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Inside Today

Article

Constitution and Institution
Column: Beneath the Surface by Abdul Bayes Page 4

Focus
Text of Tofael's interview; Lingering political crisis: Need for fresh thinking Page 5

Live from the Internet
Fundamental changes needed in political culture; Global Bangladeshis express concern Page 9

International
Taiwan asks its forces to boost defensive posture
Socio-political struggles in 21st century to be about water, says UN report Page 8

Business
APEC ministers reach agreement on a set of guidelines
Israel proposes \$100m fund to create jobs for Palestinians Pages 6, 7

Metropolitan
Dhaka Day by Day
Tired of wearing a pollution mask? Try our fresh air Page 3

See 144 imposed around Parliament JS session begins today amid Opposition gherao

By Staff Correspondent

The sixth Jatiya Sangsad goes into its first session at 4:00 pm today amid an Opposition programme to gherao the Sangsad Bhavan and observe the day as 'black day'.

The mainstream opposition on Saturday announced the programmes to 'resist legislation of the bogus parliament' hours after the President had summoned the new parliament into session.

The three major opposition parties — Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami — that boycotted the February 15 parliamentary polls, is demanding scrapping of the 'farjical' elections, resignation of the BNP government and formation of a non-party caretaker government to hold a fresh election of the sixth Jatiya Sangsad.

On the eve of the parliament session, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police last night imposed Section 144 in the areas surrounding the parliament building banning rallies, demonstrations and processions and carrying of illegal arms.

The session is expected to be short-lived. According to parliament secretariat sources, in the order of the day, elections of the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker would take place first. It would be followed by the elections of a panel of chairmen. Then an obituary reference would be adopted, to be followed by tabling of 19 ordinances and delivery of the President's speech.

The BNP will not introduce its bill for non-party caretaker government in the House today. The bill will be introduced in the House on the next working day of the session, the sources said.

Opposition to gherao JS today

By Staff Correspondent

The mainstream opposition will observe 'Black Day' today protesting the installation of the sixth parliament that goes to its first session this afternoon.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami had also announced separate plans to gherao the Parliament building on the day.

While announcing their identical protest programmes on Saturday, after summoning of the sixth parliament, the three parties, termed it as a 'bogus parliament elected through a farjical poll on February 15'.

Meanwhile, Commissioner of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) last night imposed a ban on staging demonstrations, processions and rallies and carrying arms and explosives around the Jatiya Sangsad Bhavan area. The ban order would remain effective till the end of the first session of the sixth parliament, said a DMP source.

Sabotage suspected Tk 500cr goods gutted at Benapole landport

JESSORE, Mar 18: Goods and property worth about five hundred crore taka were gutted today at Benapole landport in a devastating fire, report UNB, BSS.

There was, however, no casualty in the fire at the country's largest landport, bordering India.

Witnesses and police said the fire originated at about 1:30 pm from a burning stove explosion near No-1 godown at the port while an Indian truck driver was cooking under his vehicle.

Official sources and the members of the law enforcing agencies confirmed the incident as an act of sabotage.

BSS correspondent reported that the fire originated from a kerosene stove when three Indian citizens after entering into Bangladesh territory, from across the border in the guise of truck worker were engaged in cooking in the stove.

The fire instantly spread to the nearby sheds of the godown and burnt to ashes three of its largest sheds - Shed Nos 7, 8 and 10 - where valuable commodities, including motor vehicles, tractors, chemicals, machinery and cotton yarn were stored.

The raging flames also gutted some 16 Indian trucks, parked inside the godown for unloading imported goods, mostly chemicals and yarn.

According to police and Customs sources, the gutted items, include 10 microbuses, 11 Maruti cars, six tractors and huge yarn, dyes, chemicals and machinery.

Joint Collector of Benapole Customs Manpan Fatwari estimated the loss at around Tk 500 crore. Clearing and Forwarding agents, put the figure at around Tk 400 crore.

New Rohingya refugees enter Teknaf

From Abdul Monayem Khan

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 18: New Rohingya refugees from Myanmar have started entering the country.

According to local administration officials, at least 62 Rohingyas - Muslims from Myanmar entered into Teknaf thana area crossing the bordering river Naaf in the last 5 days.

Deputy Commissioner of Cox's Bazar district acknowledged the fresh flow of Rohingya refugees.

Teknaf thana police said, 36 persons of 8 families from Akiab, Mongdu and Buchidong areas of Myanmar had tried to enter into the refugee camp at Nayara under the thana on March 13.

When the group tried to enter into the camp, an official of the camp informed the Teknaf thana. The refugees, however, left the place before police visited the spot, he said.

On March 16, another group of 26 people were arrested by BDR when they were crossing the Naaf river to enter into Bangladesh territory.

Hasina urges President Refer to SC caretaker govt for 6th JS polls

By Staff Correspondent

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the President to make a reference to the Supreme Court regarding formation of a caretaker government for holding elections for the sixth Parliament.

Reiterating her demand for scrapping the February 15 'farjical' polls, the AL President said, "Peace can be restored in the country if the President initiates a reference to the Supreme Court."

Sheikh Hasina was addressing a big rally at the Panthapath in the city yesterday, organised by the AL to mark the 76th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Senior party colleagues joined the AL chief in paying tributes to the memory of Bangabandhu.

Amidst anti-government slogans by party supporters, Hasina called upon the government to 'stop bloodshed and meet people's demands immediately'.

Without directly referring to the move initiated by President Abdur Rahman Biswas, at the request of the Prime Minister, for resolving the present political crisis through talks, the AL chief said: "The President betrayed the Opposition as well as the people by summoning session of the Jatiya Sangsad, constituted illegally through an election of vote-rigging."

Awami League along with its two major movement-partners - Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami, said they would demand a reference to the Supreme Court for holding fresh elections.



Awami League president Sheikh Hasina addressing a public meeting at Panthapath yesterday on the occasion of 76th birth anniversary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Sunday. — Star photo

4 AL leaders held in city

By Staff Correspondent

Four Awami League leaders including two ward commissioners of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) were arrested under the Special Powers Act in the small hours of yesterday.

The four leaders are MA Sattar Bhuiyan, Talukdar Sarwar Hossain, MA Salam and Mostaque Hossain Allen.

MA Sattar Bhuiyan, Commissioner of World No 48, Hazaribagh, and senior vice-president of Dhanmondi Thana Awami League, was picked up from his residence by plain-clothes policemen at around 3 am.

Following the arrest, angry supporters staged a sit-in and held a rally in front of the Dhanmondi police station at 7 am.

Local residents and tannery workers observed a hartal from 6 am-2pm yesterday at the spot.

Non-cooperation Series of clashes at Mirpur: 30 hurt

By Staff Correspondent

Hours-long clashes and torching of party offices by rival political activists at Mirpur and stray incidents of violence in some parts of the city left at least 45 people injured on the 10th day yesterday of the Opposition's non-cooperation programme.

Cocktails were hurled at a police water cannon vehicle and three police vans came under mob attack at Pallabi in Mirpur during the violence that started at about 2:30 pm and continued till late in the evening with a few hours' lull period in between. Thirty people were injured in the clashes.

Trouble began in Mirpur Section 10 when Awami League processionists marching towards the Panthapath to attend a party, were attacked reportedly by BNP activists at around 2:30 pm, witnesses said.

The attackers hurled several crackers and fired gunshots creating panic in the area, locals alleged. Violence then spread to Kazipara, Shewrapara, Mirpur Section 6 and 7.

The mob then started damaging rickshaws and shops indiscriminately and torched an autorickshaw at Kazipara. The rival groups were then engaged in clashes, exchanged gunshots, exploded crackers and crude bombs besides setting ablaze ward-level party offices of their opponents, said witnesses.

The violence however cooled down at about 5 pm when police lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the clashing groups.

Fresh violence erupted as a rumour of a killing spread in the area at around 7:00 pm. The violence spread to Technical Crossing and Mirpur Sections 1, 11 and 12.

This correspondent while visiting the area at about 10 pm, saw several people being taken to hospitals.



Magic forecast

The prediction of renowned Bangladeshi magician Jewel Aich on the historic win of the World Cup cricket championship by Sri Lanka came true when it was made public amidst cheers from a jam-packed audience at the National Press Club yesterday.

Aich made the forecast in presence of the Press Club authorities and journalists on the eve of Sunday's exciting final between Sri Lanka and Australia at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, Pakistan.

Written on a white paper, it was sealed up in a packet and locked inside an iron box which was kept at the Press Club reception until its disclosure yesterday afternoon. The key of the iron box, however, was kept in safe custody in the vault of the Press Club branch, of Agrani Bank.

Amanullah, a senior journalist and former managing director of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS), opened the iron box, unfolded the paper containing the forecast and read it out.

Foreign firms stop JMB work

By Inam Ahmed

Construction work of the 700 million US dollar Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge (JMB) came to a halt yesterday as the foreign companies stopped work because of the political crisis affected their operation, according to sources concerned.

The Korean firms, Hyundai constructing the main bridge under Contract-1 and Samwhan, working on the approach road under Contract-2 and 4 have already stopped work, it has confirmed yesterday.

The Dutch contractor, Clinker-loaded cargo vessel sinks in Pashur

KHULNA, Mar 18: A clinker-loaded cargo vessel sank in the river Pashur at small hours today, threatening the green channel to the Mongla port, reports UNB.

Police and port sources said the cargo vessel, MV Hudabia, suddenly capsized at Chula Kamalaj point on the green channel of the river.

The national sub-contractors also failed to supply essential construction materials due to the non-cooperation programme.

The sources said the companies are waiting to release their equipment from the Chittagong port.

In the past few days, experts of the constructing firms came across several threats by pickets at the construction site.

On Monday pickets had stopped a car carrying a Korean expert of Hyundai at a village in Bhupur and warned him not to work during the Opposition programme.

Only two days before that, two more expatriate project officials of Hyundai were injured when their car came under attack and was stoned by pickets.

Haji flights from Mar 27

Haji flights under the government arrangement will begin on March 27, an official handout said yesterday, reports BSS.

Haji flights will continue till April 15. The Hajj pilgrims will start coming to the temporary Hajj camp at Sector 8, Uttara from March 23.

This decision was taken at an inter-ministerial meeting held at the Ministry of Religious Affairs on Hajj Programme '96 with State Minister for Religious Affairs Prof M A Mannan in the chair.

According to the handout, 7,700 Hajj pilgrims will perform their Hajj this year under government management. They have been informed through letters to report to the temporary Hajj camp before the start of Hajj flight.

The prevailing situation in the country was discussed at the meeting and cooperation from all concerned has been sought for safe and secured arrival of Hajj pilgrims to the Hajj camp.

It also appealed to all concerned for due cooperation towards uninterrupted and safe movement of transports of various offices and organisations now engaged in dealing with the activities of pilgrims.

All district and thana administration as well as people of all walks of life have also been requested to extend their cooperation towards safe movement of the transports with Hajj banners carrying intending Hajj pilgrims to the camp in Dhaka.

All Hajj pilgrims have been requested to contact Hajj officials in Dhaka on Telephone 249576 or respective district administrations for any information they need.

JP Secy Gen tells The Daily Star Political camps have 'visibly reached a consensus'

By Nurul Kabir

The contending political camps have 'visibly reached a consensus on the major issues including elections under a non-party caretaker government and fresh polls in May this year.'

'Now a government move seeking Supreme Court opinion on a legal framework on the basis of the political agreement would help resolve the impasse.'

This was stated by Jatiya Party Secretary General Anwar Hossain Manju in an interview with The Daily Star yesterday afternoon.

The JP leader further said 'As both the government and the Opposition are now committed to holding elections under a caretaker administration, none of the parties should try to outwit each other.' Such attempts would only add to the already aggravated situation, he cautioned.

He noted that the political parties concerned had in the past always tried to outsmart each other which eventually complicated the situation.

'All the parties in the country which have so far tasted state power since independence have earned considerable notoriety for vote-rigging. The people are now convinced that only a non-party government can ensure their franchise', Manju said.

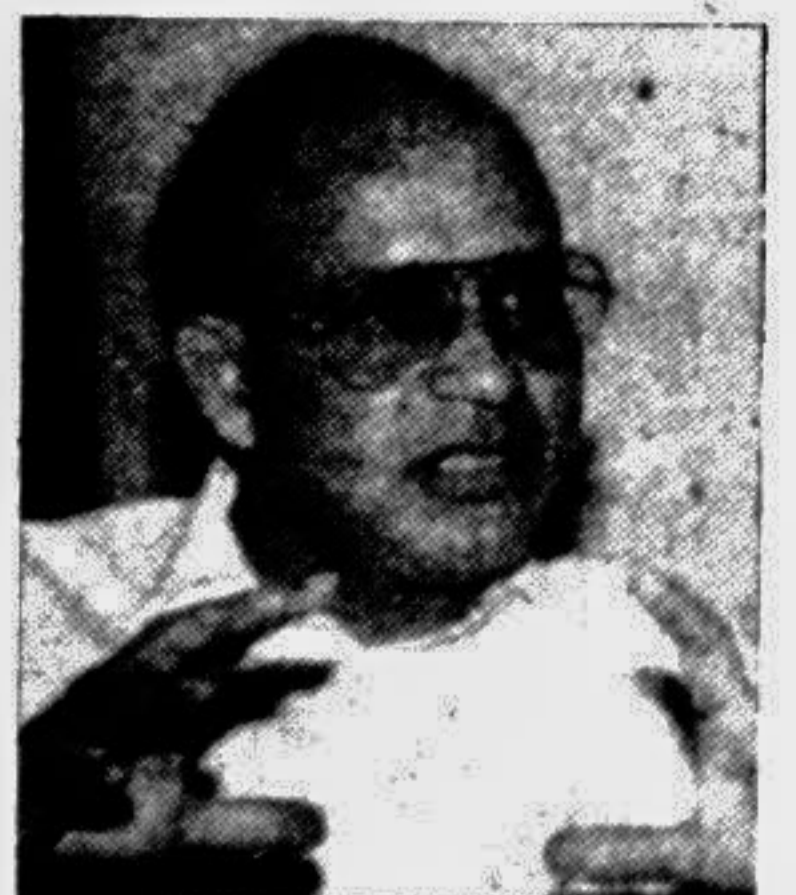
'It would therefore definitely be counter-productive if any party tries to subvert the process of consensus on the caretaker government issue.'

Turning to economic implications of the political crisis, Manju said the unrest has pushed the national economy on the verge of collapse and it would take at least three years to recover, even if the crisis is resolved 'right at the moment.'

The JP leader, also an industrialist, maintained that the political unrest had affected the rich more than the poor.

Both the poor and low income group have been suffering due to the prevailing political crisis, but the big entrepreneurs are the worst victims of the impasse, Manju remarked.

When his attention was drawn to the fact that people in general were not joining opposition activists on the street, Manju said:



Anwar Hossain Manju

Flood situation in Sylhet static

From Staff Correspondent

SYLHET, Mar 18: The flood situation in the five thanas of the district - Jaintapur, Gowainghat, Companyganj, Jakiganj and Kanaihat remained static today.

There was no report of rain or onrush of waters from the upper stream.

About 25 thousand acres of croplands in these thanas had been inundated by the incessant rains and onrushing of waters from the upper stream of the hilly area across the Indian borders during the last five days.

The rivers, Sari, Plain, Gowainghat and Dhooli were also flowing near about the danger levels. The water level in the Surma and Kushiya have also gone up during the last four days at many points in Sylhet and Sunamganj districts.

Standing Boro crops on more than 15 thousand acres went under waters in low-lying and surrounding areas of 23 thanas of only Companyganj thana due to the breaches in the embankments on the banks of the Plain river of the thana in early hours yesterday.

The embankment of the Patharchauli haor in the thana is still under threat. When waters were swelling through the

No cargo handling at Chittagong port

From Staff Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Mar 18: Cargo handling and delivery of goods at Chittagong port could not be resumed today as the All-Party Action Committee imposed a 'people's curfew' around the port area.

Army personnel were not deployed in the port today as planned earlier, port sources said. Navy, however, remained on duty for the third consecutive day today.

Bombs were hurled on the road near Chittagong Export Processing Zone this afternoon when State Minister for Shipping and Port Shahjahan Straj was passing in a car, witnesses said.

Police said some bombs were blasted in the area at around 5 pm when the minister was returning to the airport from Chittagong port. But no casualty or damage was reported.

Police however, denied the report but said some cocktails were blasted in the morning around the port area.

BDR was posted around the port area and police patrolling was stepped up to maintain tightened security there today.

State Minister Shahjahan Straj held a three-hour long meeting with port users and officials at the port rest house from 12 noon.

Some representatives of the port users were taken to the port rest house for attending the meeting with the minister under police escort, port and meeting sources said.

During the discussion, in the meeting, the state minister urged the port users and officials to resume port operations including delivery of cargo.

The minister urged the stevedores to start gang-bookings of port labourers from tonight and assured of providing security escort in transportation of goods from the port area to the respective destinations, meeting and port sources said.

But the port users argued against availing the security escort saying that who would ensure their safety after the security escort left, port sources informed.

The meeting, however, decided to resume transportation of government cargo including foodgrains and petroleum.

20 hurt as BNP, AL clash in Natore

From Our Correspondent

NATORE, Mar 18: At least 20 people were injured, six of them seriously, during sporadic clashes between the Awami League and BNP activists in different areas of the town today.

Seriously injured Raihan, Malek, Ripon, Hafiz, Shamim and Tapan were sent to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

The clash erupted when AL activists attacked the BNP workers at old bus stand area in the town. The clash flared up at Kapur Pally, Kanaihat and Batta crossing.

Several shops and houses were ransacked and 4 houses at Kanaihat were set afire during the clash.

NEWS BRIEFS

Businessman stabbed to death

From Our Correspondent

KISHOREGANJ, Mar 18: A businessman was stabbed to death by some muggers at Kadamtala on Kishoreganj-Karimganj road last night. The victim Dulal, 30, of Bhatia village was returning home by a rickshaw when the muggers attacked him.

Quantity of rice under OMS increased

The government has decided to increase the quantity of rice selling under the open market sale (OMS) system. As per the decision, two tons of rice will be sold at each 90 sales centre of the city every day from today instead of one ton, said a PID handout yesterday, reports UNB.

Repolling in Comilla-9 tomorrow

COMILLA, Mar 18: Repolling in 28 centres of Comilla-9 constituency will be held on March 20. According to the district election officials, the election in the centres was postponed on March 6 following massive violence, reports UNB.

38 more MPs take oath

Thirty-eight newly elected parliament members including 30 woman members elected from the reserved seats for women took oath at the Sangsad Bhavan, yesterday. Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali administered the oath, according to a press release, reports BSS.

One killed in road accident

COMILLA, Mar 18: A middle-aged man was killed and three people were injured when an autorickshaw overturned at Kabila in Bunnichang thana on Dhaka-Chittagong highway today, reports UNB.