

Truckers on strike Fertiliser supply to N-dists snapped

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 18: Fertiliser supply to the country's 16 northern districts remained snapped as truckers today struck work in protest against Sunday's assault on transport workers in Gurudaspur thana of Natore district, reports UNB.

Four trucks, after unloading fertiliser at Ahmadpur in Natore, were damaged in mob attack. Truck drivers Khorshed Ali and Samar and helper Balal were injured in the attack.

District Truck Sramik Union today announced the suspension of movement of trucks engaged in supplying fertiliser to the northern districts on grounds of insecurity.

Transport leaders further alleged that hoodlums extorted toll at different places on the way of emergency supply of the agro-input which is essential at this peak season of IRRI-boro farming.

The government, earlier, had ordered adequate supply of fertiliser for the region's cultivators. The Opposition also relaxed their non-cooperation only for fertiliser-carrying transport.



Speaker Shaikh Razzak Ali administered the oath of office to 38 MPs including 30 women members of the sixth Jatiya Sangsad at Sangsad Bhaban yesterday.

Avalanche claims 35 in Pak-held Kashmir

MUZAFFARABAD, Mar 18: Snow and rain forced authorities to suspend rescue operations today for people caught in an avalanche in Pakistani-held Kashmir which official sources said had killed at least 35 people, reports Reuter.

The sources said 35 bodies and four survivors had been found in the debris after the avalanche hit a remote mountain hamlet on Friday night.

The death toll could rise, they added.

Heavy snow and rain are preventing military and civilian rescue teams from continuing their search.

Mohammad Akram Sohail, deputy commissioner in Muzaffarabad, told Reuters.

River transports keeping city alive now

The age old river transport system is keeping the city alive as most of the daily necessities are reaching the capital by its surrounding waterways during the opposition's ongoing non-cooperation programme.

In the absence of all kinds of mechanised road transport throughout the country, essentials such as fish, poultry, fruits, vegetables, rice and other commodities are being transported into the city from different parts of the country using the river boats.

At the main river port along the Buriganga river, fleets of country boats are seen every day, loaded with essentials for delivery in the wholesale markets along the river.

Traders at Sadarghat, Swarigat, Badamtoll, Babubazar, Waizghat and Imamganj said that supplies for the city's kitchen markets have been maintained as many suppliers took to river transports for transportation of goods in during the Opposition programme.

This way suppliers even from far flung areas in northern districts are reaching our markets with commodities including rice," said Ismail Siddique, a rice trader at Badamtoll.

"This water transport system has been the lifeline of the capital for centuries and now it is helping the city dwellers to survive," said Md Habibullah, an elderly businessman at Waizghat. Once the supplies reach the wholesale markets, retailers take those to different city markets on rickshaws and rickshaws early in the morning everyday.

At Mirpur, a small riverport on the bank of the river Turag, many countryboats are seen bringing in vegetables from surrounding villages.

Some of the boatmen there said that although the river transport took more time it was less costly and free from many hazards, common nowadays on the roads.

"Moreover we can keep the vegetables fresh by sprinkling river water on them during the journey," said a boatman who came with pumpkins from a village in Keraniganj.

But cattle traders at the country's largest cattle market at Gabtali expressed their disappointment at the supply of cattle has fallen from average 5000 a day to about 1500 now, a trader said. Indian cattle made the bulk of the supply which has dwindled because trucks are not plying, he said.

USAID study suggests Dhaka should privatise, increase fertiliser price

By Govinda Shil

A USAID-financed study has suggested privatisation of fertiliser production and increase in the prices of urea and other fertilisers at par with international prices, to make the domestic market more competitive and to remove market imperfections.

The study on 'Fertiliser Situation in Bangladesh: With an Emphasis on Urea' under the USAID funded 'Agro-based Industries and Technology Development Project (ATDP)', also predicted that the country may need to import urea by 1997-98 as the government has no plan to increase urea production in the country by the year 2000.

The study, under the Ministry of Agriculture and conducted by the International Fertiliser Development Corporation (IFDC), said that during last years' fertiliser crisis smuggling out of urea did not take place on any significant scale.

"Indeed, in crisis periods there seems to have been significant smuggling of urea from India," said the report.

The report confirmed that there was a secondary fertiliser market in the mill gates which was an outcome of the government policy and was

Mirpur clash

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pm found the road connecting Sections 10 and 12 blocked by trees and tyres burning.

Witnesses said a large number of ambulances were seen picking up the injured people to the private clinics since the afternoon. One Abdul Mannan was admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital with bullet injury.

Police force was reinforced in Mirpur area. Police in riot gear was seen patrolling the area last night.

Chase and counter chase between the rival political activists were also reported from Bangabandhu Avenue, Demra, Shankar, Farmgate and Mahakhali areas. Witnesses said, these clashes left at least 15 people injured.

Mass hunger strike for solution to political impasse

CHUADANGA, Mar 18: A mass hunger strike demanding immediate solution of the nagging political impasse over caretaker issue was staged at the district press club today.

Chuanganda Theatre, a cultural organisation, led the 12-hour protest that started at 9 am with some 100 people fasting.

The hunger strikers include artists, litterateurs, lawyers, teachers, intellectuals, journalists and businessmen.

4 AL leaders

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Hazaribagh Industrial Area in protest of the arrest and threatened to shut down the tannery industry unless Bhuiyan was immediately released.

Talukdar Sarwar Hossain, DCC Commissioner of Ward 37, Tejgaon, and a member of Jubo League Central Committee, was arrested at 2:30 am Monday.

Two other AL leaders, MA Salam, President, Tejgaon Thana AL, and Mostaque Hossain, Allen, President, Ward No 40 AL, were arrested from their homes in the early hours of Monday.

They have been given a one-month detention order and sent to the Dhaka Central Jail.

Condemning the arrests, leaders of local Awami League and its front organisations have demanded their immediate release.

Haji flight

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Another report adds: Bangladesh Biman will leave for Makkah on March 28 with all the Hajj pilgrims from Chittagong district under government arrangement.

All the Hajj pilgrims including those who have not yet received letter from the Dhaka Hajj Office regarding their flights have been requested to report at the temporary Hajj camp at Uttara in Dhaka within 10 am on March 24 along with their necessary articles and documents.

Every Hajj pilgrim will have to bring 12 copies of recent passport size photograph to be attested by gazetted officer along with their medical examination certificate.

Opposition

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The opposition parties plan to hold separate rallies in the city prior to their march towards the Jatiya Sangsad.

AL chief Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to address her party rally to be held at 2 pm in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

JP will organize its rally at the west-end of Panthapath at 3 pm while Jamaat's rally will be held at the north gate of the Baitul Mukarram Mosque at the same time.

Besides, the Opposition yesterday announced that the three-hour relaxation period for banks during their current non-cooperation programme would not be effective for today and banks would remain closed. But the 4 pm to 10 pm exemption for shops and 4 pm to 5 am exemption for export-oriented industries would remain effective, said the three parties in separate press releases.



Businessmen of Nitaiganj Bazar in Narayanganj brought out a procession in the town yesterday protesting extortionism.

JS session

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sources said.

Meanwhile, BNP sources said last night the non-party caretaker bill has been finalised and is ready for printing after completion of necessary formalities.

The parliament session begins with 320 members including 30 women MPs. Elections could not be held in 10 constituencies due to violence and other reasons.

New cabinet

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Members of the new cabinet are likely to take oath at a simple ceremony at the Bangabhaban at 10 this morning.

Earlier, President Abdur Rahman Biswas would re-appoint Begum Zia as the new Prime Minister and she would form her new cabinet shortly afterwards. The PM and her cabinet colleagues would then take oath.

Begum Zia, at a lengthy meeting with top party leaders last night, discussed, among other issues, formation of the new cabinet. The meeting, held the PM's Tejgaon office, ended at around mid-night.

The new cabinet is likely to be smaller than the present one, meeting sources said. Some of the incumbent ministers might be dropped while a few new faces were expected to be inducted into the new cabinet, the sources added.

Rabbani accuses US of abandoning Afghanistan

KABUL, Mar 18: President Burhanuddin Rabbani lashed out today at the United States, accusing Washington of abandoning Afghanistan after helping to drive out occupying Soviet forces, reports AFP.

"The American government ignores Afghanistan, they ignore the bloodshed," Rabbani told reporters in the capital Kabul. "The Americans look at the fighting in Afghanistan like it was a football game."

Rabbani and a number of Afghan leaders have long held that the United States turned its back on Kabul after the 1980s war against the Russians.

For more than 10 years, Afghanistan was the site of a brutal proxy war between the West and the former Soviet Union, during which more than a million people were killed.

Washington and its western allies supplied arms and helped finance Afghanistan's mujahedeen resistance fighters who ousted the Russians in 1989 and later toppled Kabul's communist government.

After the collapse of the Afghan communist regime in 1992, the resistance forces splintered and turned their guns on each other. Civil war rages on today, seven years after the Russians left.

"I'm surprised that since the Russians fell, the Americans have forgotten Afghanistan," Rabbani said.

"The Americans are responsible for the current situation." Bilateral aid to Afghanistan from Washington has all but disappeared and the United States has little direct contact with Kabul.

Reluctant to single out any one of the warring factions, the United States insists its interests in Afghanistan are represented through the United Nations peace efforts.

Last year, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Robin Raphel said the United States was eager to see a stable government in Kabul, in part to help curb the spread of terrorism and the drug trade.

Afghanistan is one of the world's largest suppliers of heroin.

Shantibahinj man surrenders

BANDARBAN, Mar 18: U Ching Pru Marma, 25, a member of outlawed Shantibahinj, surrendered to Baidypara BDR camp here yesterday along with one SMG and 29 rounds of ammunition, reports BSS.

Feud and internal clash within the Shantibahinj and government's offer to award different facilities have inspired him to surrender and return to normal life. Marma said.

BNP-AL clash in Rajbari: 10 hurt

RAJBARI, Mar 18: At least 10 people were injured, two with bullets, in a clash between the BNP and Opposition supporters here today, reports UNB.

Abul Kashem and Razzak (Chhoto), both said to be BNP activists, were struck with bullet in the fighting. Kashem was sent to Faridpur Hospital while Razzak admitted to Rajbari Sadar Hospital.

Awami League leaders claimed, BNP activists attacked their procession injuring four of their supporters. Police said the clash ensued at railgate when two processions — one of the Awami League and another of BNP — confronted.

Awami League brought out procession in support of the non-cooperation programme while BNP in protest.

During chase and counter-chase for half an hour, several gunshots were fired and bombs blasted.

Dacoity in Dhanmondi

By Staff Correspondent

Unidentified gang exploded crackers in a house at Moneshwar road under Dhanmondi thana and robbed cash and valuable worth about Tk one lakh yesterday evening.

The owner of the house was partially injured in the attack. The incident was sequel to a previous enquiry, police said.

A group of about 20 people entered the house blasting at least six crackers. They also set fire inside the house when they left the scene, police sources said.

Moon sighting body meets tomorrow

The National Moon Sighting Committee will hold a meeting at the conference room of the central office of the Islamic Foundation tomorrow at 7:15 pm, reports BSS.

The meeting will be held on the occasion of sighting of the moon of the Hijri month of Zilkad.

State Minister for Religious Affairs and president of National Moon Sighting Committee Al-Haj Prof M A Mannan will preside over the meeting.

Anyone sighting the Zilkad moon within Bangladesh territory has been requested to contact the Islamic Foundation over the following telephone numbers: 9559493, 9559693, 9556407, 9559591, 9559474, 9550280 and 9558337.

Salman's appeal to President

Salman F Rahman, President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) appealed to President Abdur Rahman Biswas to rise to the need of the hour and save the country from ruination, reports BSS.

In a statement last night Salman said "There was still time to prevent further damage if the President were to make reference to the Supreme Court," which he opined "could have led to a face-saving solution for both sides."

Expressing great disappointment he said that the President ignored the appeal of the business community to refer the matter to the Supreme Court to resolve the present political crisis. Salman observed that his (President's) calling of parliament session on March 19 "had unfortunately completely failed in meeting the aspirations of those citizens and business people who had looked in him to resolve the crisis and ease their suffering."

Gherao

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Prime Minister Begum Khaleida Zia and Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina for the crisis as they failed to resolve their political dispute. They also burnt effigies of the two leaders.

The angry farmers earlier gathered at the Chuadanga bast in the morning. Krishak Sangram Samity and Jatiya Ganatantrik Front organised the protest.

They later submitted a memorandum to the DC for arranging fertiliser, pesticides and diesel at fair price.

Urea fertiliser now sells here at Tk 400 per bag while diesel at Tk 20 per litre. Pesticides like Phuradon sell at Tk 60 a bottle, up from Tk 40.

A protest meeting was also held in front of old DC office from Fen-1 constituency when the election in Fen-2 another constituency the PM was contesting from, was yet to be held.

"How can she (Begum Zia), even not becoming an MP, go for forming a cabinet today?" Hasina asked.

Hasina alleged that the Constitution was violated as polling

The Midnight File

50 killed in Manila fire

MANILA, Mar 18: At least 50 people were killed in a fire that broke out in suburban Manila shortly after midnight, local radio station Damm reported today. Philippine police confirmed four deaths. The fire started at 12:30 am (16:30 gm), police said, adding that more than 300 people were inside the disco, mostly students celebrating the end of the school year, reports AFP.

Tibetans protest HR abuse in China: 100 held in Nepal

KATHMANDU, Mar 18: At least one hundred Tibetan activists and members of Amnesty International-Nepal were arrested today during protests over human rights abuses in China, police and Amnesty sources said, reports AFP.

Local Amnesty president Charan Prasad, director Krishna Kandel and a former president Krishna Pahari were among those arrested, the sources said.

Amnesty said several hundred people were detained but police put the figure at only 100 and said most would be released later today.

The demonstrators, who included Tibetan refugees living in Nepal, were rounded up as they tried to march on the Chinese embassy here to deliver a protest memorandum over human rights abuses in China, the sources said.

Police took away at least 10 van loads of activists.

Amnesty sources also said three of its officials were arrested in Kathmandu on Sunday for organising a signature campaign against China's human rights abuses.

Lankan HC's gratitude

By Staff Correspondent

The High Commissioner of Sri Lanka in Bangladesh has thanked all those who sent messages of congratulation on the victory of Sri Lanka in the World Cup Cricket tournament.

He also conveyed his personal gratitude to all Bangladeshis and other cricket lovers, who supported the Sri Lankan Cricket team from the very beginning of the tournament.

He said that their encouragement and solidarity strengthened the will and confidence of the Sri Lankan team in winning the World Cup.

"It is indeed very touching to feel the spontaneous warmth of the Bangladeshis from all walks of life; not only in our moment of triumph, but also in despair," the High Commissioner said in a press release.

Magic forecast

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then read it out to the eager and enthusiastic audience in the VIP lounge of the Press Club.

The prediction read: Sri Lanka will be the champions. They will win by more than 25 runs if they bat first or by 6/7 wickets if they go for fielding first. The forecast said the Lankans might go for fielding first. Jayaasuriya's fate may be disastrous. Arvida de Silva will be the man-of-the-match. Silva may score a century.

Flood

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embankment at points yesterday morning, hundreds of villagers including women rushed along with spades to save the embankment. They worked the whole day.

The early flash flood has badly hit the Boro, wheat and other crops in these areas. However, the extent of loss caused by the flash floods, could not be ascertained immediately.

Vessel sinks

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channel between the port and the outer anchorage at about 2 am. The mishap occurred while the vessel was unloading cement clinker from an incoming ship, MV Yanda.

The clinker was brought by MV Yanda for the Mongia Cement Factory at Mongia.

Port sources said the sunken cargo vessel had endangered the channel which was already hit by navigability problems. Arrival of ships at the port would be threatened if the capsized vessel is not salvaged and the clinker removed immediately, they added.

Benapole

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Fifteen fire brigade teams from Jessore and nearest districts, including Narail and Satkhira, and firefighters of the air force base in Jessore rushed to Benapole and brought the blaze under control after several hours of frantic efforts.

Local administration declared section 144 in the godown area this afternoon to prevent looting. Police and BDR cordoned off the area.

BDR sources said they were searching for the Indian truck, whose stove allegedly caused the fire.

Hasina: Refer to SC

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lami — demanded cancellation of the February 15 polls and plan to gherao the Sangsad Bhaban today, as the House goes into its inaugural session.

AL leaders at the rally urged the people to observe 'Black Day' today and attend a rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club at 2 pm to be addressed by Sheikh Hasina.

Reading out various some clauses from the Constitution, Hasina brought allegations of violation of the Constitution by Begum Khaleida Zia and said, "According to Article 57 of the Constitution, the post of the Prime Minister is now lying vacant. Expenses made from the national exchequer for the government of Khaleida Zia after February 21 does not have any sanction from the people and she will be made accountable for that."

Charging her (PM) with violating the Constitution on various counts, the AL president said, "The post of PM, Begum Zia is holding now, do not have any legitimacy as per Article 71 of the Constitution."

Quoting from sub-clauses of Article 71, Hasina questioned, "How could she (PM) take oath as a member of Parliament from Fen-1 constituency when the election in Fen-2 another constituency the PM was contesting from, was yet to be held."

"How can she (Begum Zia), even not becoming an MP, go for forming a cabinet today?" Hasina asked.

Hasina alleged that the Constitution was violated as polling