



US Congressman Bill Richardson being received by Director General of the Foreign Ministry M Ashraf-ud-Dowlah and US Ambassador David N Merrill at Zia International Airport yesterday.

— PID photo

### Trade bodies' leaders on polls

## People's rights ignored, economy at stake

Star Report

The February 15 parliamentary polls have put the people on the sideline and the country's economy into great jeopardy, according to leaders of different trade bodies.

Talking to The Daily Star, they said that political uncertainty has gripped the country at a time when it is taking preparation for transfer of capital and technology from the developed countries.

Abdul Haque, President of the Bangladesh Reconditioned Vehicles Importers and Dealers Association said that the election failed to ensure people's participation in it.

It fulfilled only the constitutional obligation, but ignored people's right to franchise. Voters' turnout was poor. It was not only a failure of the government, but also of the opposition parties in a nascent democracy.

"I think there is still time for a consensus and a fresh elections to elect a representative parliament. Our political leaders should consider how much loss an economy like ours can really bear with. Due to the long drawn political crisis, all the economic indicators are showing a downward trend."

The upper middle class, who form most of our clients, are not buying cars any more, because their vehicles become the first target in any political demonstration. In Chittagong Port, some 5,000 imported reconditioned cars are lying idle, he said.

Ziaul Huq, Chairman of Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners Association, gave a bleak picture of the overall transport business and said letters were sent recently to all other commercial banks seeking waiver of interests. The current situation has forced us to do that. Buses and trucks become the first target during a demonstration. All backward linkage industries are related to the transport sector become idle during a strike.

The political leaders should now weigh which is more important — the constitution, the caretaker government or the economy, he said.

Rezaul Karim, Chairman of the Bangladesh Jute Association, said leaders of the ruling party and the Opposition should sit together to resolve the political crisis for the sake of the country's economy.

"I believe for the sake of constitutional continuity and greater national interest, we can still sit together and find out a mutually acceptable solution," said Karim who was elected uncontested in the election. He, however, claimed that turnout of voters was good

despite boycott of the polls by the opposition.

Dr Momenul Haq, Secretary General, Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries, said that the just-concluded election would not be able to bring about any solution to the political crisis. It would, rather, lead the country to a great confrontation.

He said that the turnout of voters in the February 15 elections was poor.

The BNP, which had a good election record, was discriminated in the polls, he claimed. "Now it stands without a good mandate."

"I wonder how the government is going to make up for the overall loss in the financial sector over the last couple of months. Our fear is that the June budget is coming with lot of proposals for tax increase."

"Now our only hope is that good sense would prevail in the political leadership."

Nizami urges Biswas to form caretaker govt

Jamaat-e-Islami leader

Matiur Rahman Nizami yesterday said the BNP government has lost its effectiveness in the face of the Opposition's non-cooperation movement, reports UNB.

Addressing a rally at the north gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque in the afternoon, he said the government had failed to bring the public servants to offices even after issuing "circulars of threats."

The Jamaat secretary general reiterated the demand for cancellation of the February 15 election and holding fresh polls under a neutral caretaker government within 90 days.

He urged the president to form a caretaker government and arrange fresh elections.

Hasina

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Meanwhile, Jatiya Party has

condemned the arrests of its

leaders Barrister Moudud Ah-

med and Anwar Hossain Manju

and leaders of other Oppo-

sition parties including Awami

League's Mohammad Nasim

and Begum Matia Chowdhury.

President member and

city President of JP Col (Retd)

A Malek and JP General Secre-

tary Abdus Salam in a joint

statement yesterday demand-

ing the release of the leaders

said that arrests and repres-

sion of Opposition leaders

would never be able to stop

the on-going movement.

Later, JCD activists ransacked the district AL office and damaged its furniture and window panes.

The JCD brought out the

procession from Sadar Road

protesting the opposition's

non-cooperative programme

while the BCL demonstrated in

protest against the arrest of the

four opposition leaders in the

capital.

Meanwhile, debutant Ken-

ya, who created some sort of

reputation of being a born

fighter despite losing against

favourites India and Australia,

will take on Zimbabwe in a

Group A fixture at Patna, India.

## Lawyers abstain from attending Supreme Court

Country's Supreme Court did not function yesterday as lawyers of its both divisions abstained responding to the opposition call for non-cooperation with the government, reports UNB.

Supreme Court sources said lawyers of both the Appellate and High Court Divisions did not attend the courts, forcing them to close judicial functions for the day.

Another source, however, said a group of lawyers requested the judges of both divisions of the Supreme Court not to go to the courts and also asked the officials to shut the offices.

The Dhaka District Judge's and Session Court also did not function because of boycott by lawyers, sources said.

### Hartal observed in Natore

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Feb 25: A day-long hartal was observed in Natore town today to protest the killing of a transport workers' leader yesterday.

The Jatiya Samik League called the hartal protesting the killing of Matiur Rahman Mukta, former president of Paribahan Samik Union of Natore district.

All modes of transport stayed off the roads and shops and business houses remained closed during hartal hours. The hartal coincided with the second day of the 3 day non-cooperation programme called by the main opposition political parties.

Matiur Rahman was buried at Garikhana graveyard today after autopsy at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, Natore Sadar police have arrested 6 persons for their alleged involvement in the killing of Matiur.

### DCCI's appeal to Biswas, Khaleda Hasina

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) has appealed to the President, the Prime Minister and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina to resolve the crisis now facing the nation through their political sagacity and wisdom, reports BSS.

Ali Hossain, president of DCCI, in an appeal addressed to the three persons said the anarchy created in the country due to continued politico-social-economic instability is not only affecting the trade and business community, but creating far reaching impact on the national economy. If the present situation continued for long, a catastrophic situation will develop which would not be desirable to any quarter.

The gross domestic product (GDP) growth was already going down and that infection has also touched agriculture after affecting the industrial sector, the appeal said.

We would not even be worthy to seek pardon from the posterity if the situation continued, he opined.

### 2 Pirojpur JCD activists hurt in blasts, AL office ransacked

PIROJPUR, Feb 25: Two activists of the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) were critically injured in bomb explosions near the Town Hall today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said Kamruzzaman Shaheen, 25, and Rana, 24, were injured when several home-made bombs exploded in the area after the processions of JCD and pro-Awami League Chhatra League ended there at about 7:30 pm. They were admitted to Chittagong Medical Hospital along with seven others.

Witnesses and police said the gunfire broke out when supporters of ruling BNP reportedly tried to take control of the port.

Our Brahmonbari Correspondent reported that at least



Police guarding the court building in the city on the second day of the opposition's non-cooperation programme yesterday.

— Star photo

## 200 hurt: Non-cooperation

From Page 1

Police arrested 35 people from different places of the city for picketing, 25 from Motijheel, 10 from Demra.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, which had boycotted the parliamentary polls, called the non-cooperation programme demanding dismissal of the illegal government, cancellation of the 'farcical' polls and holding of fresh elections within 90 days under a neutral caretaker government.

At Tongi, the rail-route gateway to Dhaka, hundreds of opposition activists fought pitched battles with police while damaging the automatic telecommunication signal system and trying to set slippers on fire.

At least 50 people including two policemen were injured in the clashes. Police fired rubber bullets and tear gas shells to disperse the mob. Police arrested 26 people from the spot.

Opposition activists hurled a bomb at the convoy of ministers at the port crossing at 4 pm. But

Opposition leaders at a press conference later blamed the ruling party activists for letting loose a reign of terror in the city.

Awami League leader and city mayor ABM Mohiuddin Ahmed, JP leader Mahmudul Islam Chowdhury, Jamaat leader Abu Taher and Indumandana Datta of JSD spoke at the press conference.

At one stage, the angry activists attacked Kazipur police station and the residence of TNO and set fire to valuables inside. Later, they stormed the local BNP office and ransacked its furniture.

The injured, three were admitted to Kazipur Thana Health Complex.

Meanwhile, opposition parties brought out separate processions and held rallies in all the nine thanas of the district protesting the arrest of their central leaders.

Meanwhile, at least 30 people were injured as opposition activists clashed with BNP supporters and set fire to the TNO office at Dhunot, 25 miles from Bogra district headquarters yesterday.

Witnesses said several hundred opposition activists gheraoed the Dhunot Thana Parishad confronting the BNP supporters and set fire to government offices inside its complex at around 7 pm.

Police fired about 50 rounds of blank shots to disperse the clashing groups.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami later brought out a joint procession protesting the police firing.

Our Brahmonbari Correspondent reported that at least



A policeman examining the wreckage of the bombed bus in Jerusalem yesterday.

— AFP/UNB photo

7 persons were injured during separate clashes between police and activists of opposition political parties at Kosba and Bancharampur.

Police arrested 22 persons during the clashes.

UNB adds from Shirajganj:

Ten people, including two policemen, were injured as the activists of Awami League attacked the TNO and BNP offices in Kazipur thana yesterday.

Police said they brought out a procession in the thana protesting the arrest of its central leader Mohammad Nasim.

At one stage, the angry activists attacked Kazipur police station and the residence of TNO and set fire to valuables inside. Later, they stormed the local BNP office and ransacked its furniture.

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