factory was suspended Tuesday night because salinity level of the water of the Karnaphuli river increased alarmingly. Water is one of the basic raw materials of the Tk 1500-crore factory which produces 1700 tons of urea a day.

Factory sources told The Daily Star the work to install a one-kilometre pipeline between the Karnaphuli Fertiliser Factory (KAFCO) and the Chittagong Urea Fertiliser

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